Be your community's #1 fan

If you're not from the Midwest, you might not know about Euchre.

Euchre, pronounced "yoo-ker," is a fun social card game that introduced the joker to modern decks. And a Euchre tournament is just one tool in CENTURY 21 Affiliated broker Ryan Servatius' arsenal of community events.

Servatius is part of CENTURY 21 Affiliated in South Haven, Michigan. This Lake Michigan shoreline market is mostly vacation and second homes. But Servatius and his team have helped to deepen community connections through social media and local events — and in turn, become trusted real estate sources and community evangelists.

What does it mean to have local expertise?

Residential real estate is rich in data. But that data is also more widely available than ever. Any motivated buyer or seller can become informed before ever contacting an agent — if they even want to.

So why would they want to?

Well, it's one thing to access data. It's another to master it. Local expertise means agents don't

just know the numbers. They have a thorough understanding of the unique needs of their market from the microscopic to the 30,000-foot view.

Ryan Servatius and his team understand that South Haven and surrounding areas have a complex set of requirements with a seasonal ebb and flow. It's not enough to just know how many units sold recently and for how much.

"Buyers and sellers today have a number of opportunities online — on their phones more than anything," he said. "Most of our buyers are from out of state, and they don't know the ins and outs of a vacation market. That's our job."

Those ins and outs include zoning changes that might disallow short term rentals. It includes knowing which HOAs support or limit reuse of a property. "We need to know what's going on in our community that will affect our clients' lifestyle as well as their property values."

Serve the community as a whole, not just buyers and sellers

A cornerstone of Servatius' strategy is his dedication to community and continued civic engagement. In his 17 years of business, he's been an active member of his local associations, as well as with various NAR committees on a national scale. He has numerous certifications and specialties.

And he has a Facebook page. But not just any page.

Things to Do in South Haven is an active local page with close to 7,000 followers and nearly 13,000 engagements in the last month alone — more than the local chamber of commerce and in the offseason, no less. But the page has little to do with real estate.

Instead, he posts pictures of the sunset, and of the river. He shares details about community events and local businesses. His video posts see three times the engagement of text or photos. They aren't highly produced or even rehearsed. He just turns the camera on himself and talks as he walks through town.

"I don't talk about real estate," he said. "I'm just the #1 fan of my community. For example, we host the CENTURY 21 Affiliated Euchre night. For 8 weeks in the winter, every Tuesday from 6pm to 9pm, we host a Euchre game in a different local restaurant. It's completely free, you just have to sign up. The business owners love it. And the servers appreciate us bringing them business, so they refer us to everyone they know."

Local engagement isn't all games. But it is usually fun. Events such as a beach cleanup get together includes all local real estate agents, not just the CENTURY 21 Affiliated team. But Servatius insists each of his own agents pick a charity or cause they are passionate about.

Does the brokerage have to be local? Not really, it turns out.

Century 21 Real Estate is hardly a local boutique brokerage. In fact, CENTURY 21 Affiliated has 120 offices in six states. But Servatius saw top performers joining the brand, and really liked what he heard from leadership.

“I’d been part of enough companies to know they’re basically the same — at first. But I needed a culture I believed in. And I believe in the vision of where this company wants to go.”

The recent rebrand has been a boon for Servatius to start conversations and highlight the company’s mandate to defy mediocrity and deliver extraordinary experiences. “Century 21 Real Estate is a name everyone knows. Our job is to put a human touch on a powerful brand — we make it hyper-local.”

Buying and selling a primary or vacation home is still a high value, low-frequency activity that carries a large threshold of emotional and financial risk for the average homeowner. People still want a trusted expert to hold their hands and guide them — someone who knows and cares for the community in the same way they know and care for their clients.

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