Beverly Carter Foundation will ensure real estate agent safety remains top-of-mind

Carl Carter, Jr.

When Carl Carter Jr. needed a bit of direction at the age of 17 after graduating high school, his mom, Beverly, found and applied for a job for him at Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and she took him down there on his first day.

Because that’s what mothers do. They take charge when they see their kids stall or dither. Carl was the eldest of three boys who were a bit of a handful.

“We were *bad*,” jokes Carl.

He ended up making his mother proud and sticking with health insurance as his career, becoming involved in internal and external training and doing a number of certifications in adult learning.

There are no words to describe what the family of murdered agent Beverly Carter have gone through since her death in September 2014.

But Carl is trying to turn the experience into something positive. He is using that background in health insurance and training to set up a new venture — a not-for-profit foundation in his mother’s name, the Beverly Carter Foundation, whose mission will be helping agents and brokerages with information on safety and training programs.

Beverly Carter

In a bid to get closer to their Mom's industry, Carl, his wife Kim and his younger brother, Chad have all got their real estate licenses recently, signing up with eXp Realty.

Carl will remain in health insurance and run the foundation, while Kim and Chad intend to transition into working as agents.

Yet to see real change in attitudes towards agent safety

Why now?

Because although her murder sparked a national conversation about safety in the real estate industry, the "widespread substantive change" Carl called for has not happened.

His concern is that current agent safety programs, training and guidelines are not preventing crime because they are built around incorrect assumptions about crime against agents, unrealistic expectations regarding the needs of agents and a lack of understanding of predatory behavior.

Carl wants to provide scientifically based research, information, consulting, training and support at no charge to every MLS, association, brokerage and agent.

MLSs, associations and brokerages are in many cases not supporting and reinforcing the safety messaging, which results in poor adoption of safety practices, argues Carl, who has traveled around the country talking to agents and brokerages in the last couple of years.

How the foundation will help

The foundation will work with industry and criminology experts to develop publications, videos, online training and social media resources. It will also provide instructor-led training through classroom and online modalities at no cost to MLSs, associations, brokerages and agents.

The foundation will offer support and advocacy to agents who have been victimized while selling or leasing real estate through its victim's relief fund. It will also work with federal, state and local government officials to pass laws designed to improve the safety of the real estate industry.

On the not-for-profit's website, there is an invitation to donate — the plan initially is for these funds to further build out the website to include training content and to develop and buy physical training materials. The foundation will also be purchasing marketing materials for trade shows and conferences.

Once the first phase of training content is built and approved, funds raised will go to launch the other portions of the foundation — consulting, training certifications, victim assistance and legislative advocacy, said Carl.

“The whole mission is to provide resources at every level (at no cost) to do my part in making sure that what happened to my mom never happens again,” said Carl.

A board with resources

Carl is setting up a board of directors to help him put together the ambitious plans of the foundation.

Doyle Yates

Doyle Yates, National Association of Realtors director, chairman of the Arkansas Real Estate Commission and EVP at Coldwell Banker Harris McHaney Faucette Real Estate, is a strong agent safety advocate, especially after Beverly Carter’s death, and will be joining the Beverly Carter Foundation board.

More than two years after her death, Yates says: “The main thing is that we don’t want to let this die. It’s tempting at times; you get pushback, you get people who are complacent on all levels. They say: ‘Those are good ideas,’ but they don’t do anything about it. You’ve just got to bite down on it and say: ‘We are not giving this up.’”

In his role as Arkansas Real Estate Commissioner, Yates has added one hour to the state continuing education requirement on safety for every licensee in the state.

As president of the Northwest Arkansas board of Realtors since 2015, this year Yates has seen that the board adds one hour on NAR’s Realtor Safety Program to the one-day new agent orientation.

“It’s about catching them on the front end,” said Yates, who said it can be hard to get seasoned agents to change the way they do things.

Yates is happy to support Carl as much as he can.

“I appreciate and admire him — it’s important to me and I can be passionate about it, but this is an emotional drain for him to relive his mom’s death. He’s invested more in this than anybody else.

“Carl is doing that thing that some people learn to do, which is to take a bad situation and find what good to make out of this instead of letting it destroy you. And his mother will have a legacy.”

A broker-owner with strict agent safety rules

New York broker owner Phil Faranda of J.Philip Real Estate was involved with NAR’s work on the safety program it produced after Beverly Carter’s death, and he met Carl at the recent ICNY Influencer’s event. He is now joining the Beverly Carter Foundation board.

Faranda agrees the industry needs conduits to consumers, such as Zillow or realtor.com, to inform people that they may need to meet the Realtor at the office before going house-hunting, for instance.

“For safety procedures to be truly effective, you need to get every person that touches the transaction to be behind the idea that the buyer needs to be vetted before going out with the agent,” he said.

Faranda himself was physically attacked by a client when he was a 30-year-old broker. His attacker was an emotionally troubled ex-cop whose house hadn’t sold, and he lashed out violently at the younger Faranda.

The broker-owner has strict safety procedures with the 70 agents in his business based in Briarcliff Manor, New York.

“I never want to have to say to their spouse: ‘I wish I could have done something differently and no harm had come to them,’” he said.

“You can never prevent 100 percent of death in the industry, but you don’t have to make it so easy for these people to target and kill us,” he said bluntly.

The Beverly Carter Foundation will also be calling on criminologists, including one of Faranda’s contacts, former New York Police Department detective Tom Grimes, to help it with identifying patterns and statistics.

Statistics don’t lie

Grimes, president of NY Finest Speakers, said the numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that there have been 205 homicides of real estate agents since 2008, which is not insubstantial.

Since becoming involved in real estate agent safety training, the former detective said he has found agents, as a group, to be trusting, caring people — similar to those in the nursing industry.

That personality trait can work against them when it comes to their own personal safety, he said. They always expect the best outcome.

Instinct, policy and planning are three main things for agents to remember as they go about their day, and instincts should come first. He remembers meeting an 80-year-old woman agent in Connecticut as he did a talk on agent safety.

She told him afterward that she was attacked 40 years ago by her best client. She had helped the family buy two houses and she was helping them with their third transaction in five years.

She had always shown the husband and his wife through homes, but this time the husband called her and said: “It’s just you and me house-hunting.” The hair rose on the back of her neck.

At the first home, he sexually assaulted her — and until she spoke to Grimes, she had never told anyone about the attack.

She said: “I kept it inside me for 40 years.” She wanted to scream to the other agents at the event to listen to their instincts.

Beverly Carter had a bad gut instinct about her killer, said Carl.

She made up a company policy that she couldn't meet him at the house by herself. He responded by saying he would be with his wife, and he had his wife come to the phone to speak to the agent.

Said Grimes, "When you get a bad feeling about someone, don't let that person be the one to squash it.

"The point we make is, if I feel concerned about meeting you, I don't let you bring another person. *I* bring another person," he said.

Everyone has a part to play

According to Yates, everyone in the industry has a part to play in improving safety for agents — including NAR, which stepped up immediately after Beverly's death with a suite of safety resources and has a new initiative for 2017: each local board has to provide at least one safety event a year.

It also falls to brokerages, said Yates. "They have a responsibility to train an agent. Why is safety training not as important as training on taking a listing?"

In a few cases, brokers are reluctant to talk about safety for fear that it creates fear and could scare agents into being less aggressive salespeople, he said.

"You can still be looking out for your own personal safety."

Educating the public on agent safety

Having a public conversation with consumers about why agent safety procedures are necessary is another big part of the conversation, he added.

Yates thinks that real estate portal realtor.com could play a part in this, given its association with NAR.

"They could start to drop these snippets and ideas on the website that agent safety procedures are in the public's best interest and in the agents' best interest," he said.

Why would a real estate portal want to be involved?

"They sell enhanced access to leads to Realtors — if they are offering something that can better protect their clientele, that's their motivation," he said.

“Our national organization and realtor.com have to understand they have a big responsibility when it comes to this; they have such a huge voice.”

Progress on agent safety depends on leadership of brokerages and real estate boards

To see it really done well, there needs to be leadership from brokerages and Realtor boards to “take this stuff and own it — and build things that work for them,” Carl said. That’s why they’re offering customizable content for those entities.

“I’d love for my mom’s name to be on it, but the idea is that a local board can customize it, show their staff that they care, they endorse it and can own it. We will keep the content refreshed.”

Carl wants to see the foundation be mostly focused on proactive things agents can do to stay safe.

“The problem with so much of the tech out there on safety is that it is reactive. You have been deceived; now you are in a spot. With Mom, the first thing they did was grab her phone,” he said.

He often meets people in the industry who have found the one safety tool that they think will save them.

“You see caution go to the wind as they think: ‘I have a solution.’

“There is no one solution; you have to have a tool box,” he said.

Email Gill South.

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