Realtor board reignites safety conversation after agent reportedly attacked

After an unnamed Indiana real estate agent was reportedly attacked and raped in a South Bend vacant home last month, the Elkhart County Board of Realtors (ECBOR) has called a meeting next Wednesday where 80 managing brokers from North Indiana and South West Michigan will discuss their safety procedures.

ECBOR also reactivated its Realtor safety task force, made up of ECBOR leaders and community volunteers, to raise awareness about safety among real estate practitioners.

“Everybody is kind of raw here,” said association executive Julie Alert. But she is hoping real estate firms will take real action in equipping their agents with information and formulating preventive office protocols as a result of this incident.

“Sometimes something bad has to happen, for people to take action,” she said.

After the managing broker meeting, the association and its task force will make appointments to come to brokerage offices and help them one-on-one with questions.

As industry is still recovering from the shock of Beverly Carter’s kidnapping and murder, a tragedy that changed the conversation about safety in real estate, Alert has arranged to have Beverly Carter’s son, Carl Carter Jr., founder of the Beverly Carter Foundation, come to Elkhart and speak to local agents and those from surrounding counties on June 1.

Turning awareness to practice

While ECBOR’s president made Realtor safety a priority last year, recommending agents use the Real Agent Guard app, featuring a safety timer that notifies law enforcement of your location, ECBOR members haven’t necessarily taken that next step, said Alert.

Anyone in the real estate industry who meets with the public can encounter danger; they don’t have to be Realtors, Alert added.

“We are going to help them put some policies in place; if we do it together, it will be better for all of us,” said Alert. “This is an opportunity for us to drill it home, we want to keep people safe.”

One conversation point at the meeting will be a safety pledge brokers can ask agents to sign to raise their awareness and give them a sense of accountability. The pledge asks agents to talk to clients about the safety issues that come with an open house and to use a buddy system if they are feeling uneasy about a meeting.

“We need to be better,” Alert said. “We know there are the tools and we want our Realtors to take advantage of them.” People often have opinions about how they can defend themselves, she added. Men seem to think they are at less risk, and yet 34 percent of attacks are on men.

And while some are comfortable with a gun, others are not, Alert said; there are a number of tools in the toolset, including wearables and wearable jewelry, which can be preferable to a phone that is often taken off the victim early in an attack.

“No matter what you have, if it isn’t a habit, it isn’t going to work very effectively,” said the association executive.

Additional safety resources include:

- 52 additional safety tips for real estate agents
- Inman’s Special Report on agent safety

Email Gill South.

Source: click here