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IN THE SOCIETY OF INDUSTRIAL AND OFFICE REALTORS[®], FAMILY TIES REALLY DO BIND

Family networks abound in the SIOR universe, mostly because children saw the value and enjoyment of their father's work. Maybe, the next generation will see the same accomplishments in their mother's work as many daughters have now entered the business.

By Steve Bergsman

I'm a journalist and my wife is a social worker. When our two boys went off to college, we said they could major in anything they wanted except journalism and social work. It's not that we didn't enjoy our respective careers, but we thought in the modern world they should work in positions with better compensation. I have to say it was the only time in their first 21 years they actually listened to their parents. My older boy works on Wall Street, while my younger boy is a surgeon.

The same paradigm for commercial real estate professionals doesn't hold. There is something strangely alluring about selling or leasing big buildings, working with CEOs, or helping a community attract business that inspires the children of many SIOR professionals to end up in the same industry as their fathers. Or, maybe in the next generation, their mothers.

"As children, we were able to see what he was doing from where we were sitting and I knew he was helping out our community and state. I always wanted to do what he was doing."

SIOR Report looked at a number of family networks consisting of SIOR professionals and found a few married couples in the business, and many father-son, father-daughter, or in the case John Barker Sr., SIOR, CRE, president of John Barker Realty in Shelby, N.C., father-children. His son, John Barker Jr., SIOR, and daughter, Leah Barker Bailey, SIOR, are both in the business, but neither working at the same firm as the father.

"Really, my dad is the reason for me doing what I'm doing," Leah explains. "As children, we were able to see what he was doing from where we were sitting and I knew he was helping out our community and state. I always wanted to do what he was doing."

And how did John Barker Sr., get into the business? He went to work for his father-in-law, who was a developer. After eight years with him, John Barker Sr. formed his own company. So for Leah Bailey, a senior leasing agent at Trinity Partners, Charlotte, and John Barker Jr., president of Red Rock Developments, Charlotte, it's now three generations of Barkers in the real estate world.

This is not an unusual story. Family ties hark back a couple of generations.

Stanley Wisinski, SIOR, CCIM, a principal in Grand Rapids-based NAI Wisinski of West Michigan was in college when his uncle, who was in the real estate business, hired him part-time. Soon, he had his residential real estate license and worked in that arena before switching to commercial. He started his own company in 1986.

Stanley's daughter, Mary Anne Wisinski-Rosely, graduated college with a degree in marketing and finance and then joined the Grand Rapids Press in advertising sales. After management changes, Mary Anne's fiancée suggested she go to work for her dad. That was in 1995.

Today, Mary Anne, SIOR, CCIM, is now a partner at NAI Wisinski.

"I wasn't really surprised she came to work for me," says Stanley. "When she was growing up, she would come to the office with me on weekends or evenings. I would have her with me while I was doing some work."

To which, Mary Anne added, "I had my own little office as a kid. I used to draw on the

old real estate forms or pretend to fill them out – like I was doing my dad's job."

For William P. O'Brien, SIOR, and Michael C. O'Brien III, principals of M.C. O'Brien Inc., the oldest commercial real estate firm operating in Brooklyn, they are working in a company founded by their grandfather, who passed the business to their father and now they both work in the company.

"I have had an opportunity to work on properties that my grandfather and father touched," says William O'Brien. "I've dealt with people who knew both of them and in every instance I heard wonderful stories. They set the bar high for us."

Neither William nor Michael set out to join the family business. Michael, for example, has a degree in geology and was a wild-cat driller in Wyoming. When the crunch in the oil fields left thousands of workers unemployed (some things never change!) including Michael, he came home and decided to try out the family business. William majored in psychology but toward the end of his college years, his father Michael C. O'Brien II, an original SIOR, didn't recommend "plastics" or mention "Mrs. Robinson" instead said something to the effect, "why don't you look at the real estate business?" Michael did and over 30 years later is still there.

Again, these kinds of stories are not unusual. Talk to a second or third generation SIOR member and they often say they tried other jobs in other industries before coming around to their father's profession. Some would even say, they, in a sense, ran completely in other directions, very far away from real estate, before seeing the light.

Kristin Geenty went to George Washington University, graduating with a degree in economics and international affairs, thinking she would push on and become a lawyer. Instead, she worked at a number of starter slots before deciding it was time to settle



Stanley J. Wisinski, SIOR, CCIM and daughter Mary Anne Wisinski-Rosely, SIOR, CCIM.

into a final career. In 1999, she turned to her father, Kevin Geenty, SIOR, founder of The Geenty Group Realtors in Branford, Conn.

Jokingly, she says, "I saw the name on the sign and I thought the interview would be easy."

However, in a more serious moment, she adds, "my father really enjoyed his career, was very successful, paid my full boat to an expensive school. The job seemed to offer a lot of security and I was innately good at sales."

Kristin Geenty, SIOR, is now president of The Geenty Group of Realtors.

"I wish I had known when I went into college that this is what I should have done instead of entertaining law school," she says. "I wish I had started in college."

Even if the father wasn't in the real estate business, sometimes an ancillary effect of a parent's professional journey begins the generational movement to real estate.

The father of Grant Tidemann, SIOR, CRE, a vice president in the Commercial Division of Wichita-based J.P. Weigand & Sons., had his own manufacturing company, which, unfortunately, was struggling. Eventually, it was sold and Grant took a look his dad's financial situation afterward. Most of what he had left was in real estate. In 1979, Grant joined the industry.

Skip forward about two decades and Grant's son Bradley is now a student at Colorado State University thinking he might enjoy a career as an orthodontist. Then he got cold feet—or maybe just cold hands—and on a visit back to Wichita, met with the general manager at J.P. Weigand.

Bradley was thinking after college graduation he would take some time off and travel, but two weeks before graduation, Grant called and said, "I got you a leasing job." Bradley graduated in May and was at his first commercial real estate job on June 1. So much for travel. Today, Bradley, SIOR, is also a sales associate in the Commercial Division of J.P. Weigand.

"I didn't have any idea my son would be in real estate," says Grant. "I wanted it to be his decision and it just happened to work out from the standpoint of him wanting to get back to Wichita. I didn't push him one way or the other."

Angel Silverstein, an associate SIOR, partner in Angelic Real Estate LLC in Manhattan wandered into real estate in the same manner as Bradley. He had gotten his degrees in English and Communications attending a number of universities including Oxford in England. Angel's father managed the family money which included a number of different properties around the world and that piqued his interest. Although Angel calls himself as a spiritual advisor, if pushed he will also say he likes investments and holding property.

I have been writing for *SIOR Report* for at least a decade and one of the most frequent volunteers to be interviewed has been Gabriel Silverstein, SIOR, and president of Angelic Real Estate. There are a small number of marrieds who are both in commercial real estate and members

of SIOR. Marrieds see each other at the job and when the job is over. I asked Gabriel how they make it work.

"We have very complimentary skills as opposed to overlapping skills," Gabriel comments. "Instead of two people who bring the same thing to the table and logically would want to do the same part of every project, instead we come at a situation from different points of view."

Having interviewed Gabriel for many years, I was always curious how he came to call his business Angelic Real Estate, but after interviewing Angel I thought I figured out the answer. It was much more prosaic than I expected.

"In 2004, we purchased a sailboat racing team and the boat and team were named Angelic, after Angel," Gabriel explained. "When we started the real estate company I already had shirts, jackets and hats that said 'Angelic' from the racing team. We had a brand."

Gabriel is the broker part of the team, while Angel sticks to investments. And that, too, is not unusual.

At The Geenty Group Realtors, Kevin now spends a lot of his time overseeing the family's real estate investments, while Kristin manages the company and does brokerage full-time.

There is one more dynamic that is important in family networks, the migration of others in the family workforce to SIOR. One can be in commercial real estate without earning an SIOR designation, but it usually happens that if the parent is an SIOR member, than the offspring, who is in real estate, becomes a member.

Peter Krombach, SIOR, president of The Maune Company in St. Louis, became a member of the original SIR back in 1972. He hung around long enough that in 1996 he became president of SIOR.

"I had been in the real estate business since 1965," says Peter. "SIR seemed like a good way to expand my horizons relative to doing business out of town. There was a new chapter in St. Louis and I became president. They sort of passed that one around; it was a little easier than becoming national president."

In the mid-1990s, Peter's son Keith, entered the commercial real estate business. Today, Keith, SIOR, is an associate director with Newmark Grubb Knight Frank in Denver.

"When I joined it was after my dad had been president," says Keith. "It has been great in SIOR because I just say my last name and a lot of people, who have been in business for a long time are happy to meet me because they knew my dad. It was a good introduction."

Although NGKF has its own network of brokers, Keith still uses the SIOR network. "About twice a year, there is a transaction



Gabriel Silverstein, SIOR, and husband, Angel Silverstein, SIOR Associate's, complimentary skills and teamwork have allowed them to have a successful business partnership.

that I work on with an out-of-state broker who contacted me through SIOR."

Sometimes, the grown-up child who has become a star in commercial real estate joins SIOR because of something more warm and fuzzy. When they were kids, their fathers took the families to conferences, which many times were places that seemed exotic and fun. William O'Brien recalls that when he was about 12 years old his mom was sick so he had to go with his father to an SIOR conference in Arizona. Now, that was fun for a Long Island boy.

Kristin Geenty also knew she would join SIOR. "One of my favorite memories," she recalls, "was wandering around The Breakers in Palm Beach. My dad used to turn the SIOR conventions into family vacations."

A lot of the next generation are coming up the ranks in SIOR, becoming active in committee work or heading up local chapters. The commitments to the industry, the contacts, the ability to affect change is what keeps organizations like SIOR pertinent and attractive.

There is one other intangible that makes SIOR attractive and Gabriel Silverstein said it best: "While SIOR has increased the visibility of our company, on a personal level, we have made a lot of good friendships." ▼

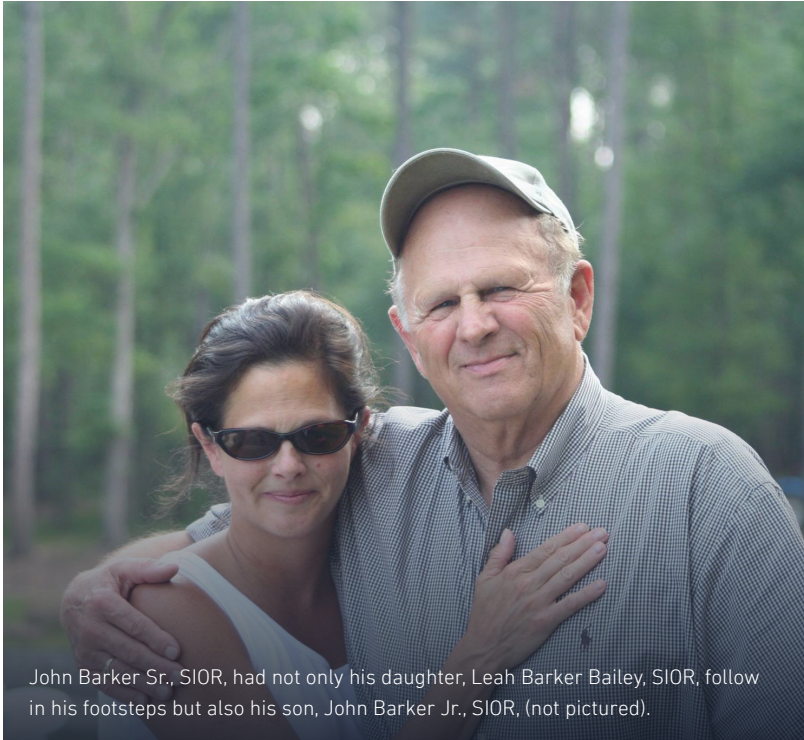
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Kristin Geenty, SIOR, grew up watching her father Kevin Geenty, SIOR Retired, in a fulfilling and successful career and is now president of the Geenty Group Realtors.



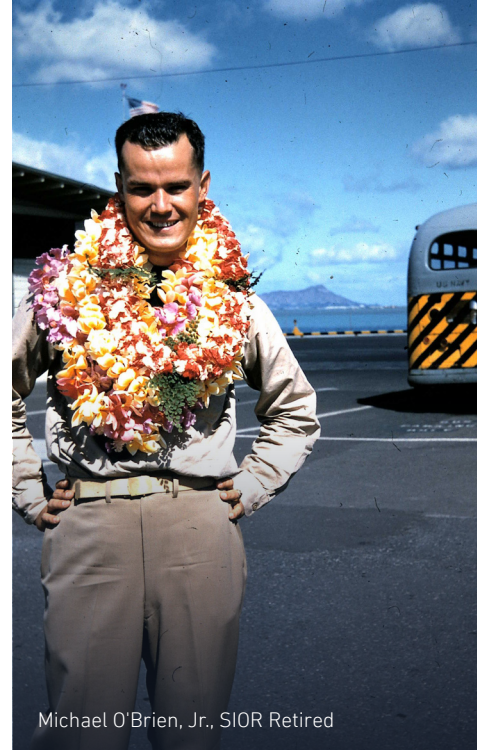
John Barker Sr., SIOR, had not only his daughter, Leah Barker Bailey, SIOR, follow in his footsteps but also his son, John Barker Jr., SIOR, (not pictured).



Grant Tidemann, SIOR, CRE, and his son Bradley Tidemann, SIOR.



John Ritter, SIOR, Richard Maltz, SIOR (now deceased), Jerry Norton, SIOR, Stan Mullin, SIOR, Michaele C. O'Brien, Jr, SIOR, William P. O'Brien, SIOR, Dave Violette, Michael C. O'Brien, III, SIOR, Peter Hanson, SIOR.



Michael O'Brien, Jr., SIOR Retired



Peter Krombach, SIOR, and his son Keith Krombach, SIOR.



Brothers, William O'Brien, SIOR, and Michael O'Brien III, SIOR.

CONTRIBUTING SIORS



Leah Barker Bailey,
SIOR



John Barker Sr.,
SIOR, CRE



John Barker Jr., SIOR



Kevin Geenty, SIOR,
Retired



Kristin Geenty,
SIOR



Keith Krombach,
SIOR



Peter Krombach,
SIOR



Michael C. O'Brien III,
SIOR



William O'Brien,
SIOR



Angel Silverstein
SIOR Associate



Gabriel Silverstein,
SIOR



Grant Tidemann,
SIOR, CRE



**Bradley
Tidemann,** SIOR