



~~Real Estate: Really A Mobile Career?~~

By Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer

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At first glance, the real estate field might seem ill-suited for a spouse seeking a mobile career compatible with the nomadic lifestyle of a military family.

Indeed, mobile military families are sure to confront some difficult challenges when attempting a career in real estate sales.

Marine spouse Harmony Jones found out the hard way. "I started in real estate because it seemed like a great job for someone with kids who needed a flexible schedule," she says. "I initially thought that I could take it from one state to the next. I found out later that most of the time you have to get re-certified in each state."

As Army wife Jeri Winkler says, "It's an expensive venture. Not all states have license reciprocity. As a PCS move takes us from state to state, we not only have to take that state's required real estate courses but we must also pass the required tests and then pay the required local, state and federal dues. It costs several hundred dollars to take the class and test, and the dues and other fees can run into the thousands."

"With a timeline of six to nine months to acquire the new license," Winkler adds, "your return on investment isn't good if you are in a place for only three years." She also points out that ~~military spouses new to an area simply do not know their way around and are unable to bring any historic understanding of the local market to their services.~~

Winkler has a real estate license but keeps it in an inactive status while she moves. "When my husband retires and we return to Virginia, I will reactivate my license."

Rather than give up the idea of working in real estate while her husband is on active duty, however, Winkler has found a way to stay in the field and continue to build her skills as she earns a living. She runs her own virtual assistant business, SecretAssistant.com, which specializes in real estate. Offering eight years' experience in real estate and expertise in real estate software programs from TopProducer7i to emailcard and HotMarket, Winkler provides services such as prospecting, creating virtual tours and maintaining websites and databases for real estate agents across the United States.

Similarly, Air Force spouse Carla Burns is using her previous experience performing public

relations for two real estate companies in her new VA business, needcpr.com.

Army Guard and Reserve spouse Elaine Rodriguez Stewart has moved six times in 13 years with the military. During the first 10 years, she found a secretarial or administrative job with each move. Three years ago, she applied that experience, virtual assistant training and extensive Internet research related to real estate support services - plus attendance at many free online training and area seminars provided by real estate vendors - into her current business, eOfficeVisions.com.

Military Moves Provide Advantages

Starting a virtual assistant business isn't the only way to develop your real estate expertise as you move. Your military moves provide an automatic opportunity to expand your knowledge and skills if you approach moving with that specific goal in mind.

After six moves in his 28-year military career, retired Air Force officer Kenneth W. Edwards and his wife learned a lot about buying and selling homes and working with real estate agents

Now a real estate broker and author of "Your Successful Real Estate Career," Edwards says: "If you are a military spouse, there's a strong likelihood that you've moved a few times in your life. Nothing could better prepare you for a career in real estate."

Air Force spouse and current real estate broker Sue Guenther, who moved 19 times in 26 years, points out certain advantages military spouses can offer when entering the real estate profession after many years with the military. "They are sympathetic to the moving process," she says, "and usually they have human [relations] skills. That's key in this business."

Guenther agrees that military life makes it difficult to maintain a position as a licensed real estate agent. "It also doesn't work well if you have young children at home," she adds, "as you'll be pulled in too many different directions." Frequent evening and weekend work and telephone calls add challenges to young family life - and that doesn't even include deployments.

She recommends obtaining experience by working in unlicensed capacities in the real estate field. "Work for a title company or a multiple listing service," she advises. "You'll learn the lingo and background that will help tremendously when you do go into sales." Other possibilities may include working for an appraiser's office or at a real estate brokerage.

Real Estate Industry Prospects

Stephanie Singer, senior public affairs associate for the National Association of REALTORS®, describes the potential for attractive earnings: "In 2004, the median gross personal income for all Realtors was \$49,300. Earnings increase the longer a Realtor is in business, however. Real estate professionals with two or fewer years of experience earned a median of \$12,850 in 2004, while those in the business 26 years or more earned a median of \$92,600."

Those are gross income figures; nine out of 10 Realtors are independent contractors and thus responsible for their own health insurance, Social Security, professional fees, equipment and marketing costs. Median expenses for sales agents in 2004 totaled \$6,800.

Guenther says it's an advantage for a real estate salesperson to live in an area with a large

military population: "You have a built-in client base that will be moving and buying and selling."

Jones points out that it is rarely appropriate for her to discuss real estate business at base events focused around her husband's job. She solved that problem by tapping into the power of groups.

When Jones moved to San Diego, she teamed up with Bob Leeds of the Family Member Employment Assistance Program to create a group called SEAMS - the Self-Employed Association of Military Spouses. SEAMS allows spouses to network with each other and provide support, resources and contacts to help improve their businesses.

Some military spouses could profit from an interest in real estate in another way: real estate investing. Capt. Angela Jefferson and her husband, Sgt. Maj. Earl Jefferson, bought their first home 12 years ago. They now own five homes.

"We didn't set out to make money in real estate," Angela says, "We just sort of stumbled on it when we started buying and renting homes. We lived in all of the homes we bought."

The Army couple "fixed up" each of the houses to make them easier to rent, and even went on to write a book, "[Military Investing 101](#)".

Real estate is an example of a career field that may not seem mobile - and certainly it is not in its traditional form. However, those interested in the field do not have to give it up. The key is in one's mental approach. Think, "How *can* I make it work - what is possible right here, right now?"

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© 2006, Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer. Military spouses Kathie and Holly are co-authors of "Help! I'm a Military Spouse - I Want a Life Too: How to Craft a Life for YOU as You Move With the Military." For more information, go to www.militaryspousehelp.com or send a message to kathie@jumpintolife.net.

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Websites For Real Estate Career Novices

[National Association of REALTORS®](#)

[Association of Real Estate Law Officials](#) (includes an extensive list of links to other real estate organizations and resources)

[Real Estate Virtual Assistant Network](#)

[Military Spouse Virtual Assistant Network](#)

For information on SEAMS: Robert.K.Leeds@usmc.mil

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