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**Real Estate**



**Family business: Many real estate agents like to keep everything relative when it comes to selling homes**

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**Rachel Stone**  
 Express-News Business Writer

Real estate agent Mary Olivo Hall has a cell phone that rings off the hook. More accurately put, it *sings* off the hook.

Her granddaughter downloaded Judy Garland's "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," which pipes up every time Hall has a call. "The Wizard of Oz" is a dominant theme in her office.

Her motto? "There's no place like home."

And home is never far for the 56-year-old San Antonio native.

Hall shares a small office at Keller Williams Realty with her husband of more than 30 years, Eddy, and their 29-year-old daughter, Andrea Hall Doolittle.

"It's the best thing in the world," Mary said of working with her family.

Theirs is not an unusual arrangement. Real estate is often a family business.

Some of the city's leading real estate companies — the Phyllis Browning Co., Kuper Sotheby's International



Kin Man Hui/Express-News

Nancy Cook said that growing up hearing her mother Bette talk real estate all the time prompted her to pick a different business. But, three years ago, after experiencing a slump in the public

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and Santikos Investments, for example — also are family businesses.

relations field, she got her license to sell real estate, too.

- [Kuper Sotheby's International Realty](#)
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Kuper Sotheby's agent Nancy Cook remembers interminable childhood dinners where her parents, John and Bette Cook, talked about nothing but real estate.

"I can remember them talking excitedly about VA loans and mortgage rates," 51-year-old Nancy said.

Her parents had their own real estate business, Cook Realty Co. After 17 years, they joined what was then called Kuper Realty Co. Bette still works for the company, now known as Kuper Sotheby's International Realty. John is retired.

"I thought it all sounded so lacking in excitement that I would never make the mistake of getting into that business, and I didn't," Nancy said.

Instead, she had a decades-long career in public relations. But then marketing budgets were slashed and demand for her services slumped.

So three years ago she got her real estate license and now works alongside her mother.

Nancy and Bette have found that their difference in age and background complement each other.

For Bette, working with computers gives her fits, and she's never really understood why old houses — which remind her of the one in which she grew up — are so popular with younger folks.

That's where Nancy's younger, hipper perspective offers a leg up.

And for Nancy, her mother's almost 40 years of experience is priceless.

"We think that's a benefit for our clients," Nancy said.

Another mother-daughter team, Karla and Annie Gilliland of ReMax North, sit across a desk from each other in a tiny office, like many real estate agents.

"Every day I can't believe that all the different roads we've traveled have led us here," said Karla, 58.

The retired schoolteacher, who moved here three years ago from the West Texas town of Lockney, said real estate "is what I always should have done."

"I've always loved houses and construction and architecture and design," she said.

Annie, 26, had been working in retail after getting an advertising degree from Abilene Christian University.

Her mom's success drove her to get licensed in real estate, too.

"Real estate is something you really do have to jump into and learn from every transaction," she said.

"It helped having Mom already in the business because it's hard for younger people. You don't have the same sphere of experience."

And family togetherness helps in a competitive business that can be emotional. Some clients are overjoyed to be in a first house, and others are devastated to sell their lifelong homes.

"You get wrapped up in people's lives," Karla said.

For the Hall family, the business is all about people's lives and their own family. Mary jokes that if newlywed Andrea would have a baby, they'd set up a crib in the office.

Then again, maybe she isn't joking. Hall often calls her daughter at 7 a.m. to give her the day's lowdown, and vice versa.

Mary's favorite clients are single mothers. She already had a young daughter when she married Eddy, and now their daughter Tina is a single mom.

The family also gets involved in their clients' lives. Eddy has volunteered to wait for a client's carpet guy, and he and Mary have even accompanied one family to an immigration hearing.

They sell houses from \$45,000 to \$450,000. After all, says Mary, "I think everybody needs a home."

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