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L I V E S O F R E A L E S T A T E

100 More

THE
PORTRAIT
OF A GOOD
• NEIGHBOR

Stu Siegel

*Dewey
Mitchell
& Al
Crumbley*

Tackling their way to
the top in Tampa

*Tom
Reddin*

Busting down barriers

MAKING MONEY, YES.
GIVING IT AWAY – DEFINITELY.

Vision for giving

BY KATIE KERWIN McCRIMMON



Stu Siegel in his own neighborhood with local children

DANIEL PORTNOY

At 17, Stuart Siegel landed a job at a Jewish nursing home on his native Long Island. He served dinner every night to a cadre of characters who realized right away that this kid was special.

Instead of counting the minutes until he could clock out, Siegel got to know the residents.

"I would see the way some of the workers treated the patients," he says. "They weren't very caring. They were lazy, cutting corners. I never cut corners. If I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it right."

Each night, along with a meal, Siegel would serve up some conversation.

"Because I'm Jewish, I related to a lot of patients there. I'd listen to them," he says.

"People were waiting to punch out, but I was in no hurry. I took the job for the money, but as I got to know the people, I could see the residents wanted to talk. They would look at me and want to slap me on the cheek, get a little fresh with me.

"I just started kidding around with them. It started as a job and became more than that. I felt like I was helping people."

Siegel, now 41 and CEO of eNeighborhoods Inc., moved on to much bigger jobs.

A gifted businessman, he's built two highly successful companies and in 2001, received the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year award. eNeighborhoods provides Realtors and their clients with detailed demographic data about schools, home values and crime rates.

Despite the success, Siegel has never lost that caring spirit. He's just as committed to giving money away as he is to making it, and he loves inspiring others to do the same.

Siegel became the founding sponsor of the National Association of Realtors Good Neighbor Awards in 2000. The NAR wanted to recognize extraordinary agents whose volunteer work makes a dramatic difference in their communities.

Siegel immediately understood the power of the NAR awards and the ripple effect that Realtors could generate.

"He's special in that he sees the potential," says Pamela Geurds Kabati, vice president and editorial director for NAR publications, who helped pitch the Good Neighbor Award idea in 1999. "He never asked, 'What's in this for me?' Instead it was, 'Wow, this is great. This is an army of Realtors who could be harnessed for good and inspired (to make a difference in their communities).'"

Siegel has so far donated more than half a million dollars to the program. Each year, five winners are awarded \$7,500 to donate to the charity of their choice. As the founding sponsor, Siegel also contributes money each year to cover the administrative costs necessary to keep the program going.

And he pours his heart into the sponsorship, reviewing finalists and getting to know each winner.

"These people are angelic. I aspire to do half the things they've done."

He cites one of the original award winners, Oral Lee Brown, an African American Realtor who sponsored a first-grade class in Oakland. She promised the children that if they stayed in school, she would pay for them to go to college. Thanks to her hands-on attention, personal savings and fund-raising abilities, she helped all 23 graduate from high school, and 19 are now in college or graduate school.

Siegel draws inspiration from Brown and all the other winners. His goal is to someday devote himself full time to running the charitable foundation he and his wife, Jill, founded in 1995. He'd also like to own a National Hockey League franchise. But that's another story.

Siegel grew up in Plainview, N.Y., a suburban community on Long Island. The youngest of three children born to Irv and Mara Siegel, Stu Siegel was a young businessman who had a paper route and shoveled walks. Siegel and his buddies loved playing street hockey. When he was 8, a player from the newly formed New York Islanders moved in down the block.

RIGHT Siegel and his wife, Jill





I wanted to be 'The Apprentice.'



"He was pretty good and he would bring us pucks and sticks and, occasionally, tickets. So, we all got hockey crazy."

Siegel started playing in various hockey leagues. His folks made him prove he was serious by making him pay for his own gear. Today, the ever-athletic Siegel still plays ice hockey — and tennis — every week. For a recent birthday, his wife gave him a trip to play in a fantasy hockey camp with pros like Wayne Gretzky at the Los Angeles Kings' practice arena.

For Siegel, hockey is the perfect break. "There's great team camaraderie. You're with all different kinds of guys. You go out for a drink. You never talk business."

Siegel's parents separated when he was 13. He made the best of a rough time, excelling in school and sports, picking up after-school jobs and growing closer to his dad.

Irv Siegel delivered soda to people's homes for a living. But like his son, he had an eye for fresh business ideas. The competition for new customers was stiff. Most beverage distributors would hit the new houses. Irv Siegel was more strategic. He went to the courthouse and found deeds for sales of existing homes. Then, he created gift packages for new families. He eventually sold the beverage business and focused on the new neighbors business. He originally called it Getting to Know You. It later became Getko Group Inc.

Stu Siegel always wanted to be a businessman, like his dad, but he was determined to make it on his own. He graduated with honors in 1985 from the prestigious Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. At the time, his goal was to be the next Donald Trump.

"I wanted to be 'The Apprentice.'"

But Trump wouldn't return his calls, so Siegel went to work for a company that was buying and selling shopping centers. At 22, he was negotiating multimillion dollar deals.





Siegel as a 20-year-old rugby player for the University of East Anglia in England. Siegel took up rugby during a student-exchange program to replace college hockey, which he played at the University of Pennsylvania.

A few years later, his dad approached him about coming on board at Getko. The younger Siegel almost passed up the offer.

"I thought if I worked for my dad, I would have this stigma."

But he searched his soul and cut a deal. He would handle marketing and take the company national. Siegel became the road warrior. He had the golden touch. When he came on board in 1987, the 25-year-old company was earning \$7 million a year in revenues. By 1995, that number had grown to \$52 million.

Soon after, Cendant, which had recently acquired Welcome Wagon, offered to buy Getko and merge the two companies.

Overnight, at age 32, Siegel became a millionaire and secured his dad some cash for the first time in his life. That was huge for Irv Siegel, who started off life in Brooklyn, one of eight children born to Polish immigrants.

Along with financial success, Stu Siegel found the

woman to share his life and his vision for giving. He married Jill Meyer in 1994.

After the sale to Cendant, one of the first things they did was take \$1 million and form the Stuart and Jill Siegel Foundation. Siegel took his cue from sports stars like Dave Winfield of the New York Yankees. They would get big contracts and start their own foundations. He always wanted to do the same.

The marriage also led Siegel to his next business partners.

Still wanting to hatch his own company, Siegel decided to provide sophisticated data to Realtors. He and his wife decided to move to her native Philadelphia to start a new company. Siegel knew how to gather the information. And his wife's father and brother, Jerry and David Meyer, respectively, were computer consultants who could do the programming.

They launched in 1997. eNeighborhoods was born.

At first, skeptics doubted their concept. But soon, Siegel had sold all the big real estate firms on the software. Eventually, eNeighborhoods was named one of the fastest-growing software companies by Microsoft and *InfoWeek*, and became one of NAR's top 10 products of the year. In 1999, Siegel also acquired ConsumerInfo.com, which supplied consumers with free credit reports online, and renamed it iPlace. The concept was to collect information from people using the site and merge it with demographic data to create a vast marketing database.

By 2001, annual revenues had reached \$65 million and Homestore came knocking with a hefty offer to buy. But the offer wasn't large enough to overtake another deal Siegel was working on. Siegel was sure he could get Homestore to increase its offer, although his banker, his attorney and even his board of directors doubted he could pull it off.

Siegel bet them all steak dinners he could do it — and he did.

David describes Siegel as a keen negotiator with a rare leadership presence.

"He's very quiet," David says. "He doesn't feel the need to always jump in and say something. He lets them talk themselves out. And when he does talk, people listen."

Siegel closed on the Homestore deal Aug. 24, 2001.

Two weeks later, the 9/11 attacks left the nation's financial markets reeling, and the fallout exposed problems in Homestore's accounting practices. That fall, Homestore missed its quarterly projections by a huge margin. Suddenly, the company Siegel had put his faith in was in trouble.

Homestore laid off Siegel and his partners and announced plans to shut down the Philadelphia operation by January. It was a bleak holiday season.

But Siegel refused to abandon ship. He kept coming into the office and held a holiday party, dipping into his pocket to hand out \$20,000 in bonuses to shell-shocked employees. Then he got to work making things right.

“Was it painful? Yes. But life goes on. I made a decision. I screwed up. I moved into the next gear. I tried negotiating to buy it back,” Siegel says.

For weeks, he couldn't score a deal. But, as Homestore's troubles mounted, Siegel was able to buy back

eNeighborhoods for far less than Homestore had paid.

Ready for a fresh start, Siegel, his wife and her family decided to move to Boca Raton, Fla., where eNeighborhoods is now headquartered. It was a great move personally and professionally.

Professionally, eNeighborhoods' parent company, Siegent (short for Siegel Enterprises), boasted more than \$20 million in revenues in 2004. Siegent also bought two new companies late in the year that will trigger new growth: REChannel, which does website development, and WyldFyre, which supplies critical MLS data.

Personally, Stu and Jill Siegel love raising their children, 8-year-old Drew and 4-year-old Carly, in the warmth of the Florida sun, and Jill enjoys having family nearby. They're getting involved in local charities, such as the Boca Raton Community Hospital and Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Jill was always attracted to her husband's big heart.

She recalls one of her roughest moments after the birth of their son when she suffered an ectopic pregnancy, a life-threatening condition for the baby and Jill. An ultrasound showed the baby was still alive, but there was nowhere to grow. As they waited for emergency surgery, Jill was panicky and sure they would never have another child. Siegel was a rock of support.

“He kept saying, ‘Don't worry. Everything will be OK. What's meant to be is meant to be.’ He was very calming and very soothing,” Jill says.

They survived the grief of the lost child and later had their daughter.

Now, one of Jill's greatest joys is watching her husband's spirit filter through their children.

After the tsunami ravaged South Asia in December, Drew came home from school with a request to help victims. The suggested donation was \$1 each. Drew decided to give \$10 of his own savings.

For the Siegels, charitable giving is second nature. It's also a lot of fun.

In December 2003, a friend who knew Bruce Springsteen asked Siegel if he wanted to donate to the public library in Springsteen's hometown, Asbury Park, N.J. Siegel wrote a check and later was invited to a benefit concert where he went on stage and talked with the rock star, whose philanthropy is legendary.

“I love what you do,” Siegel told the Boss.

Springsteen replied, “I love what you're doing.”

Asked if that phrase is Siegel's mantra, he shrugs and says it sounds about right.

“I do love what I do.”



ABOVE Bruce Springsteen and Siegel

RIGHT Wyane Gretzky and Siegel

