

business
profile



Clear Title

Kent Stewart is intent on making Reli the gold standard of title companies.

By Niki Sepsas

If it's true that "variety is the spice of life," then a glimpse at the professional life of Kent Stewart would provide enough variety and spice to ignite even the most mundane existence. The Ohio native shed his Midwestern roots in 1974 to attend college at the University of Alabama. Armed with a degree from that insti-

tution's School of Law, Stewart hung out his shingle in his own law practice in Birmingham in 1981, focusing primarily on real estate law.

It was during that time that the Magic City was caught up in the fever and excitement of professional football with the Birmingham Stallions of the World Football League. Stewart

met several of the players on the team and became interested in representing them as a sports agent. For the next ten years he and his partner, Rick Davis, listed numerous players from the WFL as well as NFL coaches and players, including Ozzie Newsome, Joe Cribbs, Jay Barker, Stan White, Tommy Bowden, and

Chan Gailey as clients.

Many of his colleagues would have been content to manage a successful law practice and represent a stable of professional athletes, but Stewart was looking for other opportunities. More spice.

While in Columbus, Ohio in 1995, he wandered into a Boston Market restaurant for lunch. Fascinated by the chain's home meal replacement concept, he immediately scheduled a meeting with the restaurant's corporate executives. Within 90 days, he had inked a deal for the Boston Market franchise rights for all of southern California. During the next two years, his new company, Boston West, opened and operated 105 Boston Market restaurants in Los Angeles, San Diego and Palm Springs.

"The Boston Market venture was a great learning experience for me," Stewart relates. "I gained exposure to some very heavy hitters in the business world."

Stewart parlayed that business experience with his law background to inject the next bit of spice into his professional resume. As his law practice continued to grow, he saw the need to add title insurance to the list of services he was offering his clients. His goal was to provide a higher level of service to the people who turned to him for legal assistance and to give attorneys more control over the closing process.

In 1996, Stewart founded Stewart National Title, and in 2002, he changed the name to Reli.

"Purchasing a home is probably the biggest investment many of us will make in a lifetime," Stewart notes. "I wanted Reli to be the Ritz-Carlton of title and closing professionals. The 'Reli' name came about as an adaptation of 'rely,' which emphasizes the trust that homebuyers place on the people that work with them. I replaced the 'y' with an 'i' to emphasize the highly personal-

ized attention we offer each of our customers."

Stewart adds that a number of specialized components must come together and mesh efficiently to make closing on a home a smooth, hassle-free process. The professionals at Reli, he notes, strive to create the most relaxing atmosphere possible for their customers.

Licensed to operate in Alabama and Florida, Reli now has a presence in all 67 Alabama counties and the panhandle of Florida. To offer the highest level of service to their clients, Reli operates 15 branch offices throughout Alabama. The company handles primarily residential closings but works with commercial properties as well. In 2003, Reli handled over 50,000 files to become Alabama's largest title insurance company and the only one offering statewide service.

"The primary difference between us and other title companies is our ability to handle title searches and closings under a single roof," states Gil L. Murdock, III, Reli's chief operating officer. "We focus on just those two processes. Our people are not handling divorces, wills, or other litigation. We have a number of real estate attorneys onboard here, and their mission is to make every title search fast, accurate, and as simple and comfortable as possible. We are unerringly calm, professional, reassuring and accommodating to take the anxiety out of what is the biggest financial commitment people are likely to make. Kent's vision for the company is what attracted me to Reli, and the passion he has for making the company the Ritz-Carlton of the industry has become the rallying point for each person here."

Stewart and his staff have embraced the latest technology to ensure the achievement of their goal of total customer satisfaction. In 2004, Reli introduced i.View, the newest cutting edge electronic wiz-

ardry in the real estate community. A simple point and click can give buyers, sellers and mortgage lenders immediate, secure, on-line access to view, print and track the progress of the closing file. The service, available 24/7, gives brokers the ability to dramatically streamline the closing process through better and more timely access to pertinent information. Updates are available immediately after changes are made by Reli professionals, and automatic e-mail updates of certain events can also be provided upon request.

Still intent on adding more spice to the recipe for his life, Stewart continues to seek new challenges. In 1996, he formed the Birmingham Golf Foundation to raise money for children's charities. The organization now hosts an annual golf tournament in October which draws top pros and celebrities. Michael Jordan, Glenn Frey, Vince Gill and Dennis Quaid have all appeared at the tournament and helped raise more than \$1 million for the Big Oak Ranch.

When questioned about the cornerstone of his success, Stewart quickly points to his wife, Julie, and their two children, Tanner and Taylor. In addition to inspiring him to be the best that he can be personally and professionally, he feels that their family outings together and the sports activities in which the children are involved provide him the ideal setting in which to play an active role in the community that he proudly calls home.

When not wearing the pin stripes of a title and closing professional, the wingtips of an attorney, or the visor of a golfer, Stewart can be found sporting the jeans and T-shirt of a bass player in an alternative rock band that has performed for the last four years at Birmingham's City Stages and at the Bayfest music festival in Mobile.

Not surprising for someone who is always looking for more "spice." 