

# Park Cities People

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## So You Want To Be A Realtor?

Dallas pros talk about how to make money in a competitive market

by Paige Phelps

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Real Estate Editor

Annamari Lannon started her career in politics in Washington, D.C. Now a successful Realtor with Allie Beth Allman & Associates, she thinks playing with the pundits on Capitol Hill might have prepared her for selling high-rise condos.

"Maybe you need a little politics before you get into home sales," she said with a laugh.

Anthony's success in Allie Beth Allman's urban division, which focuses on high-rise sales, makes residential real estate look easy.

In reality, making a buck these days is a tightrope act of salesmanship and service while trying to keep traditional commission intact. Add to that the current buyer's market, the growing ranks of discount brokerages, do-it-yourself home selling kits, and the rising numbers of Realtors and succeeding at all seems like a miracle.

Dori Warner, a senior buyer's specialist at Hewitt and Habgood Realty Group, said that competition among Realtors in North Oak Cliff is friendly, but fierce.

"It's a very competitive market," she said. "There's only so much business to go around," she said.

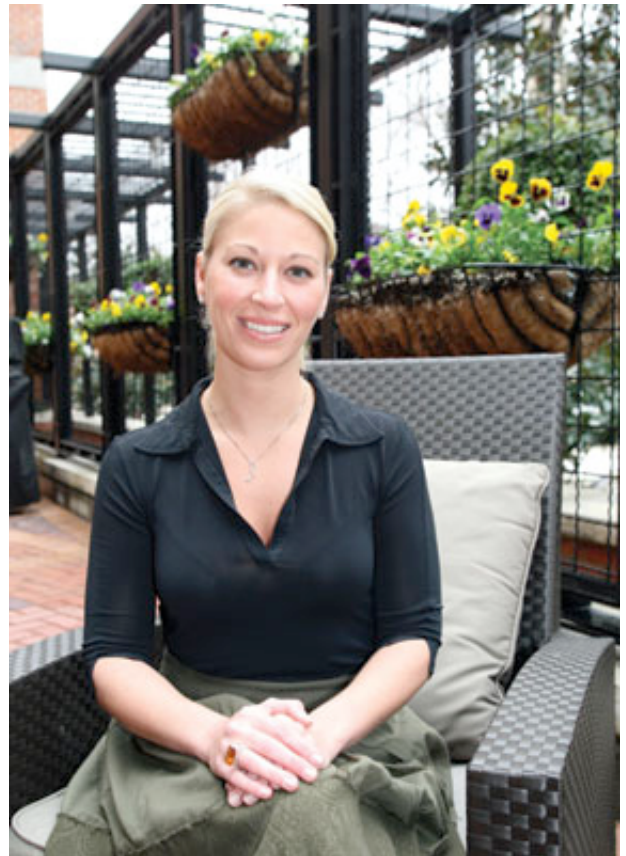
"It's a hard first two years," said Christina Benoit, a Realtor with Abio AHK Realty. "My advice? I'd say save a lot of money and expect to work seven days a week, 10 hours a day."

Bettie Abio, the owner of Abio AHK, a real estate company with four branches around town, said that she has, without a doubt, seen the market grow more competitive over the years.

There are simply more people in the business, she explained, but added, "There is plenty of business out there; there is work if you want it."

It is work that rookie Realtor Lindsay Clarke is counting on.

Recently divorced with three little girls, Clarke said residential real estate sounded like an exciting career to tackle.



Staff Photo: Christina Barany  
Uptown Realtor **Annamari Lannon**

She just listed her first house, and she hopes to have a steady income — “as steady as it can be in real estate” — in a few months.

Clarke faces tough competition. According to a September article in MSNBC’s *Motley Fool*, “The National Association of Realtors has seen its membership swell by some 63 percent since 2000, to roughly 1.25 million people.”

The article also reported: “According to a Real Trends/Harris Interactive survey, 62 percent of real estate brokerage firms are feeling pressured to negotiate commissions.”

In fact, Realtors, by federal law, do not have set commissions.

“In the traditional agreement, the homeowner agrees to pay 6 percent commission,” said Garth Lewis, the owner and broker of a Help-U-Sell branch in Dallas. He described Help-U-Sell as “a full-service realty company like an Ebby Halliday, but different because we have a set fee for services instead of the traditional percentage.”

In Lewis’ model, Realtors are cut out of the picture altogether. Homeowners are encouraged to hold their own open houses, although the firm can do that for them for a higher fee. Lewis said his business has steadily increased since he opened two years ago. His services cost about \$2,950 to \$3,950 on average because Help-U-Sell does all the paperwork and cuts out the standard commission.

“We’ve sold homes as low as \$90,000, and we’ve sold homes up to \$700,000,” Lewis said. “It’s in the higher-priced homes that people save the really big dollars.”

Realtors like Anthony say their job is not going anywhere, especially in the high-rise market.

“I think high-rises are different in how they are marketed,” she said. “There is not as much visibility in a high-rise. You could be driving down Monticello and see a house with a ‘For sale by owner’ sign that has more visibility, and maybe you don’t need a Realtor. Whereas, if you’re selling a unit for 2008 at The Mayfair, it’s going to be hard for somebody to know something is for sale without a Realtor.”

With her knowledge and experience, Anthony said she doesn’t see lower commissions in her future.

“Each agent does business their own way, but it’s about the way you present service and marketing so the client understands. I tell them I’m paid to market your house up front, and I don’t get paid unless it sells,” Benoit said. “I work hard and expect to get my commission.”