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cover story

Gold Rallies

By Maria Patterson

TOUGH MARKET OR NOT, THE **CENTURY 21[®]**
SYSTEM IS RAISING THE BAR

IN A MARKET WHEN MANY REAL ESTATE firms are playing it safe, Century 21 Real Estate LLC has actually chosen to raise its standards and perform, system-wide, at an even higher level. Between their symbolic relaunch of the “gold jacket” and their proactive investments in major ad campaigns—watch for April’s “Open House Month” initiative—the CENTURY 21 System is not letting a mere thing like market conditions stand in the way of continued success.

For the CENTURY 21 System’s leadership team, the tough market conditions of late actually represent an important call to action.

“If you look at the broader world around us, there’s great change—from financial issues to political issues,” says Bev Thorne, senior vice president of marketing for Century 21 Real Estate LLC. “There are a lot of different dynamics going on, and in times of change and uncertainty, there’s a scarcity of trust. We think it’s paramount during this time of uncertainty to have proof positive, to show and demonstrate quality and high standards; this creates a sense of trust during tough times. So often, organizations are defined by how they respond and react to times of transition and uncertainty. That’s what we’re focused on doing with our brokers and agents in this market: redefining the standards of excellence.”

This higher level of quality is referred to as “The Gold Standard” at Century 21 Real Estate LLC, and the company takes great effort in getting this message across frequently and consistently. The company is dedicated to making sure that home buyers and sellers understand exactly what the CENTURY 21 Gold Standard is all about.

DEFINING THE GOLD STANDARD

One very obvious way the company is telling the world about its Gold Standard is through the reintroduction of the famous CENTURY 21 gold jacket, which started about a year ago. “The great thing about the gold jacket,” Thorne explains, “is that it’s one of, if not *the* most, recognized icons in the real estate industry. It is a universal language that crosses cultures and clearly represents our Gold Standard. It’s better than a business card and instantaneously provides recognition and a link to trust.”

More important than the iconic jacket, of

course, is the message it represents: a higher level of professionalism. The Gold Standard carries a three-pronged meaning: a standard of performance; a standard of value; and a standard of insight and wisdom.

Thorne stresses, however, that the standard of value is determined by the consumer. “Value could be from a financial point of view, as in ‘you got me the right price at the right time,’ or value could mean ‘you sold my house in one week.’ It is value as the client defines it; the agent must understand what the goal of the client is and then deliver that goal.”

UPHOLDING THE STANDARD FOR THOSE IN NEED

The concept of “The Gold Standard” is one that permeates every aspect of what the company and its system members are charged with, including its longstanding commitment to Easter Seals.

“Easter Seals is a part of our brand culture and has been since 1979,” says President and CEO Tom Kunz. “It is part of being the Gold Standard that we so often speak to. We work hand-in-hand with Easter Seals at the national and local level to keep them involved and engaged with our brokers and agents, and in turn, within the communities that we both serve each day. There is obviously a great need for the services that Easter Seals provides and the CENTURY 21 System is proud to help in the organization’s mission to provide people with disabilities greater independence.

“We have representatives from Easter Seals at all of our national events and, whenever possible, at our regional and local events as well,” he continues. “When you see the amazing accomplishments and pride that the recipients of Easter Seals services have, you can’t help but be moved and motivated to want to be a part of that and help the Easter Seals cause.”

According to Kunz, CENTURY 21 brokers and agents are truly inspired by the courage, determination and perseverance of the men, women and children that Easter Seals helps each day. As Kunz says, “They are the true heroes and motivators in this case.”

Despite a transitioning market, the CENTURY 21 System has once

Setting a New Standard for Easter Seals

The idea of raising the bar permeates every facet of the Century 21 organization, including its longstanding commitment to Easter Seals. The company collectively raised more than \$3.8 million for Easter Seals in 2007, despite a softer real estate market.

Topping the list was John Kersten, broker/owner of Century 21 Town & Country in Rochester, Michigan, donating over \$900,000 to Easter Seals in 2007. To recognize Kersten’s generosity year after year, John, and his wife, Elizabeth, were honored with the first annual John and Elizabeth Kersten Award for Philanthropy at the Easter Seals Presidents’ Council dinner. The dinner honors those who make annual gifts of \$1,000 or more to

support Easter Seals’ programming. The award was presented by Easter Seals’ President/CEO John Cocciolone and Ken and Lana Gabriel, Presidents’ Council co-chairs.

The John and Elizabeth Kersten Philanthropy Award is expected to be given annually to an honoree who embodies the spirit of the Kerstens’ commitment to Easter Seals.

During the 2008 Easter Seals of Southeast Michigan Presidents Council Dinner, John and Elizabeth Kersten received the First Annual Kersten Philanthropy Award from local Easter Seals ambassador Nicholas Kinnaird.



CENTURY 21 System's Top Fundraisers for 2007

again risen to meet the Easter Seals cause, raising more than \$3.8 million for the charity in 2007. Needless to say, Kunz is overwhelmed by the outpouring of generosity.

"I can't remember a time when I have been prouder of this organization and this longstanding partnership with Easter Seals," says Kunz. "I know what a challenging year 2007 was for everyone in the real estate industry and for consumers as well, so to achieve more than \$3.8 million in contributions is mind-blowing. Since 1979, the CENTURY 21 System has raised just over \$95 million on behalf of Easter Seals and stands as the organization's all-time leading contributor."

But Kunz is not stopping there. Just as the CENTURY 21 System continues to raise the bar in its real estate endeavors, it has set a new goal to be met for Easter Seals this year as well: \$5 million in order to bring the company to an overall contribution of \$100 million since 1979.

"Just about \$5 million away from the seemingly impossible \$100 million milestone, the CENTURY 21 System has challenged itself to raise \$5 million for Easter Seals in 2008 to reach that \$100 million mark," says Kunz. "This is a challenge that I believe we can achieve. It is a great rallying cry for our System to wrap their hands and hearts around. It is something that any office, broker or agent can take ownership of and bring to life in their market. Whether longstanding supporters of Easter Seals like CENTURY 21 Town & Country, CENTURY 21 Judge Fite Company and CENTURY 21 Red River Realty, or a single agent from Anytown, USA who is inspired to work on behalf of their local Easter Seals affiliate, the dream, the goal, the pride is theirs to own and leverage. This time next year, as we celebrate our 30th year of support for Easter Seals, I know that we will be celebrating two monumental milestones."

PROACTIVELY COURTING TODAY'S CONSUMERS

The CENTURY 21 System is also actively taking its Gold Standard to the streets, so to speak. Not only is the company ensuring that

Rank	2007 Donation	Company Name	City	State
1	\$912,961.97	CENTURY 21 Town & Country	Rochester	MI
2	\$229,056.35	CENTURY 21 Judge Fite Company	Dallas	TX
3	\$191,835.88	CENTURY 21 Red River Realty	Grand Forks	ND
4	\$135,057.35	CENTURY 21 Alliance	Drexel Hill	PA
5	\$87,520.00	CENTURY 21 Conexus Realty Ltd.	Regina	SK, CA
6	\$82,242.41	CENTURY 21 A.L.L. Stars Realty Ltd.	Edmonton	AB, CA
7	\$56,850.00	CENTURY 21 Select Real Estate, Inc.	Yuba City	CA
7*	\$54,520.06	CENTURY 21 North Homes Realty, Inc.	Lynnwood	WA
8	\$52,198.73	CENTURY 21 Pro-Team	Oak Lawn	IL
9	\$49,678.89	CENTURY 21 Sweyer & Associates	Wilmington	NC
10	\$46,000.00	CENTURY 21 United Realty Inc.	Peterborough	ON, CA
11	\$45,549.81	CENTURY 21 Northbay Alliance	Santa Rosa	CA
12	\$45,185.00	CENTURY 21 Scheetz	Carmel	IN
13	\$43,980.00	CENTURY 21 Lad Realty	Aptos	CA
14	\$42,792.81	CENTURY 21 Mike Myers Realty, Inc.	Norwalk	OH
15	\$41,224.55	CENTURY 21 B. J. Roth Realty Ltd.	Barrie	ON, CA
16	\$40,450.16	CENTURY 21 Alliance	Mount Laurel	NJ
17	\$39,497.92	CENTURY 21 My Real Estate Co.	Downey	CA
18	\$35,079.00	CENTURY 21 Acclaim Realty Co.	Brandon	FL
19	\$34,318.33	CENTURY 21 The Professionals Ltd.	Calgary	AB, CA
20	\$33,170.65	CENTURY 21 Seller's Choice	St. John's	NL, CA
21	\$30,472.00	CENTURY 21 Humpal Inc.	Fort Collins	CO

*CENTURY 21 Select Real Estate, Inc. and CENTURY 21 North Homes Realty, Inc. tied for the number seven spot in 2007 donations to Easter Seals.

the Gold Standard is infused into everything done by brokers and agents system-wide, it is broadcasting the news to consumers nationwide through important initiatives like April's "Open House Month."

The goal of Open House Month is a fairly simple one: to bring buyers and sellers together with agents. "There's so much media coverage out there right now that talks about the bad market and what a bad time it is to buy real estate," says Thorne. "Open House Month is a nationwide emphasis on all doors being open and bringing consumers in so they can find out 'what's right for me.' What better environment than inside a home to have those types of dialogues?"

Open House Month is a multimedia, nationwide effort that provides Century 21 Real

“The CENTURY 21 System has and will continue to take an aggressive lead within the real estate industry to help bolster consumer confidence.”

—Tom Kunz,
President & CEO,
Century 21
Real Estate LLC

Estate LLC with a way to marry the national support of the brand with the local efforts of System members. Launching in April, the traditional start of the spring buying season, the campaign will highlight the availability of open houses and encourage consumers to work with their local CENTURY 21 agents to buy or sell a home. The open house campaign will begin with television advertising the middle of this month running through April.

Why such a strong push for a concept whose value is increasingly debated? Because, says Thorne, the open house plays an important role in today's market. “We're in a multitasking environment, and open houses provide the opportunity to begin that conversation; they remain an important conduit for sellers to expose their home and for buyers to begin that dialogue about what works for them. While preparation and promotion are essential in advance of the open house, Thorne stresses that follow-up afterwards is equally as critical.

Open House Month will be promoted through a series of national radio and television ads in order to create a nationwide umbrella. This will be matched with a grassroots effort through local CENTURY 21 offices. The program, as with all CENTURY 21 initiatives, will serve to assist all System members, no matter what size the company may be. The campaign will position all CENTURY 21 associates as the “professional champions” to help consumers “find the golden pathway home” in today's challenging marketplace.

SMART MARKETING, NOT LESS MARKETING

Given today's market conditions, it's understandable why many firms would choose to cut back their marketing spend. But for the CENTURY 21 System, cutting back seems somewhat of a knee-jerk reaction. Now, instead, is the time to speak up.

“I hope that the media continues to have an open and balanced dialog about the real estate industry that includes insight and perspective from real estate professionals,” says Kunz. “That being said, we, (the real estate industry) must be active participants in the news and how it is reported. We need to be proactively communicating the positive news stories that are happening in and around our businesses. We need to be sharing consumer success stories and demonstrating how the knowledge and experience of our full-service real estate

brokerages and professionals are truly making an impact for consumers, and how we are navigating them through the ‘golden path home.’ That is exactly what we are challenging our CENTURY 21 System members to do, especially at the local level.”

That's why it is more important than ever to look closely at how each firm is utilizing its marketing spend.

“Whether it's cut back or increased, it's really about optimizing your spend and looking for more effective and efficient means of reaching your target customers,” Thorne explains. “Independent of external economic factors, you have to have a constant understanding of how media plays in the market—like the use of social networking. That's something we wouldn't have even looked at five years ago. It's critical for us, in tough economic times, to sharpen our pencils to find the greatest efficiencies in our spend. We're constantly realigning our advertising spend against our target audience, regardless of economic conditions.”

For a company like Century 21 Real Estate LLC, while it's critical to deliver a strong, consistent message on a national level, it's equally as important for System members to get the word out on the local level. “I would suggest real estate professionals focus on consumer confidence issues that are relative to their local market,” says Thorne. “Real estate is more than local, it's personal. We encourage real estate agents to do what they do best—and that is to establish and strengthen relationships and communication. They have to be honest and truthful with their customers and position themselves as the trusted advisor to help home buyers and sellers through a very complicated process.”

According to Kunz, now is the time for brokers and agents to be proactive. “Real estate professionals need to continue to prospect and engage consumers in positive dialogue about the opportunities that may exist for them specifically in the current market,” Kunz explains. “The CENTURY 21 System has and will continue to take an aggressive lead within the real estate industry to help bolster consumer confidence. It's a matter of really getting back to the fundamentals of this business—building and maintaining relationships and being that ‘professional champion’ that consumers need and want now more than ever.” **RE**

For more information, please visit www.century21.com.