



| FEATURED ARTICLE

# BEFORE THEY

## SIORs share their stories, extraordinary accomplishments, and unforgettable memories.

By Steve Lewis

What does it take to earn an SIOR designation? Of course, we're all familiar with the formal requirements – experience, production, endorsements, ethics, and education. But as the following stories will show you, these SIORs are not just real estate superstars; they are extraordinary individuals who can spell “success” in a number of ways.

You see, all of these SIORs had outstanding careers before they even began pursuing opportunities in real estate. One was an NFL running back; another was a symphony musician; a third was a professional baseball player and commercial airline pilot; still another was a ski action photographer and a political fundraiser; and one was a law enforcement professional and member of a SWAT team.

But while their backgrounds have been diverse, their thoughts on what it takes to be a success are strikingly similar. Above all they credit their success to teamwork. Beyond that they cite competitiveness, people skills, being a self-starter, commitment, tenacity, perseverance, being in top physical and mental shape, discipline, and having a commitment to continuous learning. Another thing they have in common? A sense of pride and gratitude for their membership in SIOR.

Here, then, are stories of five outstanding individuals – your SIOR colleagues. We hope you enjoy them as much as we enjoyed getting to know these amazing people.

### **This SIOR Sees Perseverance as Key to Success**

What is it that helps ensure success across any career? “Overcoming adversity for sure – perseverance,” asserts Keenan J.S. Sue, SIOR, Senior Vice President of Jones Lang LaSalle in Honolulu. “I’ve been knocked down many times in sports and aviation. It’s pretty cliché, but you just get back up and do it again.”

Sue played baseball in college, while selling life insurance at the same time. After college he had the opportunity to play pro ball in the Northern League, an independent league “for has-beens and never-will-bee’s” as a shortstop. “We made like \$700 a month,” he recalls. After the season ended he decided he wanted to coach, but there were only two universities in Hawaii with baseball coaches. So, inspired by the movie “Top Gun,” he went into civilian aviation. “I didn’t have the right psyche for the military; I probably would have washed out for insubordination,” he concedes.

So he went to civilian flight school in Minnesota and became a flight instructor. Then he worked for a small commuter airline in Denver and another in Hawaii, eventually working his way up to Aloha Airlines. Unfortunately, the airline went out of business in 2008. So he “scrambled,” trying the minor leagues, and hauling boxes for a small company. Then he was hired by Air Pacific Fiji. “I lived down there in a hotel and flew to Australia and New Zealand,” he recalls. He was able to spend his free time surfing and playing golf, but he had just gotten married and his wife lived in Hawaii.

Then his life took a major turn; he got laid off along with several “ex-pats” friends. “We came to Hawaii with really no game plan,” he says. He was offered jobs in Korea and the Middle East but decided he couldn’t leave his family. “Getting out of aviation, which I love, was a hard decision, but I put my family first,” he shares.

Sue knew a few friends who were “just killing it” in real estate and who he did not consider to be any more talented than he was. “If they could do it, I knew I could,” he says. So he joined Colliers in 2009 doing office leasing, and got his big break when he picked up a 2 million sq. ft. landlord portfolio. “Real estate ended up



# WERE SIORS

being way better than I thought,” says Sue, “But I missed flying, so a few years ago some guys who run local flights for a land developer with a little private jet needed another guy with lots of airline experience, so I do that once a month.”

Sue just received his SIOR designation. “I’ve never been the biggest, fastest, strongest or smartest, but I’ve strived to be elite with what I’ve been given,” he asserts. “The guys who have it in our market — and there are maybe only six — are the best in

caught up in the result, like you have to get a hit or make the deal, you tend to psych yourself out,” he advises. “Winning the process takes off the gravity of what you have to do. We go after so many deals that do not hit that if you get caught up with the results you burn out. If you go with the process, more often than not you are put in the position to win.”

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He sees real estate and aviation as similar pursuits. “Most of us are self-starters,” he says. “Neither is something you get good at overnight. You have to have grit and tenacity and commit to the process. Little things done well every day — that’s what greatness is.”

class. I felt I had to do it right – SIORs have the highest ethical standards, and are the most widely respected in the industry.”

Commitment to a process, he continues, whether in aviation, baseball or real estate, is critical to success. “If you get too

## **Competitiveness, Perseverance, Teamwork Lead to Real Estate ‘Touchdowns’**

Pete Larson, SIOR, has always been surrounded by the toughest competition. The former NFL running back, who is now Executive Vice President/Brokerage Services with TRANSWESTERN in Washington, DC, had originally planned to attend University of Illinois until he heard from Cornell, where he ended-up being surrounded not only by great athletes but outstanding students. And the competition took its toll. “There were 50 of us originally; we went down to 18,” he recalls.

Everyone else he knew there had a game plan to go to business school or become doctors or engineers, he shares. “One of my

big tackle buddies had a PhD by the time he was 30; I didn't, I was a late bloomer," Larson admits. He credits his teammates with the success that brought him to the NFL. "We had a terrific offensive line, and I was named an all-East back," he says.

He was drafted by the Washington Redskins and played with them for two years, and was fortunate to work with Hall of Fame legends Vince Lombardi and Otto Graham. "Otto Graham drafted me; he was one of the real fine people," Larson recalls. "Lombardi kept me right up to the end, and said 'Let's keep up with each other.' I was exposed to some fabulous people." An additional benefit of football, he notes, was that "we could play four or five months of the year and get another job or career started."

## **“You’ve got to be ready to lay it on the line...”**

Larson didn't start his real estate career right after football. He joined the National Guard and served as an MP. Here again, teamwork was essential. "There was a great team in the U.S. Army," he says. "They also think in terms of 'we' – let's see how we can grow things together, which is one of the things I tried to bring to people in the real estate business. When we ran our own company, the Business Journal did a whole story on how we always talked in terms of 'we.' Like Lombardi said, get the right guy in the right place and you win."

While he was still in the army, Larson recalls seeing a group of men at a popular restaurant who always seemed to be having a good time. "I got in contact with one of them when I was done with the service,"

he says. "He had a degree in economics; one thing led to another, and I started doing commercial leasing."

Later on in his career his partner Brian Ball suggested he look into the SIOR, so he took the requisite courses and qualified for the designation. "I got to know a few local, really standout men; I admired them. The more I found out about it and participated, the more business I found could come through it. Now I'm looking at possibilities in San Diego and have an SIOR working with me. It's a terrific team to be part of; if you don't have a specific type of experience, that's what SIORs are for – guys who know what they're doing."

Larson says that competitiveness and preparation are prerequisites for success in any career, along with perseverance. In short, he says, you must be "prepared to go after it." If you don't win, he says, you've got to be ready both mentally and physically to go again.

"You've got to be ready to lay it on the line," says Larson, who looks forward to continuing to do just that. "My wife and others have suggested that I retire, but I like what I do," he concludes.

### **Career in Politics Teaches This SIOR “It’s All About People”**

John Culbertson, CCIM, CRE, SIOR, managing partner with Cardinal Real Estate Partners, LLC, in Charlotte, became a political fundraiser after graduating from college and quickly learned a number of lessons that have served him well in real estate.

"It's all about people. You have to be more interested than be interesting," he says. "If you do not figure out what it is a client, or another broker you're working with, or a prospective tenant or city official is trying to get done you're just not going to be successful with your own goals. I learned quickly in politics it's about building consensus and getting things done as a team."

How did he get into politics? "My mother is a psychotherapist, and as I grew up she constantly put me through various aptitude tests," he shares. "Real estate, litigator and photographer scored very high. When I got out of school I saw I had a marketing bent and could do well with deal making and risk taking, making intuitive decisions."

So for three years he spent seven days a week on the road working in fund raising and candidate relations. "I quickly had to transition from being a college student frat boy to a professional able to represent a candidate well and work in professional circles; it was fast-paced, exciting, and I learned a lot about how people get things done through other people," says Culbertson. "The front of the stage is a lot like dealing with clients, and the back is a lot like running a business."

After three years, however, he was "worn out" and needed a break. So, he became a ski photographer. "I always loved going fast; I used to race motorcycles when I was a kid, road mountain bikes, and then skied as I grew up." In a prayer, he says, it came very strongly that he should move to Colorado. "I lived out of a car for three weeks, opened up the Breckenridge paper, saw an ad saying they needed a photographer, and they hired me on the spot," he shares. They put him in a half-day training course with a woman who ended up being his wife.

For a while, things were good. Culbertson developed a name, and photographed a number of celebrities, including Ross Perot and Vice President Dan Quayle. "In 1992 I skied 167 days — every day Vail was open," he recalls. He also learned another important career lesson. "You have to stay healthy and fit; you have to have a lot of energy to run around or you can't hang. In a very high-paced industry like real estate it pays to take care of yourself."

Culbertson wanted to get married, but "her dad made it very clear she could not to marry a ski bum," he says. "He said, 'If you are ambitious at all you have to leave skiing.'"

And that's where real estate comes in. Not only had those aptitude tests indicated he would be good at it, but in Ninth grade he had read an article about Trammell Crow, cut it out and put it on the mirror in his bedroom. "One of the quotes said 'Developers are the closest things to God,'" Culbertson explains. Commercial real estate, he adds, "Is where the big boys played; it was more sophisticated than residential — all about big towers. We also had family friends in the business."

incredibly persistent," he shares. "Another key trait is my willingness to make myself vulnerable — I build trust by being candid with people."

### Career Fraught with Danger Puts Things in Perspective

"In hindsight, what I did those six years made me better," says Mike Maroon, SIOR, recalling his earlier career in law

Maroon actually began working in real estate while still in law enforcement. He had become a state trooper, but as a newlywed he was unhappy with the compensation and the night shifts. He actually resigned, but then his friends at the jail called and asked for his help, so he returned while working part-time in real estate. "I made twice as much in real estate as I did at the jail," he shares, "and worked my way up to manager."

**“There is discipline, which is really important in our industry. And you don’t get too upset when you lose a deal; it’s not like someone tried to shiv you. It puts things in perspective.”**

As his career progressed Culbertson, who believes strongly in education, pursued a number of designations and ultimately earned an SIOR. "It was very logical that I sought to be one, and I am an SIOR with a great deal of pride," he says.

The greatest benefit he gets out of membership, he says, is "being able to compare best practices with people who I think are smarter and better at the business than I am. It's a really nice feeling of camaraderie. Also, if I want to be involved and have a voice in the real estate community or provide thought leadership SIOR is very open to that."

Of all the personality traits that can help make one successful, the first one that comes to mind for Culbertson is persistence. "My father told me early on that if you are not very smart you have to be

enforcement. "There is discipline, which is really important in our industry. And you don't get too upset when you lose a deal; it's not like someone tried to shiv you. It puts things in perspective."

Maroon, who is a founding partner of The Acclaim Group, LLC, in Cranford, N.J., was one of the youngest individuals ever to earn the SIOR designation.

After completing school with a business administration major, Maroon was not sure what he wanted to do. After two years of bar tending he took the law enforcement exam and went to the police academy. That led to six years as a Sheriff's officer, where he was assigned to the maximum-security section of the county jail, and was also a member of the SWAT team. "That involved cool training with the Israeli Secret Service, among others," he recalls.

Maroon still has some fond memories of law enforcement. "There is great camaraderie among the officers; we always stuck together, and I loved the idea of serving my community, state and county," he says.

Why did he decide to pursue the SIOR designation so early in his career?

"I liked the challenge of getting it; it is very selective and prestigious, and the ethics requirements are still very important to me," he says.

Maroon says he has formed a lot of friendships with fellow SIORs, which has also helped his business. "I use the designation to attract and retain clients; they do not have to use only one firm, but can get whoever is best to help them in their submarket," he declares. "I can guarantee clients that we are the only organization

in the industry that not only has ethics requirements but ones that have real teeth in them.”

He says he has been able to transfer a number of skill sets from one career to another, including perspective and discipline. “When you’re at the academy you can’t be late for work on shifts, you can’t goof off in training or re-training in SWAT,” he notes. “Especially early in my career some brokers near my age panicked and got depressed when they lost a deal, and to me that was kid stuff compared to what I did. If that’s the worst thing that can happen to you then you’re doing pretty good.” In addition, he says, he has carried over the protective nature he developed into his real estate career. “You have a protective nature instilled in you because people are counting on you, and one of the reasons I’m doing really well now is because I protect my clients.”

Maroon offers the following personality traits as keys to success across any career. “Integrity, accountability, being able to think on your feet quickly, and the innate ability not to back down when you’re under pressure,” he says. “And just that general feeling of people looking at you and getting the sense of you being trustworthy.”

## Whatever the Tune, This SIOR Plays With Commitment

John Dohm, SIOR, CCIM, PA, industrial specialist with Infiniti Commercial Real Estate in Miami, “began” his first career in second grade. “Somebody had given the school a string bass, and asked for volunteers,” he recalls. “I looked at this giant thing and said ‘Sure.’” Dohm ultimately became a symphony musician, playing for 25 years in the philharmonic, opera and ballet, as well as teaching.

“Something happens along the road and you feel comfortable about it; it creates a little world for you, and you start associating with other people,” says Dohm, who sees a direct correlation between his musical

career and his success in real estate. “Very few people play music by themselves, so it puts you in a direction to become more social and team-oriented,” he explains. “You really have to pay attention to what other people are doing and what they’re saying; nothing works by itself.”

That love for teamwork continued through high school, not only with his music but with athletics as well. “After playing football and baseball I realized I did not want to give up any group of friends,” says Dohm.

He played music all through college and eventually joined the symphony, but at the age of 30 he realized he needed to make a change. “Think of the number of hours (6-7) of practice a day and sometimes same-day rehearsals in the afternoon and a concert in the evening,” he suggests. “It’s a lot of mental stress, and it’s hard to make a good living doing that. I wanted a real career.”

Someone suggested he get a stockbroker license. “I’m usually organized, I’m good at math, have a pretty good memory, and I find I can pass tests really well so I went and took it, got 90’s and 100 in a couple and they hired me right away,” he shares. “Then if you get a principal’s license they pay you more, etc., so I became almost a professional test-taker.” He eventually practiced as a securities underwriter as well.

Ultimately, however, he decided to leave that field because of the volatility of the market and the amount of money that could be lost. “I asked myself, ‘Where can you not lose money overnight?’ and realized it was what I was standing on — real estate,” Dohm recalls. “A friend suggested a firm in Ft. Lauderdale and gave me the name of a guy. A month later his partner called and got me started.”

As with his previous careers, teamwork was key in real estate. “It’s probably the most important skillset,” he says. “You’re dependent on the guy next to you, the people you work with, in every way. When you play your tune you have to be listening to others, moving at the same time. In

stocks you have to create a group of your own society in stock brokerage and the underwriting business — people you trust. Definitely in real estate it’s the multiple talents you put together. Get an architect you really know is top notch, an engineer, attorneys, lobbyists, and so on.”

That teamwork, he notes, extends to the SIOR. “It’s a singular organization in terms of the scope of knowledge of the people in the organization,” he says. “I don’t think I have met anybody who isn’t very good at what they do. What it means is a group of people you really know are experts and professionals. This is a society with a culture of expectation of excellence.”

In terms of his key personal traits, Dohm points to cooperation. “I don’t want to be the only one, even if I make money; the joy is in working together,” he says. In addition, he says, “I always try to learn more, to keep practicing. You can do the same thing you did last month but play it a little more beautifully.” ▼

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| CONTRIBUTING SIORS



**Keenan Sue**, SIOR



**Justin Cazana**,  
SIOR, CCIM



**John Culbertson**,  
SIOR, CCIM, CRE



**John Dohm**, SIOR,  
CCIM, CFP



**Pete Larson**, SIOR



**Mike Maroon**, SIOR

# Before They Were SIORs

## Cathryn Coate, SIOR

My career started in social work, which led to nonprofit management and political advocacy in Philadelphia. As executive director of a large cultural organization, I helped develop an arts district and a new program to support nonprofit cultural institutions with public funds. When our office building was sold and in the process of re-locating, I was recruited by our broker - an SIOR - to become a commercial real estate broker. Seventeen years later I am the "go-to" broker for nonprofits, representing - cultural, education, religious, social service organizations and foundations.

## Daniel Zelonker, SIOR, CCIM

I was a clothing manufacturer for 35 years locally at first and globally in the end, selling sportswear and suits to mainly large department stores. My factories were in a part of Miami that has gone through urban revival and is now one of the hottest sections in Miami.

## David Little, SIOR Retired

I was employed in the executive training program for Ford Division, Ford Motor Company for seven years before entering the real estate business in 1969. My last position was a Field Manager and I was traveling extensively. I loved my job but my next job was going to be in Detroit and I didn't want to leave Texas, so I stayed.

## Doug Murray, SIOR

I was in the fireworks business. I regularly leased industrial space with brokers and rammed them with thousands of pounds of explosives. After September 11, the regulations became too severe. I always thought I would like to do the job of the industrial real estate brokers that helped me, so I went into commercial real estate.

## Edward Brandt, SIOR

I owned my own Tool @ Die business for 30 years and was president of the Tooling @ Manufacturing Assn. in Schaumburg, Ill.

## Jim Baker, SIOR, CCIM

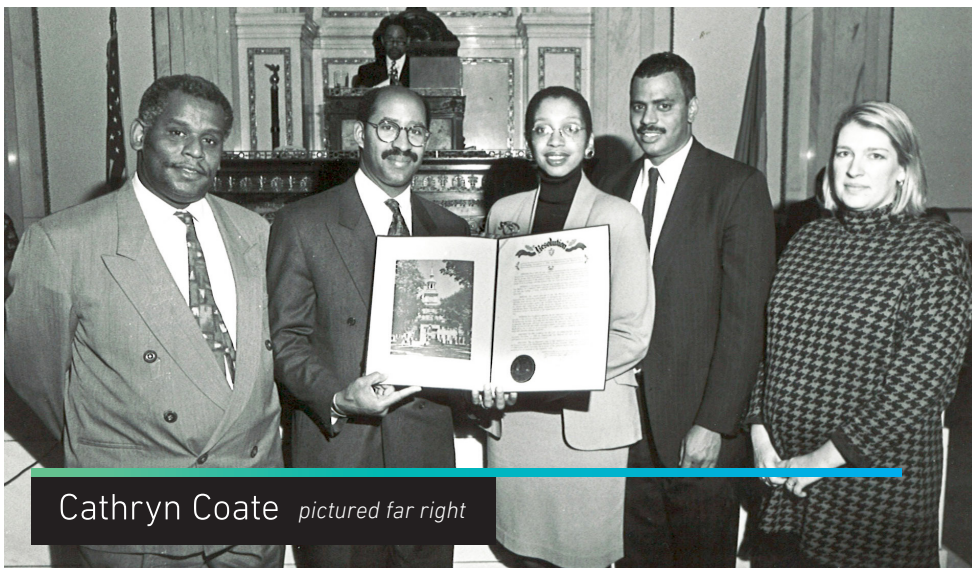
During high school and after college, I spent 10 seasons with the Louisville Orchestra under the direction of Jorge Mester and became the principal percussionist for the orchestra in 1972. I also spent summers performing at the Aspen Music Festival and the Sewanee Summer Music Center. During my years with the L.O. and the local Musician's Union, I played with a number of notable musicians and composers including: Benny Goodman, Aaron Copeland, Morton Gould, Henry Mancini, Wayne Newton and Peggy Lee, to name a few.

## Jim Smith

I was in the construction/industrial supply business for about 25 years prior to becoming a CRE broker. Interestingly, I was led to the construction/industrial supply industry by my experience as a framing carpenter. So my work life has progressed from one industry to another based on previous experience. I started a construction industrial supply business in 1986, sold it in 2003 and then started my CRE career. My experience as a distributor, who called on many contractor and industrial accounts, has helped me greatly in my CRE practice which focuses on industrial properties. My experience has given me a good understanding of construction, business operations, management and finance.

## Mike Hillis, SIOR, CCIM

I worked on the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) in 1983 and 1984 for the 84 Olympics after which I was hired as President of Easton Aluminum, the international sporting goods manufacturing company. I moved to Salt Lake City where their main production facility was located. During the nine years I served as



Cathryn Coate *pictured far right*

president I had the opportunity to oversee the construction of their distribution facilities where they handle their worldwide distribution. It was one of the earliest fully automated warehouse applications in the country and a model for the material handling systems used by so many distributors today. To be honest, that project was what got me interested in industrial brokerage.

**Robert F. Hebron, SIOR, CNE**

I was an inside sales executive for a Silicon Valley software firm named Blue Pumpkin Software. My role was to call C-level and SVP/EVP level titles in large firms that worked more than one shift per day. Think automobile manufacturer, coal mines, call centers, etc. My goal was to arrange for a brief telephone conversation between my target contact and the CEO of Blue Pumpkin Software. The call was to be introductory in nature and was geared towards landing an onsite visit with the management team of the target company. I also traveled extensively working trade shows with a goal to meet these same executives. I traveled to London and Sydney as well as many American locations.

**Roy Kardon, SIOR**

In my former life I was in a major family business with packaging and real estate interests. I later choose to be a broker with my only complaint that I did not become a broker earlier.

**William R.A. Boben III, SIOR, CCIM**

Prior to my real estate career, I taught skiing for the Aspen Skiing Company in Snowmass Colorado. In my mid-20's, I realized the real dollars in the skiing industry were not made on the slopes, but rather in the real estate industry at the bottom of the mountain. Armed with this intelligence and extremely sore feet from wearing ski boots 100 days a year, I decided that a change in my career path was necessary. ♡

