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Premier Partners

Matchmakers Extraordinaire

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By Sheila Inbinder



PREMIER PARTNERS

They stand out in a crowd. To stand out in a crowd, you have to be doing more than something right — you have to be doing something special. Or you have to be special. Or both. Which brings us to Premier Partners.

Hinsdale, IL is a town with a population of approximately 18,000, located 21 miles west of Chicago. It has over 6,000 homes with a median value of \$500,000+ and a median income of just over \$100,000. It also claims about a thousand real estate affiliated agents. They range from independents to the larger well known companies. All are doing business. But Premier Partners, Cathy Condon and Chris Pequet, are the ones who stand out in the crowd.

“They’re a tag team,” claims Terry Taylor, a first-time client. “They always work together.” When the Taylors needed a Realtor in the area, they asked a former Realtor of theirs in Seattle to recommend somebody in the Hinsdale/Burr Ridge area. “She

did some research and came up with Cathy and Chris.”

The phrase “tag team” invokes a picture of a baton being handed off. Chris and Cathy do keep handing that baton up and back. Their approach is individual, but their philosophy is identical. “I was very pleased with them,” Taylor continued. “They have such a sense of style and class. They know how to show your house. I felt very comfortable with them. I trusted in them so that when they would recommend something to me, I immediately did it. I trusted in the way they thought my house should be shown and when I was nervous about it, they held me together; it’s easier because there are two of them.” And going back to that tag team reference, “If you can’t get one, you can always get the other. Nothing was inconvenient because there were two of them.”

Partners. Sometimes it is hard to differentiate one partner speaking from the other. If people occasionally confuse

In the kitchen of a client’s elegantly remodeled home currently available for sale in Hinsdale.



them, it is not because of their looks, it is because of their beliefs; they think as one, and sometimes even speak as one. They don't just finish each other's sentences, they often speak in unison. And they are a tag team in conversation — continually passing that baton up and back.

THE BACKGROUND

Premier Partners has been in existence only four years. However, both Cathy and Chris have been in the business about 20 years each; “I guess you could say we have 40 years experience between us,” they like to say. Given the competition factor, why Hinsdale? Cathy says the most significant factor is that old adage of quality and quantity. “We have many offices here with lots of agents, but with varying levels of activity and performance. Chris and I do have a lot of experience. In looking at how the real estate profession was moving to more with less service, we were somewhat discouraged as to the professionalism of it. If it's your practice, your profession, you like to see people operating at the best standards.” Chris says, “This profession lends itself to part-timers.” Cathy adds, “So, we decided that we would go backwards in real estate *and* move forward, as we said in our motto: *Redefining Real Estate*. We went back to all the basics and started with A through Z and made it 100 percent. The venues that are available today have greatly improved from what we had 10, 15, 20 years — even three weeks ago. We can market in so many different ways. So we pumped it up. We really did pump up each of the venues that are typical to real estate.”

Always passionate when speaking of her profession, Cathy went on to say, “And the other piece that is so important is we tried to delete everything we knew to go into the creativity that has become what you'd call a paradigm, to take each part and look at it from different directions and get new creative ideas. And then there is the Internet, the thread of which everything is now woven. So the combination of both



Cathy Condon.

of those has really given us the best of both worlds. And that is so appropriate in the area where we are: a terrific blend of old and new.”

Knowing how the partners stress service, it isn't a far stretch to imagine how many satisfied clients they have to their credit — clients who when contacted were more than anxious to let everyone know just how “more than satisfied” they were. “I'm going to start out by saying they're wonderful,” Regina Melbourne, one of those happy clients, stated. “I found them to be quite a team together. They balance one another very well. Cathy sells herself as the mathematical person and loves to run all the numbers to give the ideal price range of your home while Chris handles the marketing, so I found a team that really covered all the bases.”

Much has been said about how the partners think alike and work together. With two such high-powered professionals, it might be expected that they would compete against each other occasionally. Nothing could be further from the truth. Melbourne summed it up best. “They are really respectful of one another when giving their presentations. You never saw the kind of rivalry that can exist in that type of partnership come up at all. They really balanced very well; they really dove into their different areas. And Chris is so great with the digital. She took wonderful bird's eye view pictures; I'm not sure how she achieved some of them. They have a lot of vigor

marketing the house. They get so excited about it.”

Regina Melbourne had to make one last point. “I know Cathy writes the ads and I found them to be very catchy. I think they really started a new trend in marketing. I find people rushing to open the paper to see what they’ve come up with for the next week.”

It is important for the partners to let it be known that while they’ve only been an official team for a few years, they have worked together off and on for more than 20 years. “We would do our own business,” according to Chris, “but we would team up for big projects.” Finally, in 2001, they decided “we would jump in together and make this joint project we call Premier Partners.”

Chris says, “Each of the properties that we work with are all great products for the right buyer. The key is getting the word out — the marketing — to connect the right buyer to the right home. In order to do that, you have to have creative marketing. Our goal is to get the property information into the hands of the right client. That’s how we work.” The baton now goes back to Cathy, who adds, “The marketing is nothing unless you can follow up. Like Business 101, management is the key when you look at the stock activity; you can’t do anything unless you’ve got good management.”

How better to hear about good management than from Elio Buoni, manager at the Prudential Preferred Properties office, who contends he inherited Chris and Cathy. “When I became manager about a year ago, they were here already. They are super people. They always put their clients first.” And as far as his personal association with them, he says, “They’re also team players. Sometimes you get these big producers, the kind of leave-me-alone-don’t-bother-me kind of thing, but they are



Chris Pequet.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KURT GERBER, WWW.GERBERCARPELLI.COM

very supportive of the office.” Buoni says he is not accustomed to big producers like Cathy and Chris taking time out to come to the sales meetings. “I have never managed better people than Chris and Cathy, and I’ve managed a lot of other companies. I truly believe they are the best of the best.”

THE PARTNERS

Cathy Condon grew up in the Beverly section of the south side of Chicago and also lived in South Shore. She refers to herself as a corporate relocation transferee as her husband’s career took them around the country. “I’ve lived in five homes in Hinsdale, one of which was the family home of Frank Baum, the author of *The Wizard of Oz*.” Even though her father was in real estate, an attorney, Cathy originally opted for pre-med,

but as she refers to her present occupation, “I guess it was in my blood.” The mother of four, now with 10 grandchildren, including twins, Cathy was a competitive swimmer, who actually likes to exercise and is currently into weight lifting, although she concedes she also does it because “it’s good for me.”

Chris Pequet grew up in Ann Arbor, MI, but after living here about 30 years, considers herself a native. She met her husband in college and after they got married, they moved here for his work. They knew some people in the Chicago area, but just coincidentally moved to Hinsdale. Although ending up in the real estate field, she has always worked in sales, primarily for two major pharmaceutical companies. Chris raised her family in Hinsdale. She is the mother of two sons “who grew up in the investment banking world,” which is her husband’s profession, and who followed in their father’s footsteps. Chris is an avid tennis player and golfer. “I’ve played with the same groups for years.”

THE PARTNERSHIP

Chris and Cathy met at what is now their present office. Cathy acknowledges, "We're very much the same, yet we're very different." Chris agrees, "We complement each other. But, we have two entirely different strengths, which adds to the fun." Cathy adds, "We're both very creative in our own respect. Chris does the photography, the set-up and such, and I do the creative writing. I read everything I can get my hands on."

Asked if clients are more knowledgeable today because of the ability to check things out on the Internet, both agree "absolutely." Chris explains, "They're very informed, very hands on. And it also depends on the client. Every client is completely different. The younger the group, the more computer savvy they are. They do research on the Internet and come to us information in hand."

With all this information and knowledge so readily available, do they still need the services of a professional? They both reply, "Absolutely. They need us to put the puzzle together."

Both approve of the fact that clients are so well informed. Chris says, "It's wonderful. We really appreciate when people have done some homework." And Cathy chimes in, "One thing I think is great about it, their questions are very well grounded. They're asking questions that are appropriate. One of our important jobs is to ask them the right questions in order to give the right counsel that they need rather than just talking with no direction. It is important to find out what their goals are, what their attitude is and what their past experiences have been in order for them to understand the process. That's where it is important to pull together all the material that they know, and don't know, and the need to educate them on the process of purchasing or selling." Sometimes, it appears, the more information clients gather, the more help they need.

Then there's the other factor that Cathy touches on. "Often it becomes very emotional — it's not easy." Chris notes, "Likely it's the biggest investment they'll make in their entire life. We take that very seriously. It is their most important asset and so it goes back to why we started our partnership: to make sure the process is handled correctly at the highest level of service." Cathy ends with, "It's very uprooting and it's often said that the three biggest forms of stress are death,

divorce and moving."

Nancy and Mark Van Grinsven were clients of Premier Partners. They got to know Cathy when their husbands met. As Nancy tells it, "We were buying and selling a home in Hinsdale and asked Cathy to help us with that. She did that in a very professional way. She sold the house in less than two weeks. Cathy and Chris worked as partners on the latest sale." Nancy confirms that tag team label. "They do work as a team. They're terrific. They're both so personable and they're very good listeners. They really listen to what is on our minds and they respond to anything. They are a terrific team, no doubt about it."

MORE ON THE PARTNERS

Premier Partners lives up to their name in every sense of the word, or words. It is impossible to do an article on the partnership without highlighting the partners themselves, because they are the partnership and they take it very personally. They deal

in humanity. Chris: "We are sensitive to our clients' needs. What we offer is a product that is so far above and beyond what others in our profession do. The service we give is the tried and true kind of thing, the 24/7 kind of thing."

Cathy: "We are very involved with our clients. We are totally available. We don't sign them up and disappear. We are their neighbors and we enjoy that. There's nothing nicer than to meet a client in town and hear how pleased they are."

Agreeing that clients can tend to be nervous about making such an important decision, Chris points out that that's part of the hand-holding process. "And education. The whole service portion begins before a buyer makes an offer to purchase a home. We educate them to know the process — what's on the market, what homes sell for — so they're comfortable with their purchase."

Cathy continues, "When we establish a relationship, one thing that adds to our success is client bonding. We share with them that we are working for them and with them. We encourage them to share with us, let us know what's going on, both positive and negative. In most cases, you'll find there are a number of people involved. Even if Chris and I are selling our own listings, we still have attorneys, lenders, appraisers

I find people rushing to open the paper to see what they've come up with for the next week.

— Client Regina Melbourne

and a host of others. Things can be very difficult and I'm very sensitive to that because I've moved a lot." And the partners are there to help with it all. "There is so much to do — driver's license, new doctors, voter's registration, library cards — and anything can happen. The truck might not show up."

THE COMPANY CONNECTION

Cathy and Chris refer to their partnership as a little boutique office inside of Prudential. They created their own partnership and have their own staff. When they were about to open their own office, Premier Partners Realtors, the office they were in was sold to Prudential Preferred Properties. "It was just coincidental that it all happened at the same time." They met with the new owners and found their goals aligned. "We knew what we wanted to do. We wanted to offer very high-end standards of service and marketing." They stress that everything they do for their sellers is top end, and whether it's a \$3 million home or \$250,000, they will get the same level of quality — in brochures, technology and everything else the partners offer. Prudential Preferred

Properties confirmed their vision. "We have a comfortable working arrangement."

David Hanna, a partner in Prudential Preferred Properties, couldn't agree more. When asked about Premier Partners' affiliation with them, he said, "They are two of my favorite agents." Prudential, as Hanna tells it, is a reincarnation of a previous Prudential franchisee, which was sold to Coldwell Banker in 1997. In 2002, Prudential Preferred Properties bought an independent Prudential franchisee in Hinsdale. "And Chris and Cathy were part of that package." And he couldn't be happier. "They are completely dedicated to the service needs of their clients. It's the cornerstone of their success." Hanna claims it hasn't always been "an easy road." He attributes this to the fact that they are perfectionists. "Their expectation is they will deliver as close to a perfect transaction to their client as they can."

They're succeeding, and they're doing very well. Their track record speaks for itself. They did \$70 million in sales last year as a team in a very competitive marketplace. Hinsdale has more Realtors per capita than any other community

In Clarendon Hills, Chris and Cathy offer a 6,000-square-foot new construction masterpiece designed and built by one of their clients.



in Northern Illinois. Hanna actually believes one out of 40 residents in Hinsdale is a Realtor. He states that "Chris and Cathy's business is centered largely in the Hinsdale community. It's the core of their business and where they've built their reputation. It all starts there: demanding clients, high-end property and little room for error. Working with people who can afford to buy million dollar homes says something about their ability in the work force. The fact that they're able to deliver that kind of service to people who have been so successful in their own careers is really something."

Referring to the tag team label, David Hanna concurs, but takes it one step further. "They have different skills. Each of

them excels in different parts of the business. I think one of the things that lets them work so well together is the fact there are so many tasks in selling a house, and some of them, to the average Realtor, are far more enjoyable than others. They found a way where each of them embraces different parts of the business and they're really able to take advantage of their strengths all the time."

The ladies themselves put a slightly different spin on what constitutes a working partnership. "When we started out we said no screaming, and we do not quarrel," according to Cathy.

Chris emphasizes, "We have the same goals and we have the same work ethic, so I don't think there's really any reason why we would need to quarrel. We both are working very hard and have a mission in mind."

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

While they do business in the Western suburbs, or anywhere a client's needs may take them, their primary focus is Hinsdale. "But we're very train friendly. The western suburbs offer the best service." Admittedly, they sell along the train line quite a bit too, because a western suburban resident may want to commute into the city. So, it brings in the sister communities also. "Actually, we work with two train lines."

Premier Partners works mostly in residential resale, new construction and vacant land. But Cathy says vacant land is a moveable commodity. "It comes in descriptions that are surprising. It frequently comes in a rehab where the foundation is there." The area, they say, is land-locked. "There's not a lot of vacant land around." As to whether they lean more heavily toward the buying or selling end, both agree at the end of the day it turns out to be evenly split. "Our listing volume is huge. Sellers choose to work with us, which we credit to our marketing skills."

With the office located in downtown Hinsdale, they do get some walk-in business, but say what they really get is more repeat business, another testament to client satisfaction. And referrals. The majority of their business is actually referrals.



Hinsdale's downtown Rose Garden provides a pleasant moment with the familiar Robert Frost bronze.

Cathy says, "Referrals are our lifeline; we truly appreciate our past clients who send us so many of their family, friends and even acquaintances."

MATCHMAKING AND TECHNOLOGY

The added plus is how the use of technology also fits into this picture – literally. Chris tells of sitting at her computer with someone across the country on his computer asking if she can give him more information on a particular property. "We have all of our homes on virtual tour and this buyer was having a hard time understanding the layout of a home. We did the tour together, room by room." Talking on the phone, with the computer in front of both of them, "is a fabulous tool." It's an even greater convenience, because it allows contact with people from all over the country, or the world for that matter.

In reference to their own listings, they maintain that if you do a good job, it passes down the line. "Last year, we sold about half of our own listings." Marketing is key. Chris and Cathy consider themselves matchmakers. "We have a large group of buyers and as we get listings, we try to find the perfect home for each buyer — matchmaking." That is another reason to which they attribute the success of selling so many of their own listings.

But no matter how great the technology, you still can't beat the human element. When they say hands on, they don't necessarily mean on the computer keys. One of the things they do when putting a house on the market is staging it and getting

the house ready. "We do our own staging. We're very hands on. We are active in the whole process." With that kind of work schedule, having good help is essential. And they have it. "Our clients absolutely love Marilyn Novak, our transaction assistant. We couldn't live without her."

THE COMMUNITY

Both Cathy and Chris are very dedicated to the community and committed to giving back to it.

They consider their clients very special and every year host a client appreciation party. The way it's done is key, too, because a different important and/or historical location in Hinsdale is chosen as the site. They have held parties at the lodge of KLM, which is Katherine Legge Memorial Park, a multi-acre Village of Hinsdale Park. They have also done the Graue House, another historical house near Graue Mill, which dates back to the settling of Hinsdale. Twice hosting the party at a Decorator Showcase Home has been their favorite location. The party is usually held in the fall to coincide with Premier Partners' anniversary.

Then there's "the other thing" the partners do as part of their give-back to the community. At the holidays, they offer what they refer to as the Gracious Listing Program. As

Chris explains, "For any listings we take during the fourth quarter, we donate part of our commission, in the client's name, to the charity of their choice." Cathy mentions another of the charitable efforts: "In support of the Hinsdale Public Library, we donated funds to purchase patio furniture for the community to enjoy." They also were one of the sponsors for the Library's fundraiser this past summer, Drive-In Movie Night, and even helped out behind the counter at the concession stand. The local sponsorship list is long for Premier Partners. They also supported fundraisers for The Hinsdale Community House and the RML Specialty Hospital, a non-profit hospital located in Hinsdale, to name just a few.

AND FINALLY

To list all their awards and honors would practically double the size of this article. But not to give some indication would be doing the ladies an injustice. In Prudential Preferred Properties Awards alone, Cathy and Chris have been consistently No. 1 in Production, Dollar Volume, Listings and Units Sold and received numerous designations and certifications. In addition they have been recognized as the Prudential National Network's No. 1 Team in the 10 State/Central Region. That, as they say, was just the tip of the iceberg.

They deserve every accolade they get. They work long hours, but really enjoy what they do, and enjoy working together. And it shows. "Even our husbands like each other," they say.

With more than a thousand Realtors living in Hinsdale alone, there is a lot of competition. But Cathy Condon and Chris Pequet are the ones who stand out in the crowd. ■

Chris and Cathy with Jamie Bukovac, director of the Hinsdale Public Library, seated at the table of patio furniture donated to the library by Premier Partners.



PREMIER PARTNERS

Cathy Condon and Chris Pequet can be reached at (630) 325-1234. You can also visit their Web site at www.premierhomepartners.com.