



Best metro business leader

Tim Leigh

Witty real estate firm owner doesn't make light of social responsibility

By Jennifer Knight
Contributing Writer

Tim Leigh grabs life by the horns.

And he remembers his roots.

Leigh, the droll owner-president of Hoff & Leigh Inc., grew up in Grand Forks, N.D., a city of 50,000 residents famous for a series of disasters in the spring of 1997 that quite literally took the city by storm.

Early that winter, eight blizzards dumped a record 100 inches of snow on Grand Forks, located in the Red River Valley region near the Minnesota border. Then the real weather hit.

During the spring thaw in April, a freak storm covered the region in a sheet of ice. Sixty mph winds dropped the windchill to 30 degrees below zero. To add insult to frostbite, another blizzard dumped several more inches of snow.

Then the temperature shot up, triggering floodwaters more than 50 feet high.

"I can remember looking at the water," Leigh said. "There was a wall of water two feet deep and 15 miles wide that pushed north. You can't lay enough sandbags for a 15-mile-wide wall of water."

During the flood, a gas main broke and burned most of downtown. "It looked like hell on earth," he said.

Ninety percent of his hometown's residents were ousted in the state's worst recorded natural disaster.

"Everybody in Grand Forks was affected," Leigh said. "Thousands of people suffered from some sort of post-traumatic stress syndrome. People left homes that had been in their families for generations."

Leigh was unable to sit idly by. And Colorado Springs Cares was born.

He led the citywide relief effort with help from some friends. Radio personality Chuck Baker donated air time. Frank Goeson of Goeson Moving and Storage donated equipment used to sort and ship eight tractor trailer loads and thousands of dollars worth of relief supplies more than 1,200 miles to Grand Forks.

"Just as we wrapped up a plea for support on 5/30 TV, a guy shows up in my parking lot with a TV. That's nice, right? Except the TV was still warm. This guy saw me on TV and was so

moved that he unplugged his and brought it in," Leigh said. "There were all these miraculous occurrences. Working with the flood relief effort was one of the most important and certainly the most gratifying thing I've ever done."

Perhaps it's not all that surprising, then, that the corporate purpose of Hoff & Leigh Inc. is "to operate a successful for-profit enterprise which enables significant charitable contribution to the non-profit community."

Leigh, who was selected by CSBJ readers as the Best Metro Business Leader, loves his job.

"I love the flexibility of the hours and the financial opportunity and the venue for creative expression," he said. "I'm honored to accept the award. It's very humbling that some people think of me in that way."

What one has to understand about Hoff & Leigh: "We view ourselves as a marketing company. We continue to push the envelope by using the latest marketing strategies to promote our products, which are our listings," Leigh said. "To be successful in our business, you can't follow the old model. Many agents take a listing, install a sign and wait. Passive fishing is not allowed at Hoff & Leigh."

Leigh said the back-room operation is continuously searching for new tenants for vacant spaces or new properties to buy or sell for business or investment.

"We work very hard behind the scenes to make what we do look like magic, to make our job look effortless," he said. "But listen, at 4 a.m. there ain't no magic or effortless."

From a tiny office on South Tejon Street in 1983, where he and Bob Hoff started working together—the two commercial property leasing agents shared a desk, phone and car—to today, when Hoff & Leigh, based on the number of transactions completed, is ranked as the most active commercial real estate brokerage in Colorado Springs.

Leigh admires a number of businessmen in the community.

"Buck Blessing has a business that exemplifies good organization, exceptional service and charitable giving. I would say that of Jeff Smith, Jack Howard, Dave and Chris Jenkins and El Pomar's many leaders," he said. "They are very attuned

to the community's needs, very oriented toward giving back. They run successful businesses and are very charitable."

Leigh, who says his family thinks he is Larry David (Think "Curb Your Enthusiasm")—and he has the prickly sense of humor to prove it—is married to Lise, who he met and married during a three-year tour of duty in the Army at Fort Carson.

Lise has worked for 25 years as a registered nurse in the intensive care nursery at Memorial Hospital.

"Premature babies, you know, when they come out looking like a chipmunk," Leigh said. "She's the one who takes care of those."

The couple has two daughters. Shannon, 23, is a registered nurse who just accepted a direct commission and assignment in the Air Force Nurse Corps in Napa Valley for three years. She intends to make the military her career and plans to be a nurse anesthetologist.

Holly, 21, is a senior in film school at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. "Holly grew up with a video camera in her hand," Leigh said.

Leigh is an active guy. He enjoys boating at the Pueblo Reservoir, running, golfing—"any kind of sport, really"—and is somewhat famous for climbing the Manitou Incline (one mile at a 60-degree angle) several times a week with his two dogs, The Freedom Fighters.

This is a man who quotes the Paul Newman cult classic "Slap Shot" and then Ronald Reagan in a single breath: "You can accomplish anything in life that you'd like to, as long as you don't care who gets the credit."

He is on the board of directors of The Salvation Army, which runs the New Hope Center, the downtown homeless shelter; and several programs for families, single mothers and children.

"Of course I'm concerned about all those social issues," Leigh said. "But the real reason I became involved with The Salvation Army is because they are the purest organization I have found in any venue. Their mission is to help the lowest of the low. They help people without self-aggrandizement. Their clients are not in any position to pay them back. That is real charity: quiet, humble, effective. I like that."