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FAMILY

How SIOR connected four real estate generations

By Amanda Marsh

SIOR has a long, storied history from its founding as the Society of Industrial Realtors (SIR) in 1941. Today, nearly 3,100 members across 630 cities and 34 countries carry the distinguished SIOR designation. But few have this unique recognition: Upon receiving her SIOR designation in 2015, WHITNEY & Company vice president Ginger Whitney, SIOR, became the fourth generation in her Ontario-based real estate family to do so, following great-grandfather George Whitney, SIOR, grandfather Richard Whitney, SIOR, CCIM, CPM, GC, and her father John Whitney, SIOR.

Today, Ginger works alongside John Whitney, CEO of WHITNEY & Company, whose firm's 17 employees serve the southwestern Ontario commercial and industrial markets. Their success began with a story that started over a century ago.

The Whitney Family: A Real Estate History

The Whitney family legacy dates back to 1911, when Charles Isaac Fenwick

Whitney moved to Toronto from Nova Scotia and established his own real estate firm. In 1930, he moved to Kitchener, Ontario, and his son George joined him as the salesman on duty at an office building located on King Street.

A few years later, George opened his own brokerage firm, George Whitney Ltd., to sell residential, commercial, and industrial properties. In addition to serving as president of the Kitchener-Waterloo Real Estate Board, he was an early member of SIR, earning his designation in 1951 and becoming the first Canadian member to serve on the organization's governing council.

One of the most significant deals George worked on with fellow SIR members was teaming up with the Hanson family of Hackensack, N.J. to construct a large office building for the Government of Newfoundland. The joint company, Whitney Hanson Ltd., won the \$9 million contract to build The Confederation Building, which was completed in 1960. (The Hansons are behind the firm today known as NAI James E. Hanson, led by chairman Peter O. Hanson, SIOR, and president William C. Hanson, SIOR).



George's son Richard joined the family business after graduating from university and serving in World War II. In addition to getting his SIR designation in 1961, he attended MIT and Northwestern University to study the appraisal business and earned an NAI designation. He also served as president of both the Kitchener-Waterloo and Ontario Real Estate Boards. John recalled watching his father, who also served as president of SIR for Canada, attending all of the SIR conventions with his mother, Lois Whitney.

John set on a different path, attending Wilfrid Laurier University, where he was nominated for a Rhodes scholarship. However, due to unknown circumstances, John's application was received too late, and he was told to get his Master's degree before doing his two years at the University of Oxford.

"I wasn't sure I wanted to attend three more years at university," he said. "Instead, my roommate's father offered me a job at Warnaco & Hathaway in 1973. While it was a good experience, I realized I didn't want to work in a corporate environment."

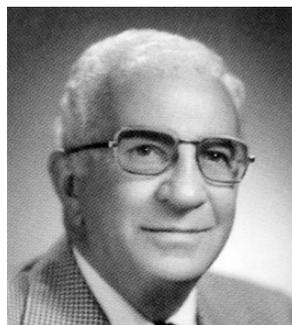
A year and a half later, John returned to Kitchener and joined the family business, getting his license in 1975. Under

1951



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1961



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his father's leadership, George Whitney Ltd. merged with another company to serve both the commercial and residential sectors, becoming full-service for another decade.

In the 1980s, the company split into separate divisions again, and John took the commercial portion, renaming it WHITNEY & Company. One of the biggest clients he took on was Waterloo-based Research in Motion Ltd., the telecommunications company that later became BlackBerry Ltd.

As a student at Wilfrid Laurier University, Ginger worked in BlackBerry's facilities department through a co-op program. The group managed 3 million square feet of BlackBerry's portfolio; and John, having worked on BlackBerry's real estate for more than 20 years, would often come in for meetings. She recalled sitting in on those meetings with her team, finding it remarkable how her father approached different properties and

his strategic planning, which piqued her interest in real estate.

This exposure inspired Ginger to follow her family's legacy after graduation. Today, she serves as both vice president and broker in the office division, handling landlord and portfolio management for clients. She also serves on the Board of Directors for the Kitchener-Waterloo Real Estate Board.

The SIOR Advantage

Becoming an SIOR last year was a natural choice for Ginger.

"SIOR is part of my family's legacy, and I wanted to continue the tradition as the fourth generation," she said. "We're more of a boutique brokerage, so it's important to have an international connection."

For instance, one of WHITNEY & Company's local corporate clients owned a property in Texas it wanted to divest and then find a new, larger facility for its operations. The firm reached out to Lee & Associates Commercial Real Estate Services president Mike Spears, SIOR, CCIM, in Houston to help facilitate.

The Whitney's experience might even encourage further SIORs among their staff. John says that while his son-in-law, Michael, hasn't received the designation yet, he plans to, and firm president Jane Klugman may also consider membership in the future.

They also frequently work with SIOR members in the Greater Toronto Area, including Avison Young principal and senior vice president Kevin Beaudry, SIOR; Colliers International senior vice president Sydney Hamber, SIOR; and Colliers International vice president of business development Peter Garrigan, SIOR.

"Being in a family business and watching my grandfather and father, I saw the expertise they got through being in SIOR," said John, explaining that as an SIOR he has seen his business increase and has gained a lot from an educational and networking standpoint.

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1988



John Whitney entered Kitchener after attending Wilfrid Laurier University, and joined the family business, getting his license in 1975. Under his father's leadership, George Whitney Ltd. merged with another company to serve both the commercial and residential sectors, becoming full-service for another decade.

Today



Ginger Whitney earned her SIOR designation in 2016 and works alongside her father at WHITNEY & Company, whose 17 employees serve the south-western Ontario commercial and industrial markets.

Given WHITNEY & Company's small geographical market, John also finds it helpful to attend conventions and meet SIORs from the U.S. and elsewhere. For instance, when he started working for Research in Motion in the 1980s, his relationships with SIORs throughout North America helped him as the telecom company expanded.

"We've been involved in a lot of transactions with SIORs, including a number of referrals both in and outside of our area," he continued. "Suffice to say, we are always comfortable with an SIOR agent, wherever he or she may be. We wanted to live up to that same responsibility when someone referred a deal to us."

Today, John and Ginger are members of the SIOR Canada Central chapter and enjoy attending the various events, meeting other brokers, seeing how business is getting done and networking with other members. They also donate to and participate in SIOR Foundation events.

A Family Affair

John noted that the Whitney family is probably closer because they work in real estate. In addition to Ginger, wife Colleen Whitney is in residential real estate and serves as a sale representative for the company, and Ginger's husband Michael Lambert (pictured on page 13) works on the firm's industrial side, making for even more family contribution to the real estate dinner talk.

"It takes a certain kind of individual to be able to work in such close alignment on a regular basis," John said. "I see it in both mine and Ginger's relationship, as well as mine and my father's relationship. You have to be professional and not take criticism the wrong way. By offering constructive criticism, it makes for a better relationship—it's closer and more respectful." ▼

What the Society of Industrial and Office Realtors Has Meant to Me

By: James R. Pirtle, SIOR Retired

By the end of World War II Tennessee had registered the greatest decline in farm employment of any of the southeastern states. Consequently, industrial employment for the first time in the state's history surpassed that of agricultural employment. Naturally, this trend toward industrialization held great significance for the people of Tennessee because it promised a better-balanced economy and a higher level of income.

Therefore, to accelerate the shift toward industrialization, the state established the Tennessee Industrial Development Commission in 1953. When I joined the Commission's staff in 1957, there was no other organization that helped to accomplish this very worthy endeavor more than the Society of Industrial Realtors.

All through my nine-year tenure as Manager of the Industrial Department of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce, I leaned heavily on SIR's Memphis Chapter to make sure companies that located new facilities at Memphis benefited from their expertise. We were so proud when Bethel T. Hunt of Memphis was elected president of the Society in 1967. And when I too became a Real Estate Executive in Memphis; first affiliated with Bell & Norfleet Realty, Inc. (vice president) before founding James R. Pirtle, Realtor, in 1974; my foremost goal was to obtain an SIR membership. In July 1979 I became president of the Memphis Chapter, succeeding Daniel F. Wilkinson who also became president

of the Society in 1992. Today I hold the Legacy Circle Member designation with SIOR, for having been an Industrial Specialist since 1977.

Having had a most rewarding, successful career in this very personable and driven profession, I wholeheartedly want to thank the Society of Industrial and Office Realtors.