

Annapolis Realtor Focus - Interview:

Steve & Biana Arentz



Steve & Biana Arentz, Realtors with Long and Foster Real Estate on Kent Island and Owners of the successful Hemingway's Restaurant and Lola's Sunset Grill, have proven themselves figureheads in Maryland, where entrepreneurial hard work is both praised and emulated.

By Breck J. Hapner

Steve Arentz is originally from Pittsburgh. He attended Allegheny Community College in Pittsburgh and Newbury College in Massachusetts. He is the past Chairman of the board of the Queen Anne's County Economic Development Commission, now serving as Secretary. He has also served as a board member with The Maryland Chamber of Commerce and is past Chairman of the Queen Anne's County Chamber of Commerce and remains a board member. Steve has worked in Education locally facilitating training classes for students to understand and utilize goal setting and goal achievement both in school and in life. Biana Arentz grew up in Puerto Rico and comes from a family of seven. She moved to Washington D.C. to attend college and graduated from Georgetown University. She has worked with the Clyde's Restaurant Group in D.C. and Maryland prior to moving to Queen Anne's County almost 20 years ago. She met Steve at Hemingway's. Biana is active in a number of ways with the community. Currently she is in her second term as a member of the board of trustees of Anne Arundel Health Systems (Anne Arundel Medical Center) and with the current health care reform issues she has been busy. She is also on her second term as director for the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond (Baltimore Branch). It has been a terrific experience to be part of the FED during these times. Biana is involved with different charities including being a founding board member of Bosom Buddies Charities, an organization that is centered on breast cancer awareness and education in Queen Anne's county. Last year she had the honor of being named Queen Anne's County Business Person of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce. Steve & Biana have been married for almost 13 years. They have two wonderful children, Elizabeth, eleven and Steven, who just turned 8; they both attend school in Queen Anne's County. Elizabeth and Steven are the source of the energy that drives these two successful people. The Arentz family has moved a number of times over the 13 years - six times, with a seventh in the near future. These moves have given them great insight in to understanding the Real Estate market in their area.

FH&LL: How many years have you been in the business? Are you full-time Realtors?

STEVE & BIANA ARENTZ: We have been real estate agents for about 8 years in Queen Anne's County. We have been fortunate to work with some very fine people in the Real Estate Industry and have had the benefit of some excellent training. The question you ask, if we are full time Realtors, is tricky. We consider ourselves part-time agents, working full time. With both of us working at Real Estate, we are able to achieve successes and compliment each other with our clientele. With the age of technology escalating and the internet available everywhere, we are able to stay on top of things more easily. We each put in a minimum of 35-40 hours a week. With the internet and the access to communication at any hour of the day full-time or part-time has become almost a non-issue for us. Currently we are affiliated with Long and Foster on Kent Island. Long & Foster is a market leader on the Eastern Shore, and we feel that being with a large company in the current economy is a real asset. They provide us with a great work environment.

FH&LL: How does running the restaurant help and/or hinder your real estate?

STEVE & BIANA: Having Hemingway's and Lola's definitely helps our business; it is the reason why we got into real estate. Our customers and friends at Hemingway's would ask us where they should buy, how we liked living in Queen Anne's County, what areas were the better value, etc. and we would spend a lot of our time showing them around and introducing them to friends that were real estate agents. We decided to get our licenses and do just referrals in the beginning, but that never worked. Before we knew it we found that selling homes and helping others find their special place was not only fun, but rewarding. We have been fortunate to meet new people and help them with their buying and selling decisions and get the extra benefit of new friends. We keep a display of homes in the foyer of the restaurant and have done very well with the flyers that we have of our listings. The funny thing is that usually when we are the busiest at the restaurant is when customers want to ask questions about real estate, happy trouble!

FH&LL: How many listings do you have at any given time? Do you work with Buyers, Sellers or both?

STEVE & BIANA: We work with both Buyers and Sellers. We do find ourselves working with Buyers more often than Sellers but that is because we get the opportunity to meet many people from out of the area. Hemingway's & Lola's have provided a great venue to meet and get to know a lot of our customers and future customers. At any one time we might have 8 to 10 listings. We have had a very good September and we welcome new listings, but in the meantime we continue to concentrate on Buyers and on the listings we have.

FH&LL: Do you have a specific marketing plan?

STEVE & BIANA: Well, we believe in doing a lot of local printed advertising. Whenever we travel and want to get information on the area's real estate market we always get the local newspaper or magazine, so we advertise in Queen Anne's County and Annapolis printed media. We do advertise full pages in conjunction with Hemingway's, which helps us split the ad budget and allows us to market both at the same time. Glossy magazines (like FINE Home and Luxury Lifestyles!) are a great form of advertising and people love to read them and look at the pictures. I have found that a number of other Agents have come to rely on mostly the web; we use the web with our websites but we still are old-fashioned about being able to pick up a newspaper or magazine, open it and see what is out there. Preferably with a glass of wine and watching the sunset over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge...at Hemingway's. The other part of our marketing that has been very successful is to use our last name ARENTZ with the caption "All your real estate needs from A to Z" and our logo is similar to the logo for the restaurant. With Hemingway's and our Real Estate we have kept a similar theme for marketing.

FH&LL: Does it include exposure on the World Wide Web?

STEVE & BIANA: We do get a number of inquiries from our web page and

it really is a great way to advertise yourself and your listings. At Hemingway's we have a newsletter that Steve and I send out weekly and it does two things for us in real estate. One, we have a direct link to our web page from the newsletter and two, we do a *Real Estate Tidbit* every week and we high-light one of our listings, usually the newest one. We have had good response to these which is great because we have about 2000 names on our e-mail list at Hemingway's.

FH&LL: Do you have specific relocation packages to send out to buyers?

STEVE & BIANA: We mostly direct them via the internet to the local links that can give them information about our area and we then customize a packet for the individual. Families relocating with five young children are going to be looking for something different than a retired couple with an empty nest. Customizing the information for the Client takes more time but helps them with their specific needs.



Steve & Biana Arentz proudly displaying Biana's "Award for Excellence, Queen Anne's County Business Leader of 2008"

FH&LL: What professional designations do you have?

STEVE & BIANA: We are both Realtors and are working on getting our Brokers license this fall. We have not decided who gets to go back to school and who stays at home with the kids....and running the restaurant.....We have noticed that all we do from midnight to seven A.M. is sleep, so why not?

FH&LL: Do you carry a cell phone? What's the best way to reach you?

STEVE & BIANA: We both carry our cell phones with us at all times, especially because we have younger children. We are available 24/7 via cell or via e-mail. Do real estate agents ever have time off? I don't think so; it seems that we are available at all hours thanks to the internet and cell phones. We have a family and we need to do the things necessary to provide for them. Either way we get the message now, not later, thanks to technology. Better yet, you are always welcome to stop by Hemingway's and join us for a glass of wine or a crab cake while we discuss your real-estate needs.

FH&LL: Do you have an assistant or someone available to help when you're not in the office?

STEVE & BIANA: We don't have an assistant, Steve and I work together as a

team and the good thing is that if you don't reach one you get the other. We do work very well together and the best part is we have fun doing it.

FH&LL: How do you determine the asking price of a home?

STEVE & BIANA: In this economic climate it is very difficult to determine the price of a home, especially because comparisons are all over the place, with foreclosures and short sales. However, the important thing to remember is that we do not determine the asking price of a home, the Seller does. We give them all the information available to us; we do a Comparative Market Analysis, offer our opinion and let them come up with a final asking price.

FH&LL: Where do most of your Buyers come from?

STEVE & BIANA: In the beginning we relied heavily on friends and the new friends we met at Hemingway's. While we still meet new people, friends are a great source of our customers. As they say the best way to get a customer is always a referral from a friend and customer. We also do a lot of advertising. It is great to have someone call from one of our many ads.

FH&LL: Please tell us about how the current economic climate has affected (or not impacted) your real estate sales and/or careers?

STEVE & BIANA: There is no question that the current economic climate has affected our sales. We are very lucky to have a second source of income to help during the slow times. However, the one thing we have done is to increase our marketing and advertising budget while the market has been slow. It has been difficult to do because the economy hits all areas, including the restaurant, but we believe strongly that in order to survive we had to advertise. Also, we have faith that the economic conditions will get better and we want to be in forefront with our name and show that we are here for the long term. Real Estate was easy when the market was exploding. Everyone was selling Real Estate, when times get harder the good agents survive and prosper, we feel that we have survived and are prosperous.

FH&LL: Tell us a cute story about one of your favorite, interesting and/or surprising real estate transactions.

STEVE & BIANA: Well, our first real estate transaction was with our closest friends, and godmother to our son. They were Condo owners and had no desire to enter a home that required any sort of maintenance. We went to look at waterfront homes and found one that excited the husband, to a point that he kept telling me how badly he wanted this house on 5 acres of grass, woods and with a pool. Talk about maintenance! I kept on insisting that we look at more. Finally we went back to our house with our friends to have a glass of wine and talk about the day's journey. While I was telling them how much they had to look at other homes Steve was sitting with the husband discussing what type of offer to give to the sellers. I just kept right on selling other homes until they did the paperwork. They closed on it and have loved it ever since. As a matter of fact, a few years later we moved up the street from them. No matter how much I insisted on them to keep looking they had already found their dream home. What a great lesson to learn from our friends. The moral of the story is *Don't sell, let your Customers (or friends) buy!*

FH&LL: For the audience, tell them why they should list their home with you, and why they should use you to help find them a home?

STEVE & BIANA: We are serious, but don't take ourselves too seriously. Look at our ads; they state "Biana is Fluent in Spanish", which is serious in our market. Steve is labeled "Fluent in English". This is our way of having a little fun. If you know Steve you can appreciate what that means and how it is meant. We enjoy our business, our friends and most of all we enjoy each other. Buying a new home is one of the most important purchases you will ever make, why not have fun while doing it? We can guarantee you that together we will find that dream home that is waiting for you and your family. An agent needs to be a lot of things to their clients. Being a trustworthy guide is how we approach our business. We love it and we are always looking for new friends to help fulfill their dreams.

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