

D | Local Business

Business editor: Antonio Fins (561) 820-4439 or pb_business@pbpost.com | On the web: PalmBeachPost.com



John Slivon is president of the Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale, based in West Palm Beach. Slivon came to Florida in 2005 after a career as an opera singer. MEGHAN MCCARTHY / THE PALM BEACH POST

Singing career helped Realtor learn new tune

John Slivon went from the stage to the presidency of 3rd-largest Realtors group.

By Charles Elmore
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

First paying job? Picking weeds. His big break? Auditioning in Italy and being signed for the role of Freddy in an all-Italian production of "My Fair Lady."

In unconventional ways, John Slivon says, all of that prepared him for his current role as president of the third-largest Realtors association in the United States, which is based in West Palm Beach.

"You may not think this has much to do with my current position, but studying and performing as a classically trained singer really has helped me in my journey," said Slivon, president of the Realtors of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale. "I still use the skills that I gained from standing before thousands. And I guess serving in the position of president, I see it as another way to serve a role and be the 'voice' for real estate, both for my members and the consumers we serve."

He moved to Florida in 2005 and enjoyed his first taste of success in its real estate market right before the housing market crashed.

"Sold my first house in two weeks, and then boom!" he recalled. "The market collapsed."

He stuck it out, though, honing the skills to survive in a competitive business.

MONDAY MEETING

A Q&A WITH ...

JOHN SLIVON

Realtors Association president

Sometimes that means just being out there and willing to jump on opportunities — such as when a neighbor gave him a job pulling weeds in his first paying gig. That held plenty of lessons, including: Don't get lost in the weeds. And this: "Lastly, never pick all the weeds. Leave a few small ones, for job security."

Name: John H. Slivon

Age: 49

Where you live now: Palm City

About your company: I am the president of the Realtors of the Palm Beaches and Greater Fort Lauderdale. It is a nonprofit organization composed of more than 28,000 Realtor members, with well over 300 affiliate members and over 30,000 MLS (Multiple Listing Service) subscribers. Our membership spans from St. Lucie County through Broward County. As the third-largest Realtor association in the United States, we employ 65 incredibly talented staff members. We have six offices spanning from Port St. Lucie to West Broward with our corporate headquarters

here in West Palm Beach at One Harvard Circle.

We are a unique organization in that our governance is composed of all-volunteer leadership. Our board of directors has a responsibility to set the strategic vision of our association and creates policies, procedures and rules for our membership. We are a 100 percent membership-driven organization. Therefore, our leadership team is passionate about the work they perform for their members and care deeply for the organization they oversee.

Our CEO, Dionna Hall, along with our staff, work tirelessly to help our volunteer leadership provide our membership with programs, services and technology that ensure our membership is benefiting from the very best. We provide hundreds of education classes, have a multitude of committees and hold numerous special events for our members. We enforce a strict code of ethics for all our Realtor members, as well. But further, our association and its members are strong advocates for home ownership and the betterment of the community that we live, work, and play in.

How your business has changed: Real estate, the agent and Realtor associations have changed immensely since the advent of the internet. Not too long ago, a consumer would walk in to a real estate office and ask for an agent's assistance in finding a home. During this visit to the agency, the consumer would be

Monday continued on D3

ADVERTISEMENT

NEWSMAKERS & SHAKERS

WILLIAM N. PIKE

William N. Pike currently serves as a Director of Operations in the Pike Corporation's Florida division. The Pike Corporation was founded by Floyd S. Pike in 1945 and provides a suite of construction and engineering services to electric and gas utilities across the nation. Mr. Pike is the first of the fourth-generation Pike family members to hold a full-time position at the company. Prior to officially joining Pike in 2017, Mr. Pike served as an Associate at Anchor Capital Management, a Raleigh-based investment management company. He graduated with a BS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Virginia. He currently serves as a Trustee of the Chamber of Commerce of the Palm Beaches.



WHO'S WHO IN LOCAL BUSINESS

NEWSMAKERS



Burke

COMMUNITY SERVICE
The Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties has appointed a new board member, **Tim Burke**. Burke is the publisher of The Palm Beach Post. Burke has worked for the Post for 16 years, and worked as a sports editor and deputy managing editor before becoming publisher. Prior to the Post, Burke worked as a sports editor and reporter for the Dallas Times-Herald and Springfield News-Leader.



Kinninger

ENGINEERING
WGI said **Brian Kinninger** joined the firm's landscape architecture division as a designer in the company's West Palm Beach office. Kinninger comes to WGI with specific expertise in urban infill development, county planning, comprehensive planning, land development code, and developments of regional impact. He holds a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture and a master's degree in city and regional planning from Ohio State University. He is an active member of the Florida Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects. WGI has 14 offices in six states, serving an active client base in over 30 states.



Smith

NONPROFITS
Child Rescue Coalition has added **Scott Smith** as vice president of business development. In his new role, Smith is responsible for planning and strategy related to Child Rescue Coalition's sponsorship, business and community relations programs. He will be focused on identifying growth opportunities, with particular emphasis on cultivating corporate social responsibility partnerships with local and global large-to-mid-sized enterprises. Before joining Child Rescue Coalition, Smith served as director of sales for TransUnion's Specialized Risk Group, where he achieved over 30 percent annual revenue growth each year. Smith has also served in a senior management capacity within the data fusion industry, where he has experience in data markets, including integrating multiple data sources for the law enforcement industry.

FOR MORE LOCAL NEWSMAKERS, D2

ENTREPRENEURS

Ex-food chemist finds niche as celebrity closet designer

Lisa Adams restores dressing-room identity to clients' luxe homes.

By Rachel Spacek
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Lisa Adams is the chief executive and designer at LA Closet Design, a full-service luxury closet design firm that she founded in 2007. Adams has

worked with celebrities including Khloe Kardashian, Christina Aguilera and Reese Witherspoon.

Based in West Hollywood, LA Closet Design offers services worldwide. Adams estimates she's doing about 15 closets at a given time and 50 a year. For a custom walk-in closet, she charges an average of \$60,000, though the prices range from around \$35,000 to as high as \$500,000.

Growing up in Honolulu, Adams

said, she felt pressure from her parents to succeed. As second-generation Asian immigrants, they had a strong desire for their children to do better than they had, she said.

"By second grade, I was already learning more than they knew," Adams said. Adams said being raised in Hawaii and being part of a diverse community taught her to treat people equally regardless of their differences.

Adams excelled in math and science and went on to study chemistry at the University of California at Berkeley; she thought the field was a perfect blend of math and science.

Adams said the transition from living on a small island to attending such a big school as Berkeley was a culture shock. As a small-town girl, she could not wait to graduate and return to Hawaii, she said.

Back in Honolulu, she worked in a private laboratory, testing food for yeast and mold. The lab helped food companies make sure their products complied with safety requirements.

After working in the lab for a few months, Adams thought, "This isn't quite 'it.'" She desired more opportunities than Hawaii and the laboratory offered.

Closets continued on D2



6.0% APY

for 1 year, Interest Paid Monthly

THE Fixed Income Alternative

- First Position Commercial Mortgage Notes (FPCMs) are SAFER Alternatives. They are 12 month notes secured by high-value commercial real estate
- Low \$25,000 minimum
- Great for single, joint, trust & IRA accounts
- FPCMs are not an annuity or insurance product
- No fees to buy or maintain*

To download our **FREE FPCM Buyer's Guide**, visit us at www.6PercentAPY.com or call 561-544-7006 to have one mailed to you.

FIRST FINANCIAL TAX GROUP
TAX AND INSURANCE SERVICES

Find us on Facebook

*\$215 annual custodial fee for IRAs of any size. No fees for non-IRA funds.

BUSINESS

Thinking inside the box

Company makes metal boxes that provide privacy in today's modern, open offices.

James Barron
©2017 The New York Times

NEW YORK — For 39 years, Clark Kent has had a serious problem. He could not just duck into a telephone booth, rip off the suit and tie and dash off to do the Superman thing.

This has been clear since the movie "Superman" was released in 1978. Clark Kent, played by Christopher Reeve, had trouble finding a presto chango place. He paused — just long enough for the audience to get the joke — in front of one of those minimalist telephone kiosks that had begun to replace superhero-worthy telephone booths with glassed-in sides. He finally stepped into a revolving door, spun around and emerged transformed.

If The Daily Planet were around now and the newsroom looked like an open-plan office, Clark Kent would be texting Perry White about Jeremy Jennings.

Jennings, 42, is one of the founders of a company that produces metal boxes that — Great Caesar's ghost! — provide privacy in open offices. They look a lot like telephone booths.

"People can come in here to think," Jennings said, sliding into one for an interview. "You can do head-down focus work in here, or call your doctor or your dentist or your girlfriend or your boyfriend." Even if everybody assumes you are looking for another job.

So Jennings is in the oasis business. In open-plan offices, the desks are closer together than when cubicles

were in fashion. Some offices use the freed-up space for lounges with somewhat more casual furniture — couches or bar-height tables and chairs.

Out where the desks are, the noise level tends to be higher, because there are more people in less space.

Like a phone booth, Jennings's box — a Jabbrbox, by name — has a door that closes. Unlike a phone booth, Jabbrbox is strictly BYOP. There is no built-in phone. The only way a phone gets into a Jabbrbox is if someone carries one in.

Old-fashioned telephone booths were an urban casualty, doomed by their popularity among bookies, drug runners and vandals. In the mid-1990s, there were 2.6 million public pay phones nationwide, but AT&T dropped out of the pay phone business in 2007. Verizon stuck it out until 2011.

Today only a handful of old-fashioned telephone booths are left in Manhattan. Four that still have pay phones are on West End Avenue. Until September, there are three in Father Duffy Square, at the northern end of Times Square, as part of an art installation. Another, on West 13th Street in the meat-packing district, dials the switchboard at the U.S. Capitol, in Washington. The idea is for passers-by who want to feel politically engaged to speak their minds to whomever answers the phone in Senate or House offices.

Originally, Jennings and Jabbrbox's other founder, Brian Hackathorn, wanted to set up private spaces in Central Park for people who



Jeremy Jennings is one of the founders of Jabbrbox, which sells one and two-person metal privacy boxes designed to provide a quiet place for private phone calls in open-plan offices. The founders originally envisioned their boxes in Central Park, or in airports and hotel lobbies, before realizing that open-plan offices could be a perfect market. "People can come in here to think," Jennings said. WILL GLASER/ THE NEW YORK TIMES

needed quiet when they had to take a call. The main target market would seem to be people playing hooky. Which no one in Manhattan ever does.

Hackathorn, a designer whose résumé includes a Best of Year Award from Interior Design magazine in 2014, has designed his share of open offices. (Hackathorn was traveling, or no doubt he would have been in the Jabbrbox with Jennings for the interview. In his absence, Jennings said that Hackathorn "likes to say he's solving a problem he helped create.")

Jennings said Hackathorn drew plans for as many as 20

booths in the park, wrapped with artwork. "Like 'The Gates,'" he said, referring to the \$21 million orange installation that brightened the winter of 2005 with 7,500 pleated portals.

"It's landmarked," Jennings said, adding that the approvals needed to put new permanent structures like booths in the park seemed overwhelming. (The city has designated the park a scenic landmark; it was recognized as a National Historic Landmark in the 1960s.)

They considered putting boxes in airports or hotel lobbies and charging users who ventured inside for that all-important private call.

"Like Zipcar for space," Jennings said.

Then they realized that office space was shrinking and that they could sell boxes to open-office tenants. Hackathorn was so excited that he said, "Let's build it."

Jennings remembers that moment. "I thought he was off-his-rocker crazy."

They now have models for one person (\$13,500) and two (\$24,000). Jabbrbox's website says nine exterior colors are available, including "signal white," "traffic orange" and "umbra gray." Inside, the color choices include "retreat" (whitish), "balance" (aqua), "happy" (light green) and "pamper" (purple).

Workers who do not rate an office could do in-the-box thinking in a Jabbrbox — and in an open office, even those fairly high in the chain of command do not always rate an office. Jennings talked about taking a potential buyer to see one that had been installed in a Midtown Manhattan office.

They had to wait because a woman was inside, and she was deep into an animated conversation on a cellphone. When she came out, the potential client started questioning her.

"He said, 'What's your role here?'" Jennings recalled. "She said, 'I'm the head of legal.'"

Monday

continued from D1

shown a book with lists of homes that the agent could sort through to show which would be available for purchase that best suited the customer's needs. These "books" were produced by the Multiple Listing Service and the local Realtor association. They were continually updated and locally focused.

Today, properties are easily found on the internet and the consumer rarely walks into real estate offices. They communicate via emails, phone calls and video conferencing. Contracts are even signed electronically. Property listings are no longer being collated in to books. Rather they are whizzing back and forth over the internet. The customer instantly learns through auto notifications of new listings uploaded into the MLS database. The "single click" internet shopping experience is taking hold. Customers want their questions answered instantly.

For the agent, there are no longer county boundaries set by associations and their MLS books. Today, the agent has become a hyper-specialist working to attract the customer to their service and will travel across the region with their customers finding them a property to purchase. Where there once used to be nearly a dozen different Realtor associations to which agents would have had to belong, today there are fewer than a handful.

Realtor associations have become larger and more regional in their composition. The larger-sized boards such as ours allow for better purchasing power, more educational classes and more technology tools; usually all for a reduced price.

As for our large association, its size is the result of many mergers over the years, and we continue to grow. We recently completed the merger between the Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches and The Greater Fort Lauderdale Realtors. Where I once traveled 20 miles to attend association meetings and events, now as president of this new organization, I find myself trav-

eling 100 miles.

First paying job and what you learned from it: Picking weeds. My neighbor, who had a very large estate at the end of our street, had a very long driveway. He did not like seeing all the weeds in his flowerbeds as he drove down his drive. My neighbor noticed that I was always outside tending to my parents' garden. So he asked me one day, when passing by, whether I would like to get paid for my work. And I, of course, immediately agreed. The lesson learned? You need to be out there and show people what you can do. Second, do not get "lost" in the weeds. And lastly, never pick all the weeds. Leave a few small ones, for job security.

First break in the business: My first "big break" was actually auditioning in Italy and being signed for the lead role of Freddy in an all-Italian production of "My Fair Lady." You may not think this has much to do with my current position, but studying and performing as a classically trained singer really has helped me in my journey. It's all a long story, but I trained and performed opera throughout the United States in my 20s and early 30s. All the while I had to pick up odd jobs; "day jobs," we called them. So, I never was averse to learning or doing something different. When I finally moved to Florida in 2005, I saw real estate as a profession that I could learn and still have the flexibility of schedule to concertize. The irony is that I have since tapered off my performing, because real estate can really be a 24/7 job. I still use the skills that I gained from standing before thousands. And I guess serving in the position of president, I see it as another way to serve a role and be the "voice" for real estate both for my members and the consumers we serve.

Best business book you ever read: "Who Moved My Cheese?" by Spencer Johnson.

Best piece of business advice you ever received: Hang in there and stick with what you know and do best. I started in real estate in 2005. Sold my first house in two weeks, and then boom! The

'Performing as a classically trained singer really has helped me in my journey.'

John Slivon
Realtors Association of the Palm Beaches

market collapsed. An old-timer in the business said to me that he had seen this before; it would take 10 years to recover. He was right! I stuck it out, though. I did, and have kept doing, what I know and what works best. Service is number one with me. There is tremendous competition out there in this business and between associations. But I believe if you stick to providing first-rate service, you will keep and grow your customer base. The cost of the service will never be questioned because the consumer will easily see the value gained.

What you tell young people about your business: We have a good number of younger people coming into real estate and then wishing to engage in the activities and governance at the association. My advice to the younger agents is to use your knowledge of technology to your advantage. Many agents in the field are in their 50s and may not be as savvy. In regard to volunteer leadership, I would say to the younger group, be sure to establish your business first and be sure to have a team of individuals that can help manage your business. When serving as a volunteer you are giving your most precious gift, your time. You will need others to help you, as your time becomes scarcer.

What do you see ahead for Palm Beach County? Affordability of housing. As I review the stats regarding the median sale price for a single family home throughout our territory, I cannot get over the incredible difference between the median sales price for a home in St. Lucie — \$209,000 — compared to West Palm, where the median sale price is at \$336,000. Young potential buyers are being priced out of the housing market. First-responders, teachers,

nurses and low-income wage earners are and will continue to be challenged to find residence in the area of their work. West Palm must increase the opportunities to create new housing for those who do so much to serve our community.

Where we can find you when you are not at the office: I am always "working." When I am not attending a meeting or function for the association, I am back with my team working to grow my real estate business at Bowen Realty. But I do have 18 appointments, usually every Saturday, that I try to keep. My golfing buddies appreciate that they have a place in my calendar. And, of course, I continue to sing. You can find me every Sunday morning at Palm City Presbyterian performing as one of their soloists. I really do enjoy that opportunity.

Favorite smartphone app: Well I would have to say Realtor.com (of course). But for all my travels up and down I-95, I really do like Waze.

What is the most important trait you look for

when hiring? The ability to communicate. I have three rules for my team: 1) Never assume; 2) Anticipate; 3) Communicate. There is a fourth rule, which really goes without saying, but: "Do you really want to have to listen to John remind you about

the first three rules?" As a leader, and certainly as a salesperson in the business of real estate, you must have a grasp of how to best communicate to your "audience."

celmore@pbpost.com
Twitter: @Elmorepbp

South FL Palm Beach County Boynton Beach Area Golf & Country Club

Investment Opportunity

SEALED BID OFFERING: Wed, Sept 13th
BID DEADLINE: 12 NOON AT CLUBHOUSE

BUYER'S PROPERTY PREVIEW: Wed, Aug 16 & Wed, Sept 6
10:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.
APPOINTMENT ONLY. CALL TO SCHEDULE

Westchester COUNTRY CLUB For Sale

27-Hole Championship Golf Course plus an Executive 18-Hole Par 3 Course

- Country Club with an Events Center
- Jog Road Frontage (4-Lane Hwy)

HWA 888-324-5020
Hilda W. Allen real estate, inc.
FL License #s: BK3036361, CQ1019764; in conjunction with Brett Miller, Miller Mgmt See Website for Terms & Conditions • 6% Buyer's Premium

PUREPOINT FINANCIAL

18-MONTH PUREPOINT CD

1.75% APY¹

\$10,000 minimum deposit to open and obtain APY

EXCLUSIVE FINANCIAL CENTER RATE

Save more with PurePoint® market-leading rates

- No monthly account fees
- Exceptional client experience in person, by phone or online
- Discuss your financial goals with a savings professional

PurePoint. Pure Savings.™

1.866.486.PURE (7873)

Take advantage of this rate by visiting a Financial Center near you

Palm Beach Gardens
2602 PGA Blvd.
561.273.0447

Ft. Lauderdale
1530 N. Federal Hwy.
954.375.1211

¹Annual Percentage Yield (APY) accurate as of 08/04/2017. Rate valid for accounts opened in the Financial Centers listed above or by phone to local residents by calling 1.866.486.PURE (7873). Other rates may be available if account opened online at purepoint.com/palmbeachpost. Rates subject to change without notice. Penalty for early withdrawal may reduce account earnings. APY assumes interest remains on deposit until maturity date.

PurePoint Financial is a division of MUFG Union Bank, N.A.

©2017 MUFG Union Bank, N.A. All rights reserved. PurePoint and the PurePoint logo are trademarks and brand names of MUFG Union Bank, N.A.

Member FDIC