

FIU's Center for Leadership selects ERA Showcase entrepreneur Dr. Keller No. 1 in 'Top Women-Led Businesses' survey — honored in Miami at luncheon; releases data-filled The Showcase Report

By Ken Datzman

Barbara Keller, a former department head and college professor turned entrepreneur, has topped a list of successful businesswomen throughout the state in an annual survey conducted by Florida International University's Center for Leadership and Service, and the Commonwealth Institute of Boston.

A longtime real-estate entrepreneur in Brevard County and in New Jersey, Dr. Keller surpassed 49 other accomplished nominees in FIU's "Top Women-Led Businesses" survey, which was released June 4 at a luncheon in Miami, where she was the featured speaker.

"I was very excited about the honor. It's wonderful for our company because it recognizes the teamwork that goes into building a successful business," said Dr. Keller, president and co-owner of ERA Showcase Properties & Investments, a cutting-edge agency headquartered in Merritt Island with offices around the county.

"A number of our friends in the field have commented how great it is for a real-estate business to be honored at this time. They see it as something really good for the profession," she said.

The survey investigates growth potential and management style, as well as mentors and professional development among women entrepreneurs and CEOs. The results reveal the key characteristics possessed by women leaders, "including strategies, career progression, personal motivation, work habits, and life choices."

Recent studies by the Center for Women's Business Research indicate that the nation's more than 10 million women-owned enterprises employed 13 million workers, generated \$1.9 trillion in sales, and represented more than 40 percent of all privately held firms in 2008.

Ten years ago, Dr. Keller and business partner Jean Burgdorff, who have enjoyed much success running real-estate agencies, purchased ERA Showcase and built it into a powerhouse in the market.

Earlier, the two women developed a real-estate company in New Jersey, Burgdorff Realtors, which at its peak had 700 sales associates and 35 offices. They sold that business and moved to Florida.

At the event in Miami, Dr. Keller singled out her longtime business partner, Burgdorff. "I was fortunate, oh, so long ago, while still teaching at the university (Farleigh Dickinson), to meet a wonderful, wise and generous person who has

been my mentor for these many years."

Dr. Keller joined Burgdorff Realtors as a consultant and became its executive vice president. "Jean taught me the all-encompassing basic rule for success." The two women call it the "Golden Rule."

"It has been our basic business guide through the years and I can think of no better guiding principle for any individual or business," Dr. Keller said. "I believe opportunity is in the person, not the job. It is our attitude not our aptitude, our choices, that determines our success."

When the two partners took over ERA Showcase, the business had three sales offices in the county, a property-management division, 10 employees and about 50 sales associates. Today, it has eight sales offices, more than 150 salespeople, 50 employees, a full-support service team including three information-technology professionals, a relocation department, a title company, and a property-management arm that has expanded from managing 400 to more than 2,000 properties and 24 condominium associations.

Dr. Keller said "a wonderful team has been developed, one by one, while always staying true to our core values and culture, and our purpose in life."

Their company has compiled and just released "The Showcase Report," a detailed analysis of current real-estate trends in Brevard since 2004. The 24-page booklet is filled with relevant data covering a comprehensive range of housing statistics, including averages sales per month, sale-price to list-price ratio, inventory of listings, average days on the market, short sales and foreclosures, and a housing breakdown by communities, market by market around the county.

"We are very proud of the report," said Burgdorff. "It's a statistical analysis of what's been happening in the Brevard County real-estate market since 2004. We have been updating it quarterly."

As to the state of the local market: "I think we are near the bottom of the trough," Dr. Keller said. "Inventory is trending downward and prices look like they are starting to stabilize. But 'days on the market' are still hovering a little high. When we give opinions on the real-estate market, we think it's important to have data to back up the comments. The report provides consumers with documented information and we think it helps them make wise decisions as it pertains to the real-estate industry."

Historically, high housing affordability and low mortgage interest rates, combined with buyer



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Businesswomen Barbara B. Keller, left, and Jean Burgdorff purchased ERA Showcase Properties & Investments 10 years ago when the agency had three offices and 50 salespeople. Today, the company has eight offices and 150 sales associates who work throughout the county. Their company produces 'The Showcase Report,' a comprehensive compiling of area real-estate data and trends. They are at the Suntree-Rockledge office on North Wickham Road.

opportunities in the distressed sales market, have increased existing home sales in many areas of the nation, including in Florida. Many first-time buyers are attracted to deeply discounted and distressed home prices. Also helping to drive the first-time buyer market is a tax break to home purchasers. As part of its plan to stimulate the housing market, Congress passed legislation that grants a tax credit up to \$8,000 to first-time homebuyers.

"We are trying to make the public aware of the fact that a first-time buyer can be a consumer who has not purchased a home in the last three years. So that opens the arena much wider," Dr. Keller said. First-time buyers who purchase homes between Jan 1, 2009, and Dec. 1, 2009, qualify for the tax credit.

ERA Showcase hosts first-time buyers seminars at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays at the company's Indialantic office. The address is 400 Miramar Ave. "Part of the presentation focuses on helping first-time buyers understand the financing opportunities today. We have a startup package we provide them. It covers the various county programs available to help them with a down payment on a home. There is also information about the \$8,000 tax credit. We are here to help people and provide service. That is part of the company's philosophy," Dr. Keller said.