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Gibson Returns to His Ownership Roots

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There are lots of ways to describe the current real-estate market, but fun probably doesn't hit most top-ten lists. Unless it's Scott Gibson's list, a veteran realtor who has returned to the West Coast to find his way back to having fun. His idea of a good time is building a new real estate brokerage business, Gibson International, based in Brentwood.

This is not his first move as an entrepreneur; he started Kent Realtors in 1988 and sold it to Prudential in 1993. And it's a small start in comparison with his last job as senior vice president for NRT's Northeast Region, overseeing six operating companies covering nine states with 9,000 sales associates and \$35 billion in sales. But it's clear that after 30 years in the business, Gibson, 53, is exactly where he wants to be, doing exactly what he wants to do.

Gibson's first job out of UCLA in 1978 was as an agent with Harleigh Sandler in Marina del Rey. He joined the Jon Douglas Company in their Marina office in 1980, and his career in sales and then management grew as Jon Douglas merged with Prudential and then Coldwell Banker. In 2001, he became president of Coldwell's greater Los Angeles region, working out of the Brentwood office and responsible for \$20 billion in sales.

To gain a national perspective on the industry, Gibson decided to move to New York in 2004 with NRT, Coldwell Banker's parent company. He and Suzy, his wife of 26 years, leased their home in the Palisades Highlands and bought a house in Mountain Lakes, New Jersey, just 30 miles from Manhattan. The youngest of their three daughters, Skyler, now 20, left Palisades High after her sophomore year to make the move.

"I had a great run with the company," says Gibson, whose energy is infectious. But three years later, the job "stopped being fun for me. As trite as that sounds, I think it's important. If you love what you do, it's fun, it's just that simple, and you're better at it."

Gibson carefully evaluated a wide range of potential next steps, including an offer to move to the Middle East to manage \$3 billion of new residential development. The fundamental question became whether or not to strike out on his own. Once he decided to do that, the decision to return to Los Angeles was easy, given his deep network of local relationships.

He chose to put his own name on the door, believing it signals a level of commitment and availability important to the agents he hires.



Scott Gibson with manager Pat Heller (left) and agent Melissa Viboch at his new real estate office on San Vicente Boulevard in Brentwood. Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

"It's a much larger responsibility level," says Gibson, "but it's also a statement to my agents, the staff and the public that there's someone here who's willing to stand up for the service we're providing and the style in which we're providing it."

Gibson served as his own staff for months, working out a detailed business plan for the new company and developing everything from office design to technology systems. He took a 10-year lease on a space with a special pedigree—Jon "Jack" Douglas' original office on San Vicente in Brentwood.

His office open since June 23, Gibson has been joined by his manager, Pat Heller, who lives in the Highlands, and about 30 agents with an average nine years of real-

estate experience. Heller and Gibson originally met at Prudential and later worked together at Coldwell Banker. She brings 15 years of experience as a manager to the team and Gibson sees her as integral to the growth of the business. Gibson's daughter, Haley, 22, has a much shorter resume but plenty of poise; she's the company's receptionist.

Gibson hopes to build something special. "There's a place for a company that's more highly individualized and personalized than what's being offered out there right now, both to the agent and to the client," he says. He also sees the ability to adapt to the agent's mode of work as key to success. "Today's agents are much more mobile. The purpose of the office is to

provide an array of different technologies that accommodate the way they work today versus the way they worked 20 years ago."

Gibson continues, "The opportunity to start from scratch is to try not to burden yourselves with proprietary systems, to allow people to work the way they need to work to be successful."

As for the current housing market, he notes that despite all the bad news, the market is active, open houses are busy and some properties are getting multiple offers.

"Interest rates are low, values are strong here," he says. "If you look at the Palisades, Brentwood, Malibu . . . you can't build any more here and it's one of the prime areas in the world to live. As Will Rogers said, 'Buy land. They aren't making any more of it.'"

Says Gibson, "The problem is when people look at real estate as short-term rather than long-term . . . Looking at it as an investment rather than as a place to raise your family."

He raised his own family in the Palisades, where his wife also grew up. Suzy has been supportive of his career throughout, but the move east took the Gibsons far from their eldest daughter, Heather, 32, when she was pregnant with their first grandchild. Kanan, 2, is about to play big brother to Heather's second child, due this October. The Gibson's daughter Skyler decided to stay back East and will be a junior this fall at Northeastern University in Boston.

Gibson seems to have taken the long view with regard to his own real estate holdings. He and Suzy kept their house in Mountain Lakes. Their home in the Palisades is still under lease this year, so the Gibsons are renting on Church Lane in Brentwood, but it sounds as if they will be back. "It's a great house. It's a perfect size for us," Gibson says.

Opening a new firm in the current environment could be viewed as a risky proposition, but Gibson doesn't see it that way.

"This is my chance right now," he says. "Do I wish it was a little better market? Sure. But not much. I don't think you can ever pick the perfect time to do anything or you'll never pick the time. The safer bet would have been to get a job [working for someone else]. I'm just not there yet for the safe bet."

"I don't say it's going to be a cake walk, but it comes down to the people. With the right people, you can transcend a market. My dream is to have [my team] look back in 10 or 20 years and say '[Gibson International] was the greatest experience I've ever had.'"

More information on Gibson International can be found at www.gibsonintl.com

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— SCOTT GIBSON