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Allen Native Finds Solid Group

By Matt Pedigo

C-T News Editor

Many a Washington politician is familiar with her work.

Over the decades, many ordinary folks have found the American Dream with her help.

For over 50 years, thousands of fans of, first, Allen County, and, later, Allen County-Scottsville, high school athletic programs have fished in one of her youthful achievements—naming the patriots.

Wanda Centers Grabner has run the gamut of the real estate industry, from helping young couple get a first home to serving, as she now does, on the board of directors of the National Association of Realtors.

Born on Centers Loop Road the home of her paternal grandparents, Maude and Herman Centers, she is the daughter of Ruel and Ruby Oliver Centers. Grabner spent some of her high school years in the Walnut Creek area at the home of her maternal grandparents, Bill and Annie Oliver and, long before Barren River Lake existed, was baptized in Walnut Creek. Ruel was a school su-

perintendent in Mississippi, and Ruby a teacher there, so young Wanda lived in Mississippi for much of her early years. But her parents divorced, and, as the US geared up for World War II, Ruby moved back to Kentucky to work in a defense plant.

World War II brought an era of yellow ribbons, an abundance of the red, white and blue and the grief of many a local family. It was a period of intense patriotism, and when a contest was announced at Allen County High School to name the school's athletic programs—with a free copy of the school's annual as the prize—Grabner's suggestion won it. With the national unity and shared sacrifice of World War II still fresh on America's mind, it wasn't hard, she said.

"It was a no-brainer," Grabner smiled. "The colors were already red, white and blue."

In addition to the yearbook, her cousin presented her with a painting of a baseball jersey with "Patriots" on it that has been quite a keepsake over the years.

"I love it," she said. "I wouldn't take anything for that."

Today, Grabner says, when she sees the success and fan interest that Patriot athletics have grown to inspire throughout the Allen County



(C-T photo by Matt Pedigo)

Allen County native Wanda Centers Grabner currently serves on the National Board of Realtors and is no stranger to the Red, White and Blue behind her—in a 1940s contest in her high school years to name Allen County High School athletic programs she won with

Letters
From

(C-T photo by Matt Pedigo)

Allen County native Wanda Centers Grabner currently serves on the National Board of Realtors and is no stranger to the Red, White and Blue behind her—in a 1940s contest in her high school years to name Allen County High School athletic programs, she won with her entry—the Patriots.

began a family. She has four children: Debby, who runs a Boulder, Co., travel agency; Gail, a California realtor; Tony, who lives in Indianapolis and works for jet engine manufacturer Rolls Royce; and Paul, who works for aircraft manufacturer Boeing in Phoenix. Grabner later began her own career, after earning her real estate license. Her husband, Delbert Ludlow, has a ReMax agency. Together, they developed Ludlow Realtors, in which she now serves as President.

Grabner said the real estate industry, at least in her earlier days, was still a tough place for women to prosper.

"I've been around long enough to see discrimination there," she said. "Women don't have that now, but that's because we worked so hard at it."

Women gained a foothold in the industry, Grabner said, in part because they were willing to do what many established male agents would not—work for commission only.

"And they discovered how good women could be at it,"

Grabner said. "My husband gave me my chance.

"I remember when women weren't wanted on boards of directors," she said. "Or some would have only one. When the first one was elected president, it was such a big deal."

Grabner said she has found many rewarding aspects about the career.

"The fact that I could compete with the men, and that you could set your own goals," she said. "Nobody basically tells you what to do. Your limitations are your self-set goals. And it's rewarding to see people get into a home—a lot of people didn't think they could ever buy their own home.

"It's not all easy," she said. "There are inspection problems, appraisal problems, credit problems—I've learned to handle about all of them."

Grabner served a term as president of the Indiana Board of Realtors; her colleagues more recently elected her to serve on the national board, among the nation's largest and most powerful political action committees. The board is comprised of all

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News From
The Circuit Rider

Solid Ground in Real Estate



(C-T photo by Matt Pedigo)

County native Wanda Centers Grabner currently serves on the National Board of Realtors and is a member of the Red, White and Blue behind her—in her high school years to name Allen School athletic program.

political persuasions, but when she comes to Washington with a common purpose, she said.

"I'm a Democrat, and realtors tend to be Republicans," Grabner said. "But we're bipartisan. We're all working for homeowner and property rights and fair housing laws."

These, she said, are defined as legislation allowing "anyone to buy where they want to buy, as long as they're qualified to buy it. And that's the way it should be."

"There was definitely not fairness with some agents and some companies in the past," Grabner said. "But times have changed a lot, and hopefully the Board of Realtors has helped bring about some of that change. Of course, we've had civil rights laws passed, too. But what's important is how people feel about it; that they're doing something not because they're forced to by law but because it is right."

The board has also successfully lobbied for "no down payment" style loans in government loan programs. This has helped many young or lower income people get a start in home ownership, Grabner said.

Grabner has seen a variety of changes in the real estate industry over the years, from the double-digit interest rates of the late 1970s and early

fering quicker deals for sellers and placement for buyers but also encouraging cooperation among agents and agencies, who often share commissions with the listing agents.

"You could hang onto clients better, because you have more listings to show them," Grabner said.

Soon, Grabner said, she and colleagues on the national board will meet in Washington to discuss another industry innovation—the "Virtual Office" website. This allows buyers to view listings online, and the board is assigned the task of drafting industry policy for its use.

Today, Grabner said, she's continuing her career and has no thoughts of retirement.

"Retirement is a dirty word to me," she smiled. "I think I have to work. People who know me laugh. You get labeled, but inside I still feel like I'm 15. And I've been so blessed with good health."

Will You Adopt Me?

