

Edward I. Sumber, Esq., “Board Counsel” – His Legacy Will Always Live On

By

By John Dolgetta, Esq.

It is with a heavy heart and immense sadness that I author this month’s article in the “Legal Corner”. On June 5, 2018, our world, the real estate industry and the legal profession lost one of its most influential and outstanding members, Edward I. Sumber, Esq. While the column is usually the subject of legal updates and guidance, and the latest trends in the real estate industry, this month I pay tribute to my predecessor and mentor, a truly great attorney, counsellor, educator, advisor, author, husband, father, grandfather, mentor, friend, and above all, a great person, Edward Sumber, who was simply referred to most commonly as “Ed” or “Board Counsel”. When you mentioned the words “Board Counsel” you immediately thought of Edward.

When I learned of Edward’s passing, my first reaction was shock, which soon turned to sadness. However, immediately my thoughts turned to happiness, happiness for the life of a great man who left behind a truly impressive legacy in the real estate industry and legal profession. It was an honor and privilege to have known him and spent a large part of my life with him. I was in the process of preparing my monthly article, when I found out that Edward had passed away, and I decided that the only fitting tribute was to write this article about Ed’s career as “Board Counsel” and father of the “Legal Corner.”

Throughout his illustrious career, Edward authored hundreds of articles in *his* “Legal Corner” – I say “his” because the “Legal Corner” was his pride and joy. In Real Estate In-Depth’s over 22-year history, Edward wrote an article in his “Legal Corner” nearly every month for 20 years until his retirement from the practice of law in November 2015. I will be forever grateful to him for allowing me to author many articles for the “Legal Corner” throughout the years we worked together. It is truly an honor for me to continue Ed’s legacy and continue to author the “Legal Corner” in his memory, and I thank the Hudson Gateway Association of Realtors®, Inc. (“HGAR”) for the privilege of allowing me to continue that legacy. Each time I set my hand to paper, or fingers to keyboard, Ed was and will forever be in my thoughts. I author each article with the primary goal of meeting the high standards set by Ed throughout his life.

While his personal, charitable and professional accomplishments were extensive, and could literally fill several volumes, I decided to focus on Edward’s legal career and, specifically, the extensive impact he had on HGAR (in all of its forms and iterations), other Boards, and the real estate communities in Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Orange, Manhattan, throughout the State of New York and nationally. Edward was always a leading figure and fixture at the annual legal conferences of the New York State Association of Realtors® and National Association of Realtors®. In all the years I knew Ed, I do not recall him ever missing a conference. Fellow attorneys and colleagues used to refer to him as the “Elder Statesman.” Below is but a small glimpse into his life, which had such a tremendous impact on all who came in contact or interacted with Ed.

In 1973, Edward moved to Carmel, New York from Brooklyn, and became a partner in the firm of Stockfield, Fixler & Sumber. After a few years, Ed decided to leave that practice and establish his own law firm, Edward I. Sumber, P.C., which he continued to operate until May, 2015, when I acquired the practice from him. He primarily focused on corporate and tax law, estate planning and probate law, commercial and residential real estate transactions, and the niche area of real estate agency law. Little did Ed know that this niche area would turn into his life's masterpiece.

In 1975 and 1976, Ed found tremendous satisfaction in having become "Board Counsel" to the Westchester County Board of Realtors®, Inc. ("WCBR"). On December 16, 1975, Ed assisted with the formation of one of the first multiple listing services in the area - the Westchester Multiple Listing Service ("WMLS"). His work with the "Board" and the "MLS" became the cornerstone of his practice. As a result, Ed began to teach real estate brokerage law to brokers and real estate agents, and to attorneys, and began to write articles on the subject for the "Westchester REALTOR" (the predecessor to "Real Estate In-Depth"). Edward authored hundreds of articles in various periodicals, but truly found immense joy and satisfaction in writing his monthly column in "Real Estate In-Depth." He took this duty very seriously because he knew that it would affect and provide guidance to hundreds and eventually thousands of real estate professionals.

In November 1994, Edward became counsel to the Putnam County Association of Realtors®, Inc. ("PCAR") and in October 1995, the name of the Westchester Multiple Listing Service, Inc. was changed to the Westchester-Putnam Multiple Listing Service, Inc. ("WPMLS") and included Putnam County listings. I have fond memories of PCAR because when I started my career with Ed, it was for PCAR that I attended my first Board of Directors meeting back in 2001. I was a young attorney, and already very nervous, but the fact that Ed was sending me in his place, in place of *the* "Board Counsel", meant a lot to me and I knew I could not disappoint him. Representation of the Boards of Realtors® was an incredibly important part of Ed's practice as well as his life.

I will never forget what he did for me and will always cherish the opportunity he gave me to be part of his Realtor® family. I began working with Ed on January 31, 2001, and in 2008, Ed and I ultimately became partners. While at the firm, he involved me in all facets of the law practice, but especially with the representation of the Boards and the MLS. He provided me with invaluable instruction, guidance, and knowledge, and opened the door to one of the most exciting and fantastic industries.

In March 2001, Ed became counsel to the Manhattan Association of Realtors®, Inc. ("MANAR"), and assisted with the formation of the organization (which ultimately merged with HGAR in December 2016).

A few years later, in November 2003, Edward became counsel to the Rockland County Board of Realtors®, Inc. ("RCBOR") and continued to represent RCBOR until its merger with the Orange County Association of Realtors®, Inc. ("OCAR") and HGAR in January 2012. Edward was not only instrumental in negotiating and assisting with the merger between the

associations, but was also an integral part of the merger that took place just a few months later in May 2012 between Greater Hudson Valley Multiple Listing Service, Inc. (“GHVMLS”), which was owned and operated by OCAR, and Empire Access Multiple Listing Service, Inc. (formerly WPMLS) and which is now the Hudson Gateway Multiple Listing Service, Inc. (“HGMLS”).

In 2009, WCBR and PCAR ultimately merged as well. As counsel to both organizations, Ed again offered his invaluable legal insight and expertise to help facilitate the ultimate merger between the two associations. While Ed officially represented WPAR in connection with the merger transaction, with PCAR having its own independent counsel, he was still a pivotal and key figure in the merger and as a result, the new entity, the Westchester Putnam Association of Realtors®, Inc. (“WPAR”) was born.

The WPAR name was short lived, as yet another merger, led by Board Counsel, began to take shape. As mentioned above, there was ultimately a three-way merger involving WPAR, OCAR, and RCBOR in 2012, which ultimately morphed into what is now the Hudson Gateway Association of Realtors®, Inc. The merger between the two multiple listing services operated by HGAR and OCAR were also merged as well, forming the present-day Hudson Gateway Multiple Listing Service with nearly 11,000 members.

It is truly amazing to see the fruits of Ed’s passion and his life’s work. The affect he has had on our industry, our community and these amazing organizations is simply incredible. It is with pride and joy that I honor Edward, my friend and mentor, with this small tribute to his work, his life and his dedication to the Boards. Edward worked tirelessly each and every day. He attended nearly every meeting of the Boards of Directors for HGAR, PCAR, HGMLS, and RCBOR, spanning a career of over forty years. Ed took his calling very seriously but at the same time was always a calm, compassionate and sensitive person. Ed was a brilliant attorney and everyone who knew him felt something special when in his presence. He will be sorely missed, but his legacy will live on forever. Here’s to you, my friend.

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