

REAL ESTATE

# EXECUTIVE

Chicagoland Edition

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

A man with a receding hairline, wearing a dark suit jacket, a light-colored collared shirt, and a patterned tie, is sitting in a chair. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. Behind him is a large, rustic stone fireplace mantel. The stones are light-colored and stacked in a traditional pattern. The lighting is warm, suggesting an indoor setting with a fireplace.

**Ed Jelinek, Coldwell  
Banker Residential  
Brokerage**

Service Is His No. 1 Priority

# Ed Jelinek, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage

## Service Is His No. 1 Priority

By Sheila Inbinder

Ed outside a recent client's home in Lincoln Park.



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Ed Jelinek has the best of both worlds. He has the prestige of being associated with a large well-known international corporation, while at the same time, operating as his own business within that corporation. He has the advantage of all that Coldwell Banker has to offer; he has the benefit of being his own boss, heading the Jelinek Group. Best of all, his clients are the recipients of all the benefits.

All the top, successful real estate agents have the same special qualities. That's what makes them so successful. They are "aggressive" and "knowledgeable," "go the extra mile," "go above and beyond." They work unbelievable hours — or, to simplify: In all aspects of the business, they really know what they're doing, and they do it very, very well. Yet, each one has to have an extra something that differentiates him or her from the others. What it comes down to is their own personality. Ed Jelinek has all those same, special traits it takes to be one of the top agents; but he has one more. His approach isn't exactly what would be called aggressive, not in the sense that we use that word today. He is, however, just as effective, but rather with an ease of manner. I don't know how he does it, but he manages to be assertive, yet comfortable to work with, at the same time.

Stacey Champagne, a client, agrees, but adds, "He has this little kind of streak in him that when he wants to show his teeth for a purpose, he can do that." Ed also gives new meaning to "above and beyond," which will be shown throughout the article.

Ed was born and raised in New Buffalo, MI. He lived on a farm with an older sister and younger brother. His mother was a nurse, manager and then consultant in the medical industry. The farm was sold while Ed was in college and his father went on to work in sales. "I attended school at Western Michigan in Kalamazoo, where I was going to study music performance, but I didn't have enough talent to do that." When pressed, he concedes, "I was a percussionist, symphony style work, but I just

## Ed is one of our top agents.

— John McClintock, Managing Broker, Coldwell Banker

didn't have the raw talent. That was when I switched to studying film." Film became Ed's career plan. A producer/director he became affiliated with took him to Paris, France, to work on a film project, but unfortunately, after eight months there, that project just never got off the ground, so Ed returned to the States. "I came to Chicago because it is sort of a natural progression from Michigan." He produced commercials for television for a while, ultimately deciding he needed a career change.

In a way, going from producing and directing into real estate isn't such a stretch. You might say you're still directing people, just in a different way. And from all I gather, Ed is very good at that. Ed has been with Coldwell Banker for more than 10 years now, and as John McClintock, Managing Broker of Coldwell Banker, says, "Ed is one of our top agents." Even though it is almost a logical move going from film into real estate, I asked Ed why he made that decision. "Because, as with film, it was freelance," he told me, "and at the time, it was an opportunity for me to control my own hours. What I loved about the film industry was the people, and I felt with real estate, I would be able to meet a lot of new and different people on a daily basis." As so many before him, Ed chose Coldwell Banker based on their name recognition and excellent reputation for training programs. "I originally was going to try it out for just a little bit, and immediately started turning down production jobs when I was only two or three weeks into real estate." That was when Ed came to the decision to focus on real estate full time. "I enjoyed it so much more than I ever thought I would."

When Ed entered the field, as he says, it was a great time. "It was an extremely easy market and the perfect market for a new person to start out in, because the market was booming at that time. It was a time when a lot of people were entering the business. Companies were growing at a tremendous pace." Then, Ed added something I found a little surprising. "This market might be an even better one to start in because it educates people much more to the market and the realities of the market." Well, as long as it came up, what about the market today? Just how does he handle business in a so-called down market? "I think the main thing in this market is really positioning the property to show in the best light, and make sure that everything is absolutely perfect before it even comes

### Ed with Managing Broker John McClintock.



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### From left to right, Jelinek Group members Susan Amory, Dan Balys, Zoe Reutz and Ed Jelinek.

on the market. You also have to make sure everything in the property is positioned perfectly within the price point, which is absolutely critical in the current market." In light of conditions today, wouldn't this be considered a "buyers' market?" While Ed agreed, he also added; "I think there's a lot of hesitancy with buyers being nervous about the market because of the continuous media coverage. But it is a fantastic time for buyers to be buying right now. There is so much inventory and you can get a great selection. Prices for buyers are fantastic; there are amazing opportunities to purchase right now." Ed emphasizes this is a point they try to get across, but claims the problem is difficult "because sometimes the national news overshadows the local news. Then, people get the wrong impression." Another point Ed brings out: "You also have to work hand in hand with the buyers to make sure they are getting a good value for their money. I also try to stress to clients that I'm there for them afterwards — it doesn't end with the closing."

When Ed utters those words, he isn't just paying lip service. He takes it to heart. I heard it said by client after client. Arnie Ruben was one client that used Ed's services to help find a home. "Working with Ed was an absolute joy," he noted. "He was professional and extremely knowledgeable about not only the market, but about details of the house and of how things work. When I talk about professional, you can see it in the way he carries himself in dealing with other brokers, and his incredible promptness in responding to any question or any request at any time. His response time is unbelievable. He's not only so prompt; he's so knowledgeable about what you're asking him. He's a storehouse of information." It also turns out Arnie was very specific about his needs. He was only looking in about a four-block square area. "He found, for our needs, the perfect house. It was incredibly matched for us; he figured it out. That's why he's so incredible." And Arnie confirms: "That's only part of why he's so good. After you make the deal, he follows up to make sure everything is running well. If not, he goes back to the owner and makes sure there's a follow-up."

Actually, Ed's kind of service isn't just the phenomenal follow-up. It begins the minute you become his client. Arnie Ruben related a story that's a perfect example. The house they bought — this perfect-for-them house — almost didn't occur. "We turned it down because of a potential health

## I knew I was learning from the best.

— Susan Amory, sales partner/team member



**On site with developer: from left to right, electrician, Victor Bohnert (developer), and Ed.**

hazard.” It seems a neighbor’s hot water heater was venting toward one of the house’s windows. Arnie feared the possibility of carbon monoxide entering the window. “Ed actually tracked down the owner of that other house, who was out of town, and actually got them to fix their hot water heater. Not only that, he got the owner/seller to pay for the modification in order to make the deal work. It was incredible ingenuity.” What was it Stacey Champagne said about Ed “showing his teeth?” Arnie says, “Ed is aggressive in wanting to make the deal. But he does it with such respect for all the parties that you don’t feel like he’s being aggressive.”

Ed hates referring to people as clients. “I think ‘clients’ is sort of a cold word. With any ‘client,’ when you spend that much time with them on such an emotional level, you get to know them extremely well. It’s not like someone coming into a bank and doing a bank transaction. You get to see the couples argue; you get to be part of those arguments. With many of them, you stay in contact, as friends. You go to dinner with them; you form relationships with many of them. I get birth announcements and wedding invitations. I definitely feel like I’m involved in their outer circle level. This is all so important to me and ‘client’ just seems like a cold word.” We joked about coining a new word that was more appropriate, but couldn’t come up with anything.

Talking about technology today is almost pointless; everybody is into it. With all that technology available, buyers and sellers are much better educated. In a good market, many feel their property will practically sell itself. When the market is down, they may want to save the commission because they’re lowering the selling price. Ed feels no matter how much

information the individual can garner from the Internet, they often don’t have the expertise needed. “One of the biggest challenges with selling by owner right now is having a sense of the continuous changes that happen in this market week by week. Even using an appraiser doesn’t help with this issue, as the appraiser’s job concerns stagnant statistics from the past.” According to Ed, this doesn’t typically take into consideration the ever-changing trends or “moods” of the current market, or buyers shopping right now. “Currently, one of our most difficult tasks as agents is interpreting these trends on a nearly daily basis so that we can react quick enough to help our clients. If someone is selling by owner, they are that much more likely to react too slow to the market rather than be in front of the curve. If they miss that timing and the changes, it can cost thousands down the road. I think that is, by far, the most difficult part of the process in the type of market that we’re in.”

It is interesting to note Ed’s take on listings in this market. “I pay much more attention to what is currently under contract than what has sold, because I try to find a trend with what is selling in the given price range. I then look at the property under consideration and ask whether that property has the characteristics that are selling right now, and not two or three months ago, so I know whether we will be able to compete. If the property doesn’t, I try to address the issues by either fixing them directly, or in price considerations.” I wish every person who has ever uttered those famous words, “Why do I need a Realtor?” could read this.

It isn’t only clients that rave about Ed. He has the reputation of being very highly thought of and respected by other brokers and co-workers. Alley Ballard has been a client of Ed’s, worked on his “team” and is currently working on a development and some listings with him. “I would do anything for Ed,” she says simply. “Ed is one of the most ethical people I know. I think he is also one of the hardest working, diligent people I know. I learned real estate from him and I couldn’t have asked for a better education. He understands market trends almost before they happen. Ed makes selling real estate a really fun, enjoyable experience. I’ve never heard anybody say a bad word about Ed, ever, and that is rare when it comes to real estate.” This is high praise indeed from someone who knows Ed in all facets of his career. And she sums it up with, “He’s probably the best Realtor I know.”

Ed doesn’t have a team, per se, even though I’ve heard them refer to themselves as the “Jelinek Group.” Rather, he has some talented people he works with. “I have to be hands on. I don’t want to be what is referred to as a ‘rain maker.’ I don’t want to create contacts and hand them off to somebody else. I don’t think any of the successful agents are that way. The head of a team is someone very focused on what they want to do. The only reason I went to a team concept is that as I started to expand, I was trying to do services that other people weren’t doing, so I had to make a decision. Either I had to give up on some of those services, or I had to grow. I was not willing to give up those services.” So, Ed’s team helps do the work while allowing him to be the one to stay in the forefront with his clients.

What better segue to introduce that team? Zoe Reutz is the administrative assistant; Susan Amory is a sales partner, and Dan Balys is a listing and buyers agent for the North Shore. It is definitely a mutual admiration society.

**E**d Jelinek, to me, represents what I consider the consummate real estate professional.

— Fran Broude, President and COO, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage

Susan started out as Ed's assistant. "I really enjoyed working and learning from him. I knew I was learning from the best. "Ed is a wonderful person and he's in the business because he loves working with people. He's such a hard worker; energetic, thorough and does a ton of research for his listings. He handles each listing and buyer on an individual basis. He has great integrity. I do really enjoy working with him; it's a great partnership."

Can't find Ed? Zoe is the one to contact. She already had her real estate license and was working for a small firm when she decided she needed a change and sent her resume to the group. "Susan saw it and noted I had real estate experience and figured I knew some of the business. I have learned a tremendous amount in just five months working here. Ed is very successful and very efficient and proficient with his work. He's very intent about getting back to every single phone call, whether it's an agent or a client. He puts forth his best effort for people." And this, says Zoe, "actually pushes you to work harder." She maintains Ed has a great dry sense of humor. He can laugh at himself, or crack a joke, all of which she deems essential for somebody who works so hard. "Ed really loves his job. It makes working for him easier because you see the effort he puts forth. He cares for his clients and works more than just about anyone I know." Zoe also couldn't resist adding: "As anyone in the office will tell you, he's a pretty generous guy to boot."

Dan Ballys, who is listed as an agent for the North Shore, was on his way to Michigan when I caught up with him, to take the real estate exam there. Isn't that kind of a far stretch for the North Shore? "There are a lot of developers in Michigan who are developers in Chicago, so it is becoming more and more important," he informed me. Originally from New York, and with a background in both the law and mortgage/lending companies, he had quite a bit of experience working with Realtors. It wasn't always a pleasant experience. He came to Chicago to go to law school and when he started in real estate, he did mostly commercial. He started working with Ed about two years ago. "I went with Ed because Ed is so different than a lot of other agents. Ed cares about his clients. They are comfortable about what he does. Ed cares about his clients and will not hesitate to advise against buying a property just because it's on the market. It's not just about making a commission; he makes sure he gets a home that fits the person, fits their budget. He holds their hands throughout the process and does amazing follow-up after the fact." To emphasize the point, Dan related the story of someone who bought an expensive home and there were issues. "It was Ed who called the electrician, the plumber, the carpenter, any workman who was needed. Even five months later, when there was a problem with the gas fireplace, Ed was right there. He'll drop what he's doing to help; he's just such a caring individual."

Staging has become such an everyday occurrence in today's market, I usually don't even bring it up anymore. But here we have an ex-commercial producer; I could just imagine him considering staging the same as he might a program set. Considering his background, does he do it himself, or does he call in a professional? "A combination of both," he replies. "If the clients have furniture and everything else, you work with the clients hand in hand; repositioning their furniture, redoing their home to a certain degree. Actually, a lot of the prelisting activities that we do is to go through the place with them to tell them what needs to be done, whether it's repainting, redoing floors, moving furniture, getting rid of some things, or even buying new furniture. That's something we do a lot. If it's vacant," he continued, "then I will call in a stager on some, but not all, properties. They have access to the rental furniture and everything else that might be needed. That has proved to help out in this market. I think the main thing in this market is really positioning the property to

show in the best light and make sure that everything is absolutely perfect before you even bring it on the marketplace." Ed also states it is important to make sure everything in the property is positioned perfectly within the price point. "It is absolutely critical in the current market."

It doesn't end with the closing. Every client I spoke with had a story to tell of Ed's post-closing service. David Kerber moved here from New York and got Ed's name through a relocation firm. He wasn't happy with brokers he had encountered in New York, and as he puts it, "It was night and day. The guy is a superstar in my opinion. Ed was so much more hands on and took us step by step through the whole process, especially since we didn't know Chicago. I have been telling people in my office, you can't buy or sell in Chicago without Ed's assistance. We would be coming in from New York and he always accommodated his schedule to ours." But what really amazed David was the "it doesn't end after the closing." "He stayed in contact. I even just heard from him yesterday concerning an issue with my roof. He has been hands on with my contractors and working with the developer so that communication came off at an appropriate manner."

Then there's Steve Rasmussen, who has done five or six transactions with Ed, both as buyer and seller. He found Ed by chance when walking into a Coldwell Banker office. "I've stuck with him ever since." Steve was moving downtown from the suburbs. "I appreciated not only his

**Ed and co-lister Alley Ballard outside a new development house.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD FOERTSCH; RICHARDFOERTSCH@COMCAST.NET

**H**is response time is unbelievable. He's not only so prompt, he's so knowledgeable about what you're asking him. He's a storehouse of information.

— Arnie Rubin, client

knowledge but his extra effort and going that extra mile to make sure you're comfortable with your decisions. What really stands out about him? His customer service. And, his vast knowledge. Each time I'd be moving to a different area, and asking about where the values were, and what to look at. He would kill himself to put your needs first." And again I heard; "Even past the moving date, where he makes his money and moves on, he would still stay in contact, whether it was about a tax situation, or anything else, to help with the purchase down the road. We had the kind of relationship where I could ask him about anything about the house; it was definitely beyond his call of duty."

As much as Ed enjoys working in the resale market, he also loves working with developers. And when I say working, I mean just that. Ed doesn't just show a unit to a client who he thinks might like it. He actually works with the developer as part of his team. If anyone can attest to that fact it's Victor Bohnert, of AVision Development Company, who has worked with Ed and Alley for a number of years. "They have been with me almost from the beginning. Ed was recommended as someone who knows this side of the business — finding properties that are good candidates for development. Also, he knows the sales markets very well. One of the things I like about Ed and his team is, first and foremost, they are there as more than just Realtors. They pay attention to me and are an equal part of what I do. I sit down with them and they give me input on the design of my project, and they give me input on the business side in terms of the numbers." There's more. "They will spend time with me picking out finishes and picking out things like the appliance packages. I find that valuable." Another reason why this is such a good relationship is that Ed is out in the field. He works with buyers. He knows what they are looking for. "He sees what the inventory is like. He not only works with buyers on a daily basis and sees what they are buying; he hears what

**Recent Caribbean vacation with partner Dan and kids Joshua and Maya.**



people don't like about the properties they are not buying. I think it's important to get everyone involved, so it's not unusual at all to see Ed, or someone from his team, picking out appliances or sitting down with my architect, or picking out tiles."

There's even more. "Ed recently started spending hours with me and my architect going over a kitchen layout. It was that important to us that we get it right. I think by engaging him at all levels, from a concept to actual sale, he gets me a competitive advantage by giving me the market intelligence that I need to help sell my projects." One other thing Victor wanted mentioned is: "He keeps me from just looking at spreadsheets. Of course, we're all in this to make money, but he does give that third dimensional aspect to it and really helps us understand that our units functionally make sense and people buying our units really enjoy them. All of this is what sets us apart." Victor has worked with other Realtors in the past, and while he wouldn't mind working with others in the future, he prefers Ed. "One thing I like about Ed is I'm always confident he's putting my interests first."

When Stacey Champagne first started working with Ed, she says she immediately realized she liked everything about him. "He promptly got us listings." Echoing everyone else, she recounts how remarkable Ed was during the closing and that he's been so great every since. "We had some issues and he's gone so far beyond where he needed to go and needed to do. I can't say enough good things about him; he's such a good guy." After adding, "He's incredible," Mark Barrett, her husband, chimed in from the background, "and he's so knowledgeable." Stacey picked up again detailing how Ed still acts on their behalf with the developer and gets things done, where they can't. "He's just great. He responds immediately and his follow-through is remarkable. He has this special way about him." Both Stacey and Mark noted: "He's incredibly funny, and he's witty, which is a great characteristic in this tough business."

At this juncture, I must add a comment of my own. All good agents respond as quickly as possible; they take pride in that. But in my experience, no one responds faster than Ed Jelinek. I once set a timer, just to see how long it would take to get a reply to my e-mail.

I heard from him way before the timer went off. And it doesn't matter what time of day or night it is. I sometimes have this unexplainable urge to e-mail him, just to get an answer. I have dubbed him "King of Response." My point? If I receive this kind of attention, you can fully appreciate the care his clients receive.

Ed resides in the North Center area of Chicago, where he and his partner, Dan, are the proud parents of Maya, who is 4 years old, and Joshua, 3. When I asked Ed what he did for leisure, he repeated, "I have Maya and Joshua." His free time is spent focused on the children and most of their activities center on them. "We do a lot of vacationing and activities like going

**E**d is one of the most ethical people I know. I think he is also one of the hardest working, diligent people I know.

— Alley Ballard, former client and colleague



Family time with Dan, Maya and Joshua.

**T**he guy is a superstar in my opinion. Ed was so much more hands on and took us step by step through the process.

— David Kerber, client

to the zoo. Just like other parents, it's the kids' interests, rather than our own." He isn't into sports much and I couldn't get him to commit to any team, although one of the people I spoke to said he believed Ed was a Cubs fan "in his heart."

Talking about technology, Ed said, "Everyone was worried about the Internet removing us; it was going to take over the transaction completely and there would be no use for an agent." We concurred, of course that didn't happen. You just can't beat the personal touch. "We've adjusted and redefined ourselves. We act more like consultants today. We have a lot of knowledge and a lot of expertise where people really rely on us, especially in a market like right now. That is of paramount importance; guidance, finessing and negotiating is really helping assist our clients with our insight and experience. You can't get parties to negotiate on the Internet. The Internet also can't finesse the feelings between the parties, or bring the parties to a meeting of the minds when buyers and sellers are on different pages." He agrees that technology is a phenomenal aspect of the business and probably has changed it more than anything else in the past 10 years. "But in some ways, it has made us grow as agents a lot more than it has in some other ways."

We discussed commissions and Ed made an interesting point. It was my thinking there might be a lot of, well, negotiating about commissions now. "The way the market is right now, a lot of commissions are going up at this time because the responsibilities are much more difficult in this type of market. Our role in the job is now much harder than it was four or five years ago." John McClintock interceded with, "Ed is excellent at interpreting data, so it's one thing to look at information online that consumers can easily find, but they really need someone who knows what's going on in the general market with buyers and sellers."

On why he has remained with Coldwell Banker his entire career: "I've always been very happy with Coldwell Banker. They have always provided a very strong backbone to the business and it has allowed me to grow my

**W**hat really stands out about him? His customer service.

— Steve Rasmussen, client

own business the way I want to. It has allowed me to go in the direction I want. The management is great, and Fran is another example of where top management is phenomenal. She has great ideas and also takes the company in a new direction. They let me conduct my business the way I want it to be, and allow me to do it very well."

On virtual tours: "I think they're very important, but I think sometimes they distort the imagery and distort the property. As an agent, we have to make sure technology doesn't make decisions for us. A lot of buyers will make decisions based on a virtual tour, and as an agent, you know the properties are different than they appear. This

is why trust is so very, very important in a client-agent relationship."

Ed tells the story of a client he had years ago looking for a property at a start-up price range. "It was a boom time and there wasn't much available. We looked for a long time and it was frustrating. When we finally found something, it was the worst place imaginable. We had three different showings, and finally, I called in one of her friends, an attorney." Ed didn't ask her along because of her profession. He wanted her to talk her friend out of the purchase because it just wasn't the right place. "Unfortunately," he laughs, "when we first walked in, the friend was very complimentary and I had to pull the friend aside and show her what was wrong with it." As it turned out, the building had huge problems that Ed says probably would have bankrupted them. "Any agent," he notes, "probably has tons of those stories."

On mortgages: "They're probably more in line today. Lending was a little too easy before." Advertising? "People are looking for information. In the newspapers, you put in one picture and a few lines. On the Internet, we can add unlimited amounts of photos with descriptions as long as desired. In my circle, no one looks at the newspaper ads, except sellers looking for their own ads." He is quick to declare, however, "both buyers and sellers have become much more knowledgeable about what is helping them and what is not."

Ed with son Joshua and daughter Maya.



Enjoying Alaska with the family in 2005.



Coldwell Banker was founded in 1906 by Colbert Coldwell, a young real estate agent, and was joined by Arthur Banker in 1914. It has evolved many times throughout the years, but its name and reputation stand firm. Today, Fran Broude is the President and COO of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage Chicago/Milwaukee. She works out of the corporate headquarters in Northbrook, but really knows her company. She states, “Although Ed works out of the Halsted Street office, I know him very well. I’m pretty passionate about Ed, both as a person and agent. Ed Jelinek, to me, represents what I consider the consummate real estate professional. He’s informed; he’s a specialist in the area he professes to be a specialist about. He is well networked both within our company and the real estate industry, which is important because some of your clients have needs beyond your ability. He is extremely personable, and one of his strong points is he’s a great listener. That helps him become a very good and efficient assessor of people’s needs and wants, because sometimes you may say what you need, but that isn’t exactly what you really need, or are clear on what you can afford. Ed is a very skilled Realtor because he possesses those qualities.” Throughout the many changes in the company, Ed has always remained one of the top 100, or even 50, top agents out of 4,600 agents. He’s been a consistent member of the Coldwell Banker President’s Premier Club. He is certainly performance oriented. “He is highly respected with a great deal of his business based on referrals, sometimes as a result of coming from other Realtors because they don’t

**One of the things I like about Ed and his team is, first and foremost, they are there as more than just Realtors. They pay attention to me and are an equal part of what I do.**

service Ed’s area. His reputation is very important to him and he never disregards communications from others and replies almost immediately. If he doesn’t have the information at hand, he will let you know that it is forthcoming.”

I have quoted John McClintock, who heads the Lincoln Park office, throughout the article, but those were only a few random statements. He actually had much more to say. When we were talking about trust, he added, “Ed has developed a very high level of trust with his clients. He’s done that with the level of service that he offers. He is in constant communication with his clientele. If you ever call Ed, he gets back to you within minutes. Clients know this is a guy who is willing to do anything to get the property sold. Ed’s passion and dedication are unparalleled. He is one of our top agents in the city; the consummate professional who truly has his client’s interests at heart. He knows the market like the back of his hand and knows how to price property.

— Victor Bohnert, developer

He is a top negotiator. He also has excellent relationships with other brokers and gets things done very quickly. Ed is a great example of the type of professional that we have in our office.”

I started by saying Ed Jelinek has the best of both worlds. I am going to close with a quote from Fran Broude, because it is so apropos: “He’s a star in a very quiet, gentle way.” ■

*For more information, please call (312) 999-0321*