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KELLER WILLIAMS

REALTY GROUP IN COLLEGEVILLE



**TOM MCCOUCH AND
TERESE BRITTINGHAM**

PHOTOS BY STYLISH IMAGES



A Regional Success Story 20 Years in the Making

By Kathy Hunt

While mattresses, hand sanitizer and meal kits may have sold briskly in 2020, they were far from the top of last year's consumer wish list. According to the financial and business news website *Business Insider*, what Americans wanted most during the pandemic was a different place to call home. Record low mortgage rates, the need for home office space, and a desire for a backyard oasis fueled people's passion for home ownership. In August 2020 alone six million houses sold, which was the highest annualized rate since 2006. It represented a ten percent increase in home sales since August 2019.



THE NEW KW OFFICE IN COLLEGEVILLE



figure out their motivation, what they want to do and where they want to go. Full-time. Part-time. There's a place for everyone at KW," Brittingham said.

In addition to first-hand knowledge and support the agency offers an on-site productivity coach to work with new agents to ensure that they enter the market at the top of their game. The company also presents online, on-demand training courses and 30 training sessions each month. Since the coronavirus pandemic began, the latter events have been held on Zoom and Facebook Live as well as in person at the Collegeville office. Among the topics covered and archived on the KW website are "social media strategies for real estate agents during the pandemic," and "how to hold a virtual event for your real estate client."

Regarding the pandemic, Brittingham said, "We were really mentored well by KW International and knew that there was a shift coming. Right away we had a Zoom meeting every single evening, going over new, daily updates from the governor, giving our agents a place to be together, and letting them know that they could shift and pivot. So, while other agencies closed down, KW was able to continue on virtually."

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In spite of the enthusiasm for home ownership, many find the prospect of searching for a house daunting. There are so many questions to ask, so many factors to consider. What will the neighborhood, and neighbors, be like? Is the property in a flood zone or an area prone to natural disasters? How old are the appliances, roof and house? And just how much money can I safely spend?

Helping to answer those questions and ease the anxiety of house hunting are the skilled agents of Keller Williams Realty Group, 400 Arcola Rd Suite A5, in Collegeville. Part of Keller Williams' international Real Estate franchise, the agency represents residential and commercial properties in Montgomery, Chester, Bucks, Berks, Delaware and Lehigh counties and in Philadelphia. The agency operates from its new, 22,000-square-foot space in Collegeville as well as from its office in Quakertown.

Another aspect that attracted Brittingham and McCouch to Keller Williams was its "WI4C2TES" belief system. The acronym stands for and emphasizes the following: win-win or no deal; integrity; customers always come first; commitment in all things; communication — seek first to understand; creativity — ideas before results; teamwork; trust; equity opportunities for all; and success results through people. This approach guides how Keller Williams associates do business, and how they treat one another and their clients. "We make sure we're true to our mission and vision and that we treat everyone in a win-win relationship," Brittingham said. "That's why we have a great reputation in the industry."

When Brittingham and McCouch opened Keller Williams Realty, they had 12 agents. Almost 19 years later they are the major market shareholder in

Southeastern Pennsylvania and proudly manage a team of 254 agents.

"Our agents know there is an opportunity for growth in KW," Brittingham said. "We teach them how to aggressively market, how to budget, how to plan ahead. Tom and I are their mentors and one of the things that Tom and I are good at, we are really great salespeople and realtors. We know how to price a property. We know how to market a property. We know how to get a seller the best amount of money possible. We know how to treat people with respect and dignity and get clients for life. We share all of this with our agents. We give them support and help them grow into a career," she said, adding that, although they do have a team structure, Keller Williams Realty also has individual agents. "Not everyone has to be on a team. We do an analysis with each new agent to

Going with Keller Williams was the best decision ever made

With 25 years of working in real estate together, friends and broker Terese Brittingham and Tom McCouch founded Keller Williams Realty Group in 2002.

"We had been the top agents in our previous company for several years running before we decided to open our own real estate firm," Terese explains. "The step into KW was the best decision we ever made. Several franchises had opened up to us, but we chose KW because of their values — God, family and business — and having a work-life balance, or, as I like to call it, a work-life counterbalance, because you just can't balance everything equally. But there is a nice counterbalance and flow at KW," she said, adding, "It's hard to believe we have been in this business for 25 years!"



254 AGENTS STRONG!

COVER STORY

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Hot market for sellers

While a large portion of Americans looked at their cramped apartments and starter homes and craved more spacious living and working arrangements, another subset came to a different realization. For them it was time to downsize, get rid of that big house with the sprawling lawn, move closer to family, or just live more simply. Keller Williams Realty has been there for them, too.

"Right now, listings are the name of the game," Brittingham said. "It's a great time for sellers because they are getting such a wonderful return on their investment. We're selling homes for higher dollar volume and we're creating more market spur toward those listings. We really take it to that next level and get sellers the best value, which isn't always just numbers and price. It's also terms."

She noted a huge uptick in first time home buyers, resulting in a tremendous demand for homes priced at \$350,000 and under. Houses in this category may list and sell in the same day and for beyond the asking price. Sales of homes ranging from \$450,000 to \$750,000 are likewise quite brisk. The \$1 million-plus market is also doing well, yielding more sales than Brittingham has seen in a long time. The luxury market is one of the areas in which Keller Williams Realty specializes.

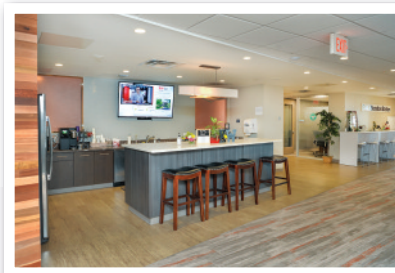
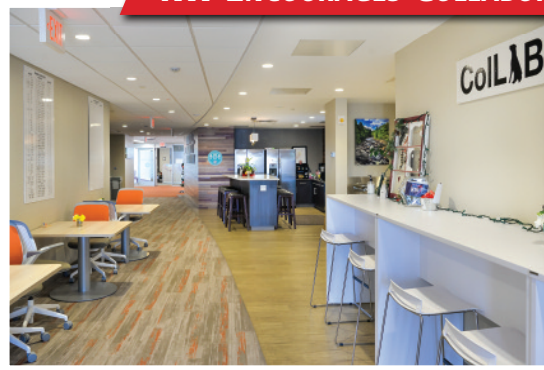
Presently, sellers have the law of supply and demand on their side. While the desire for homeownership keeps growing, the supply of available homes has not. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, at the end of July 2020, the number of single-family homes for sale in the U.S. was 1.2 million, the lowest inventory of available houses since July 1982. Homes that were on the market stayed there 18 days less than they had the previous year. As a result, multiple offers and bidding wars became more commonplace.

What these hungry buyers crave varies. "Homes along the (Schuylkill River) trail are doing really well," Brittingham said. "People are also looking for larger yards, maybe a pool, or something closer to a park. A lot of people are looking for things that better suits their needs. Some people have downsized and are looking for smaller homes. Many are upsizing. We haven't seen the full scale of that yet," she said. "We're going to see a really strong spring market."

She added that a large number of their buyers are choosing to remain local and



Terese and Tom give their agents support and help them grow into a career.



stay close to their old neighborhoods. They simply want a different type of house from the one in which they currently live. There are those, too, who want to move out of urban areas and "be where there are trees." She estimated a ten percent increase from two years ago in the number of city dwellers looking to relocate to the suburbs. She said that, even if buyers are paying a little more than they would have a year ago, low interest rates are compensating for that increase. "It's a good move on both sides. It's this unique period of time."

Because of coronavirus concerns and restrictions, the Keller Williams Realty agents have had to get creative with showing their listings. Traditional open houses,

where clients walk through and check out the features of a home, do not take place. Instead, sellers snap photos and/or take videos of the interior and exterior of their homes. These images are uploaded, organized and provided with voiceovers as needed. If sellers have questions about staging their homes, taking photos, and other aspects of selling, they can consult their agent and the Keller Williams website.

Virtual viewings are available online, and on the Keller Williams mobile app. Interested parties can view the listings at

any time without endangering their own or others' health and safety. In the end, these virtual house tours have proved much more efficient and convenient for both buyer and seller.

The Keller Williams' app works on both Android and IOS devices. It supplies ad-free, location-based content. "If you drive a certain route to work every day, it will let you know when houses on that route come up for sale. It always tags back to the agent who sent you the app and keeps agent at the top of the referral chain," Brittingham said.

According to Brittingham, 70 percent of Keller Williams Realty's sales are residential. The remaining 30 percent are commercial. Keller Williams' overall top commercial agent, Buddy Martin, works out of the Collegeville office. The agency is currently growing in the commercial sector and looking for good commercial agents to join the business.

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COVER STORY

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What makes a top-notch real estate agency?

In 2020 Keller Williams was ranked 22 out of the top 200 global franchises by Entrepreneur Media. The same year *Forbes* deemed it America's sixth best employer for women and America's 25th best employer for new graduates. Already the website *Glassdoor* has cited it among the top 35 best places to work in 2021. What makes the parent company and Brittingham's and McCouch's franchise such a success? Obviously, hard work, motivation and dedication are fundamental. So, too, are employee support and growth as well as agency planning and foresight. "Tom and I have always had big vision. We're always looking for a way forward," Brittingham said.

The relationships that they have developed in the community likewise play an important role. As a board member of the TriCounty Area Chamber of Commerce, Brittingham served as the chair during the economic downturn of 2007 to 2009. During this period, she formed strong connections with leading businesses in Pottstown, the Coventries, Reading, Limerick and



The firm is actively involved with the pediatric cancer charity Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation and encourages volunteering in the community.

Collegeville. These close relationships have led to increased business and a higher profile in the community. Brittingham's involvement with a local Vistage group has also helped to elevate Keller Williams Realty's presence. Vistage is a global CEO coaching and peer advisory organization for small to midsize businesses.

Philanthropy is another way that Keller Williams Realty nurtures relationships and positively impacts the region. The firm

remains actively involved with the pediatric cancer charity Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation and encourages volunteering in the community.

Beyond its strong, invested team of agents, healthy community relations and philanthropic activities, Keller Williams Realty possesses yet another selling point — it offers one-stop shopping for all of its clients. With Keller Williams, buyers don't have to search around for mortgages and

insurance. The agency provides in-house mortgage, title and insurance services, all of which reduces the stress and work surrounding a home purchase.

As for how Brittingham learned to lead a top-notch real estate agency, she credited her mother, in part. "My mom owned a real estate franchise that I used to work for prior to starting my own. She was my mentor my whole life. I got to watch her and saw how she grew a business early on. She had a woman-owned business back in the late '70s, early '80s, which was not as heard of back then. I was really inspired by her and I learned a lot from her on how to treat relationships and how important it is that every relationship is nurtured. This isn't a transaction. It's a friendship. You stay in touch with people. I really cherish people and relationships and I learned that from my mom," Brittingham said. She added that her mom now works for her at Keller Williams Realty.

Whether you are interested in working in real estate, hope to relocate to the region, or have a home to sell, the agents at Keller Williams Realty in Collegeville would love to help you realize your goal. Call or send an email and find out how they can best serve your needs. You can contact the agency at 610.792.5900 or at teresekw@gmail.com, and please visit <https://kwrealtgroup.com/> and <https://www.kwseven.com/>.

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