

Pierce County's Oldest Real Estate Brokerage Turns 60

Harold A. Allen Company Realtors®, Pierce County's oldest real estate brokerage, turned 60 years old on Oct. 1.

Founded in 1940 by Harold A. Allen Sr., "Allen's Finer Homes" was a blend of real estate, advertising, sales and financial professionals. Today—and an estimated 18,000 homes later—the third-generation independent brokerage is still helping home buyers buy and home sellers sell. It also operates a full-service rental division, managing more than 200 units throughout greater Pierce County.

"We're still doing well," said co-owner Harold Allen Jr., who, after 52 years turned over the reins of the company to his son-in-law, Mike Larson, two years ago. The ups and downs of the economy and interest rates, Allen said, have played somewhat into the highs and lows of the company's history. "We didn't accept that the market was bad in the '70s," he said, remembering 17 and 18 percent interest rates in the late 1970s. "We used some innovative financing ideas and did better than most, quite outstanding, actually."

Originally located in downtown Tacoma at 11th and Pacific in the Rust Building, Harold Allen Sr.'s formation of the company was "the result of many years of experience and observation," he said in a News Tribune article in 1940. "I know that Tacoma's foundations are sound. It's growth and development have always been healthy—and steady."

Allen Sr.'s associations with Tacoma business actually began in 1924 when he came to Tacoma to establish the Allen Motor Company. He served two terms as president of the Tacoma Chamber of Commerce and was active in numerous civic enterprises, including promotion of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Following Allen Sr.'s untimely death in 1945, his widow, Martha Albertson Allen, managed the company and moved the office to 729 St. Helens Avenue. Allen Jr. joined the company in 1947 after completing his military service and attending Stanford University. He expanded the company to Lakewood in 1948, and bought the corner lot that the current office sits on at Gravelly Lake Drive and Lake Grove Street for \$12,000.

Larson now runs the company and acts as President and Designated Broker. "I married into the company," said Larson, who started with the company in 1995. "I was working for the REALTOR® association and Harold made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. It really wasn't a tough decision, though. Growing up in Lakewood I saw Allen For Sale signs all over. And working for the Association of REALTORS®, I heard nothing but great things about Harold Allen Company. As I got to know Harold, it was easy to understand why the company had been so successful. I know it's a cliché, but the philosophy at Harold Allen Company has always been to take care of the client."

The task necessary for continuing success is keeping up with and implementing technology. "Ours is an information industry," Larson said. "The ability to efficiently deliver that information to the client will, I feel, make or break a lot of companies. Keeping pace with technology, not only for the public, but also the agents, is the real challenge." Posted 10/5/00. Archived 10/25/00; 4/18/01.