

Mark Gonzales, Realtor Magazine's '30 under 30'

Giving his best in the worst of times

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL / AJPress

IT's all about attitude, he says.

When the real estate market finally crashed, a dead morbid vibe filled the room of his real estate office, recalls Fil-Am realtor Mark Gonzalez.

"Everyone was depressed because their deals were getting pulled because financing was falling through," Gonzalez recalls. "Banks were not providing money to purchase homes or already in escrow and I was like, 'what are we going to do? What am I going to do?'"

Nationwide, real estate and loan agents asked themselves that same question. Experts had been predicting that the housing bubble was going to burst and that day finally arrived in 2007.

Housing prices sank and many people's attitude bottomed along with it.

But when some people looked at the real estate profession as a dead market, Gonzalez, an agent with Rodeo Realty in Sherman Oaks, saw an opportunity.

He says he could have easily followed his friends to pursue a corporate 9 to 5 job but he bucked the trend and stuck with his passion in real estate.

He hired a life coach and remembered what his mom always told him about the United States of America.

"My mom always told me, 'this is a land of opportunity and that you could take advantage of that opportunity if you go out and get it. If you really believe that you can do it and succeed.'"

"Yes, it's a bad market but people are always buying and selling real estate and there's always going to be opportunities no matter what market where in or what the extenuating circumstances are," he says.

Sticking with real estate especially in these dire economic times has paid off for the 26-year-old Fil-Am.

Last year, the California State University, Northridge (CSUN) graduate closed 16 transactions totaling \$6.2 million—earning him recognition in *Realtor Magazine's* "30 under 30" list as one of the top 30 agents under 30 years of age. He was recognized as one of the top seven percent of all real estate agents nationwide.

"I basically tripled my volume in sales in the worst market that we've had in the last 10 to 15 years," he says.

"It was surreal," he says about being on the list. "It feels like all the hardwork is finally paying off. I almost wanted to cry because I was so happy. This was one of my goals when I first began in this business."

No excuses

Born in the US, Gonzalez followed real estate early on as a child. He remembers the first time his parents bought their first home when he was four years old. At eight, he was watching the real estate buyers guide TV show on cable.

By the time he was attending college at CSUN, he knew his life path. He was already a practicing real estate agent while he was studying Business & Real Estate. He specialized in Real Estate and Business Law, Real Estate Finance, Business Communication, and Economics at CSUN.

He purchased his first home at the age of 19.

Like many people in mid-2000, he admits that he pursued a real estate profession for "the money" but when meeting with clients he later realized the importance of providing them their own home.

"It wasn't just for the money," he says. "It was making an impact; giving keys to a first time homebuyer, and seeing the feeling that they get and witnessing the excitement and the accomplishment that they've made."

Three years into the real estate profession, the market burst.

It was a difficult time, he says.

He recalls working for 12-hour days, trying to sell homes with no buyers.

"It was pretty devastating. Here I was a young rookie in the business and the minute that I get my foot in the door, the market crashes," he recounts.

With help from his life coach, Donna Lee, Gonzalez began to see the upside in the down economy.

He started to write down his goals and believing in them. He changed his negative attitude about the market into a positive one.

He also remembered about his parent's struggles in the Philippines and how they came here to the US so that he and his little brother could benefit.

"My mom came from an extremely poor family," he says. "The story she told us is that she grew up with nothing. She told us for dinner, they'd eat a half of a *tuyo* and a little bit of rice. Those are things she constantly reminded us. She says, 'look I didn't have much but look at where I'm at. Look at where hardwork has brought me.'"

"That's what inspires me to make it," he says. "It's our way of repaying our mom and dad for working hard to give us a life that we may not necessarily have had if we were living in the Philippines."

Innovative marketing

One of the ways, Gonzalez has boosted his real estate sales is by using social networking sites to advertise his listings.

On his website www.marksellsla.com, Gonzalez has a profile in social networking sites Youtube, facebook, twitter, and Flickr, among others.

He'll also make a television appearance on August 16 where he is featured on an episode of the national HGTV series *Good Buy/Bad Buy*, where he will provide a buyer with real estate advice.

He also says that he is set to make an appearance on TLC's show *Stager Invasion* where he will provide tips on how home sellers can stage their home to get buyers interested. ■



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565K new jobless claims, lowest level since Jan.

WASHINGTON—The number of newly laid-off workers filing initial claims for jobless benefits last week fell to lowest level since early January, largely due to changes in the timing of auto industry layoffs.

Continuing claims, meanwhile, unexpectedly jumped to a record-high. While layoffs are slowing, jobs remain scarce and the unemployment rate is rising, which some economists worry could weaken or delay a recovery. The unemployment rate rose to 9.5 percent last month and is expected to top 10 percent by the end of this year.

Separately, many retail chains reported disappointing June sales, as consumers are saving more and spending less.

New claims for unemployment insurance plummeted by 52,000 to a seasonally-adjusted 565,000, the Labor Department said Thursday. That's significantly below analysts' expectations of 605,000 for the week

ending July 4, according to Thomson Reuters. The last time new claims were below 600,000 was week of Jan. 24.

"This is not as positive as it looks," Jennifer Lee, an economist at BMO Capital Markets, wrote in a note to clients. "There are a number of special factors at play here, including the fact that the holiday-shortened week skewed the data."

The drop resulted partly from technical factors, a Labor Department analyst said. Auto layoffs that normally take place in early July, as factories are retooled to build the next year's models, occurred in the spring instead as General Motors Corp. and Chrysler LLC implemented sweeping restructuring plans.

The department's seasonal adjustment process expected a large increase in claims from auto workers and other manufacturing workers, the analyst said. Since that didn't occur, seasonally-adjusted claims fell.

The non-seasonally adjusted figure increased by about 17,000 to 577,506 initial claims.

The retail weakness cut across all sectors but hit mall-based clothing stores particularly hard. Companies also are cutting wages and jobs, limiting Americans' buying power.

The financial markets edged up in afternoon trading. The Dow Jones industrial average added about 5 points, while broader indices also ticked up.

Still, continuing claims jumped 159,000 to 6.88 million, the highest on records dating from 1967. Analysts had expected 6.71 million continuing claims.

Continuing claims had fallen in two of the previous three weeks. The data lag initial claims by a week.

Economists are closely watching the level of first-time claims for signs the economy will recover in the second half of this year, as many predict. ■

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