



WEICHERT, REALTORS® — 1st Team: One Stop, Many Solutions

by Stacy Schwan • photography by Kelli B. Dixon Photography



If you haven't heard of WEICHERT, REALTORS®—1st Team, you are in for a surprise. Although new to California, Weichert, REALTORS® is one of the largest privately owned real estate companies in the U.S., and its franchise arm, Weichert Real Estate Affiliates, Inc., boasts more than 280 offices

in 27 states. WEICHERT, REALTORS®—1st Team may be a new name about town, but franchise owners Irene Borz and Gary Likhatchev are experienced, savvy, and equipped to play hard.

Born to Succeed

How WEICHERT, REALTORS®—1st Team came to be is one of those hard-work-meets-opportunity stories that can rekindle one's faith in the American Dream. Irene Borz is the definition of a self-made professional. At age 19 she was already selling property in Moscow, taking advantage of economic reforms brought about by Perestroika. Her philosophy was then as it is now: "You can succeed if you work hard, if you set good goals, and if you devote all of your energy to the customer." But in 1996, when the Russian reform movement became untenable, Irene and partner Gary decided to seek the American Dream in, well, America. They arrived with two young children, two suitcases, and a massive determination to succeed. Although Borz knew only a few words of English, she immediately felt at home. "I feel like I was born here. The moment I stepped off plane I felt this is my country."

Likhatchev landed a job with Apple Computer while, despite the language barrier, Borz set her sights on getting her real estate license, pronto. She befriended an agent in San Francisco who helped her learn English in exchange for driving her around on business. In just a few months, Borz obtained her license. She joined RE/MAX Realty, where she achieved Platinum Club status. In May 2003, two years after becoming American citizens, Borz opened BorzRealty with Likhatchev as general manager. Two years later they had 17 agents on board.

"This is My Company"

In 2006, when the market began to show signs of slowing, the ever-vigilant Borz looked for innovative ways to keep her healthy company thriving. The results were July 2006 production levels double that of July 2005. Suddenly, franchises started taking notice. In all, Borz and Likhatchev received offers from more than 20 franchises. "We didn't even consider it," Borz says. "We were a 'no franchise' company." But then she heard about Weichert, REALTORS® and her interest was piqued. She learned that *Entrepreneur Magazine* had listed Weichert Real Estate Affiliates as one of the Top Ten New Franchises in 2005

and as one of the Top 100 Fastest Growing Companies. Impressed, she and Likhatchev traveled to Weichert's East Coast headquarters, where they soon changed their minds about their "no franchise" rule. "I had the same feeling when I stepped into Weichert headquarters as when I stepped off the plane in America, that this is my company" Borz recalls.

Weichert's philosophy mirrored Borz's own; superior service to the client is primary, and superior service is made possible by well-developed supporting systems. But Weichert's sheer size enabled it to offer clients something that, alone, Borz could not: a virtual one-stop-shop for everything from financing to insurance to home protection plans and more. Add to that a vast array of home services such as staging, cleaning, moving, even utility hookups, and both Borz and Likhatchev were sold.

"Weichert had all the features of a company that I was building in my own business: training for agents; a wide range of services for the customers; the highest level culture; every tool to die for," says Borz. "I came back very excited, and it's an excitement that stays with me. When I implement the tools, I see the results."

All Systems "Go"

On November 8, 2006, BorzRealty held its grand reopening as WEICHERT, REALTORS®—1st Team. Although Weichert, REALTORS® has more than 18,400 sales associates in nearly 470 company-owned and franchised offices throughout the U.S., WEICHERT, REALTORS®—1st Team has the distinct advantage of being the first Weichert® franchise in Silicon Valley. That means all internet leads come directly to them. "Weichert, REALTORS® has a unique system for internet lead generation," says Likhatchev. "We have a department that provides real time responses to requests and instantly connects prospective clients with local agents." Likhatchev believes that state-of-the-art tools plus advanced training and support will translate into high levels of efficiency and productivity for agents serious about their success.

Seeing Borz and Likhatchev move about their beautiful *feng shui*'d office suite, it's hard to imagine them being anything but successful. Likhatchev, the supportive mentor, and Borz, the high-octane go-getter, radiate an energy and enthusiasm. By employing Weichert, REALTORS® proven recipe for success, they are visualizing the powerful team of top-notch agents they anticipate having by this time next year—agents whose very names will be equated with quality service.

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