

Team Marshall Cottage Country Real Estate:

Building CONNECTIONS with people ...



Jim, Ben and Cameron Marshall.

(Photo by Dave Dravsky)

and connecting them with Parry Sound

Much has changed about the world around us since 1985, when Jim Marshall received his real estate licence: technology, trends and the region of Parry Sound itself. But although the ‘tools’ of the real estate trade have evolved – enabling transactions to be nurtured and sealed via smartphones and satellite images – in the end, the nature of dealing with clients hasn’t.

“It’s still a ‘people business’ and about relationships with people, even though the *way* we transact and communicate has changed completely,” Jim explains, recalling the mid-1980s, when a pencil on a rotary phone was equivalent to ‘speed dial.’

“This morning I was going to reach a client and I had to remember: did she reach me by text, a Facebook message,

email or voice mail? Back then it was just a phone call ... or a letter.”

Jim passes along a photo of himself in a suit at 21, standing beside his old Pontiac Acadian, the car he first used when he started working as a realtor. “I had to look respectable because I looked all of 14,” he laughs.

Initially interested in pursuing a career as a teacher, he eventually took economics at Trent University – but after a year and a half, he came home to Parry Sound to rethink things. It was December, 1984 when he saw a real estate commercial on TV showing a bunch of people wearing matching polyester suits with wide lapels, lifting a house.

“I thought, ‘I can sell real estate!’” Jim approached a local broker and inquired about job possibilities. By April, Jim

had written his real estate exam and in May, 1985 he had his licence.

Although Jim enjoyed gaining experience with four brokerages in his early career, he says “the best thing I did was join RE/MAX in 2004. This organization overall and this office was the best thing to happen to my career. And I tell John Sallinen, our Broker of Record, at least once a year and shake his hand and thank him for having me here. I’m very, very loyal when it comes to stuff like that when people give me a chance. It’s a fantastic organization.”

While technological advances such as Google and Facebook mean clients can learn a lot about a real estate agent before choosing one, what is still paramount is that both parties work with what Jim calls “commonality.”

“You have to find someone you can work with. Someone who is a good ‘click’ in terms of personality. I’m not *selling* you a cottage or house. We’re going to *buy* one. It’s a cooperative thing. There are decisions you are going to have to make, that I can help you with, but in the end, it’s *your* decision.”

It’s a winning formula – making that important connection with buyers and sellers – that is not lost on the next generation of realtors, his sons Ben and Cameron, who have both joined ‘Team Marshall’ in the last three years. The three agents use their varied skill sets, life experiences and knowledge to offer solutions to people making some of the biggest decisions of their lives.

“It’s a personality business, where we have one client that might connect with my dad, one that might connect with Ben, one with me,” says Cameron, adding that the three realtors collectively bounce around ideas and discuss who will be ‘click’ with a client.

And new technology helps.

“We’ll have a situation where we have a client from the city looking for a specific property and these places will go in a day – such as a place on Lake Joe or Lake Rosseau,” says Ben. “So if something hits the market, within 10 minutes or so we’ve got the client on the phone and we’re going through the preliminaries, such as the satellite images of the property. Then once I get there, I’m on the phone doing a ‘Facetime’ showing. If it’s good, then the client might be coming up the highway with a deposit that day.” Other online tools help Team Marshall gain more insight into the property, such as the West Parry Sound Geography Network app, which illustrates lot boundaries to establish the attractiveness of the listing.

The “team” approach offers myriad advantages in terms of not only providing the best connection, but also allows for “multi-Marshall” service, with the support of Team



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Marshall office administrator Audrey Nutter, who has worked with Jim for nine years. While the house-selling season is somewhat balanced year-round, the cottage real estate scene is a frenzy from the time the ice goes out until the snow moves in. So having a trio of realtors (and family) working together is of benefit, especially on those weekends when the team is dealing with seven people wanting to look at cottages.

"Trying to get a day off can be challenging, so it's much easier to work as a team," says Jim. He uses an example recently when Ben was busy at a dental appointment, so Cameron and Jim took the call and were on site for a client in 30 minutes. "One of us can look up properties, one can check it out first hand, and we all bring different perspectives for our clients ... My perspective isn't *always* right," he smiles.

And the perspective and approach is widely different, depending on whether someone is in the market for a house, versus shopping for a cottage.

"It's two different markets," says Jim. "With the residential market, you might be dealing with a need, as in, 'I need a home because I start a new job' on a certain date. As opposed to, 'We want a cottage. We have friends who are on Otter Lake. We'd like to be close by our friends.'"

Some aren't as specific about location but many *are* attracted to Parry Sound District because it has the reputation as being a quieter version of Muskoka.

"Development on the lakes is going to be a little less. You get a little more of the rock and 'Group of Seven' topography. The iconic Canadian landscape: rock and the windswept pine, clear waters ... that's out here on the Big Sound. (These clients) want to be on Georgian Bay; they have a history perhaps of renting

cottages here, or have friends and family here, they like boating, fishing ... and they like the big water."

Ben adds, "A house you need to buy and be in it, but a cottage decision might take two to three years. A client may want to be on Otter Lake, on Goddard Crescent, with a south view of the lake. Such a cottage might come up once in five years."

"And some people will wait," notes Cameron.

Team Marshall works with people to find these places they are "laser-focused" on and a lot of the process is managing expectations for people.

"When something comes up for sale – whether it's a house, cottage, waterfront lots – we always tell people we are dealing with an extremely finite product," says Jim. "There are only so many homes, so many cottages ... So we just tell people if you are looking at this specific price range in this particular part of town – or on this particular lake – you only have four to five listings a year that will come up."

"It's all based on empirical evidence. We just go back to the market and see ... they're

asking this much, here's the last three to four sales over the last six months that seems to indicate this is an accurate value ... or not."

When buying a cottage, Jim says the process is one of "self-discovery" for people because they don't know what *they* want beyond, 'I want a cottage.'

"Okay, so 'What is the size of your family? Do you have parents that will visit?' are questions that need to be asked," he says. "We'll be very proactive with clients; if they have parents in their late 70s, you don't want 92 steps down to the cottage or down to the lake. Be forthright, transparent and authentic. If someone calls us about one of our listings and asks, 'What's the waterfront like?' we'll tell them – it's rocky, it's deep or it's weedy, whatever it is. We want to be up front with people and that's one of the things that has been a cornerstone of my business.

"You are going to ask, 'Is this is a good cottage for me?' ... and I'm going to give you my opinion, in an objective way – if you give me permission to do that. There are pros and the cons and I let the clients make the decision."

There are always the trade-offs when buying a cottage, Ben notes. "If you're under half a million dollars, and you want to be on a year-round road, you're usually into some kind of a trade-off. You might be walking down a slope to the water, some parts of the shore may be weedy. It may not be a traditional treed lot, it could be like a farmer's field. Then there's the level of finishing of the cottage itself.

"But we find when we work with people, they might say, 'Oh, crappy old wood panelling ... but I have a great lot.' Or, 'I need to have my nicely finished interior, and I don't mind being on a small lake.'"

If someone is looking for advice on the market outside the Parry Sound region, Team Marshall does what's best for the client. "We know our area very well, we stick to our area," says Ben. "We refer outside of it. If there's something we know, we know it. If we don't, we're not making up answers. We're either calling another agent to figure out what's going on, or we're referring the person to another agent."

But why *wouldn't* someone want to be here? The Marshalls are big Parry Sound boosters.

"We really act as ambassadors for our area," says Jim, who just served a term on Parry Sound Council. "We just came back from the Cottage Life Show and we're really proud of Parry Sound, one of the prettiest towns in Canada."

Ben, 28 and Cameron, 25 attended post-



secondary school outside the area and say they are both happy to have returned. And they are seeing their former high school classmates realizing that Parry Sound – where you are a 10-minute drive from any lake or body of water and two hours away from a city such as Toronto – is a great place to live, work and play.

And thanks to the four-laning of Highway 400 several years ago, Team Marshall believes more and more people are realizing just how close they are to experiencing Parry Sound. Some are buying cottages for current and future enjoyment, after selling their GTA homes and perhaps renting a condo in the city for now. Others are a young demographic, deciding that an investment in a cottage in Parry Sound is an investment that will last a lifetime for their family, or that they can purchase an affordable home here and telecommute 80 per cent of the time, thanks to advancing technology.

With a bustling local economy and many successful new businesses, a deep water port that offers access to the globe and an enviable lifestyle on or near Georgian Bay or an area lake, Team Marshall believes Parry Sound has a lot to offer and a lot of possibilities they can show you.

"It's the best business I know and I love it," enthuses Jim, who has been involved in many official positions in the industry, including twice as president of the local real estate board, and sitting as a director on the MLS & Technology Committee of the Canadian Real Estate Association.

Down the road, perhaps, Jim says he might take a few steps back from the business, but not until he feels he's losing his "edge," equating it to a sports metaphor. "You know

when it's time. I think it's the same in this business. And you don't know until you get there.

"I can see myself at some point, maybe in five to 10 years' time, doing less and maybe working for my sons, switching the roles around," he says, such as using his boat to help take out a client on a Saturday.

And perhaps he'll have more 'down time' for his other interests: playing his guitar or piano and making music; travelling with his wife, Kim, a retired school teacher; pitching for his son's softball team; and reading some good books.

"We keep ourselves busy. Life here is good."

**Team
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