

Jeff Beals spreads the word about Omaha's growth and development

Editor's Note: This is one of a series of profiles featuring Midlands Business Journal 40 Under 40 award winners — entrepreneurs, business owners, managers and professional men and women under 40 years of age. The 2004 awards were co-sponsored by Gateway Community Bank, Stinson Morrison Hecker law firm and Right Management Consultants.

by Natalie J.S. Hadley

As vice president of Coldwell Banker Commercial World Group, Jeff Beals has a job that covers human resources, marketing, government regulations, compliance, continuing education, project management and day-to-day office administration.

His calling, however, has become spreading the word about Omaha's growth and development through print, radio, academics and public speaking.

"When I started college, journalism fascinated me — the role and influence of the media in society," said Beals, who grew up in Omaha and graduated from Westside High School. "I loved writing and telling a story, but I wanted to be able to make decisions and provide leadership. I wanted to make my own news, and good journalists don't do that."

Although he decided not to be a reporter, Beals completed his journalism degree at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. During that time, he worked for the university in new student orientation and recruitment. While earning a master's in political science, he completed graduate assistantships in recruiting and in orientation leader training.

"I liked working in higher education, so I decided to make it my career," Beals said.

He took a job as assistant director of administration for the College of Santa Fe in New Mexico.

"It was a fun job," he said. "I traveled all over the country recruiting. But I wanted to get closer to my hometown, so after about a year I took a job as director of enrollment management at Clarkson College in Omaha."

Beals held the job at Clarkson, an affiliate of the Nebraska Medical Center that offers bachelor's and master's degrees in health care fields, for about three years. He was promoted to dean of student affairs and also taught political science part time.

After another three years, Beals started considering other career avenues.

"I became a dean at 29," he said. "Being a dean at a college is a pretty nice job; it's kind of insulated but high energy and fast paced. But I felt that if I didn't do something else, I would spend my whole life in higher education administration."

Beals began taking real estate classes.

"As a kid, I was always fascinated by construction and the development of cities," he said. "When my family would travel to other cities, I was always looking at them and how Omaha could be better. Most kids don't think about whether an intersection needs another turn lane."

In 2001 Beals joined a commercial real estate company owned by childhood friend Trenton Magid, who had just purchased a Coldwell Banker Commercial franchise. Beals became vice president of operations for the

company, which provides brokerage, property management and development services for retail, office and industrial real estate.

"I had kept journalism as my undergraduate major because I knew it would be helpful in any field, and I'm glad I did," Beals said. "As a college dean, I oversaw public relations and recruitment, and at Coldwell Banker Commercial World Group, I'm in charge of marketing."

His efforts to market the company have broadened into a passion for marketing Omaha's growth and development. About 18 months ago he and Magid started a radio talk show after each had been a guest on other talk shows and received positive feedback. The program, at 8 a.m. Saturdays on KKAR, doesn't cover the mechanics of commercial real estate.

"We discuss different subjects related to economic development, so it has a broader appeal," Beals said. "We talk about buildings under construction, businesses that are expanding, population growth, tourism, road construction. I have a folder of 150 topics we haven't even touched."

Guests on the show have included Lou Dobbs, David Sokol and Omaha Chamber of Commerce President David Brown, along with other business leaders and politicians.

"We do the show more to help Omaha than to help our company, although it has been the best marketing tactic we've ever used,"

Beals said.

He carries the show's message through the company's newsletter, his public speaking engagements, his work as a freelance writer and columnist and even his old stomping grounds, higher education.

"I was at a cocktail party and met a woman with a doctorate in real estate who was teaching at UNO," he said. "She invited me to be a guest speaker at her class. Shortly after that, her husband was transferred to Pennsylvania, and she recommended me to take over her real estate brokerage class."

The class, offered in the spring semester, has grown from nine students in 2003 to 18 in 2004 to 27 this year.

Beals' community involvement includes the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Metropolitan Community College, the Young Professionals Council, Millard Public Schools, the Boy Scout Learning For Life program and St. Paul's Lutheran Church. He is a member of the Omaha Commercial Real Estate Workshop planning committee.

Beals' wife, Stephanie Beals, is a senior risk analyst in commodities trading at ConAgra.



Jeff Beals in front of Coldwell Banker's new location ... "I loved writing and telling a story, but I wanted to be able to make decisions and provide leadership."