

In Times of Change

MY PERSPECTIVE - By Frank Pellegrini, Prairie Title CEO



The last time I wrote my column for ASSURANCE, in Spring, COVID-19 had not yet arrived in full force in our country, and terms like “social distancing” and “bending the curve,” were not yet in our lexicon. The economy was humming along and, though the real estate market

was uncertain, we were hopeful that 2020 would see improvements in our industry.

Our world has been completely upended in the interim. First, the virus hit like a storm in March, forcing governors and mayors to issue stay-at-home orders that affected businesses everywhere. Then, a corresponding collapse in the job base underpinning our economy caused tens of millions of Americans to lose their jobs. And just when we began to emerge from the stay-at-home orders and bring our economy back on line, the nation was hurtled into a chaotic scene precipitated by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

In Oak Park, where Mary and I live and work, the vandalism that occurred at the same time as peaceful

protests (not as part of the protests but as separate crimes) was felt when much damage was done in our neighboring Austin community as well as in Oak Park itself. Despite our large glass windows in front and high visibility on North Ave., Prairie Title was not physically touched by violence. And we are grateful for that.

But we are all touched to the depth of our souls by the tragedy that befell the Floyd family and other families before them, as well as the exceedingly fragile state of our nation.

Speaking for myself and Mary, we pray for enlightenment and a greater sense of understanding of the anguish felt by many of our fellow citizens. We pledge to do better, to be a part of the solution, to help bring healing to our nation and all who live side-by-side with us in this great country during this most tumultuous of times and beyond.

It will take time, but the economy will sort itself out as we continue to emerge from the pandemic, and the “normal” transfer of real estate will resume albeit in an increasingly altered format as the more closings become virtual. Our most important work now is to help bring our country to a better place. We will be working on that every day.

Title Companies: “Essential Businesses”

While many businesses across the United States closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, title and settlement companies across the country, deemed “essential businesses” by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, remained open.



A survey by the American Land Title Association found that 98 percent of respondents reported their office remained open during the crisis. Additionally, only six percent of those surveyed said they've temporarily ceased operations at any of their business locations.

“ALTA members and the title insurance industry have always cared deeply about the communities in which they live and work,” said Diane Tomb, ALTA chief executive officer. “Throughout the pandemic, ALTA members have developed innovative and safe ways to continue to make the American dream come true because the more than 120,000 title professionals across the country take pride in protecting their customers by ensuring that their home is theirs when they make one of the biggest financial decisions of their lives.”

Responding to “Stay-at-Home”

Prairie Title, along with title and settlement companies across the country, implemented new processes to help consumers complete their real estate and mortgage transactions in the midst of the pandemic and stay-at-home orders.

At Prairie Title, we adapted our closing practices virtually immediately once the stay-at-home order went into effect in Illinois. As the crisis began unfolding we also faced obstacles in trying to get transactions closed in the face of a groundswell of refinancings that began to arise in mid-winter. We altered how we close in the office and shifted our business model to include:

- Curbside closings at homes or at our offices
- Continued partnering with lenders for complete e-closings including e-notarizations



Prairie Title's Andrew Kuhn (right) practices social distancing with his borrowers, Andre and Colleen during the pandemic, keeping them and himself safe.

As Diane Tomb, ALTA's chief executive officer put it, speaking for the industry as a whole: “Protecting consumers remains the title insurance industry's top priority. From drive-thru closings to offering remote online notarization, the dedication to their customers is allowing families to close on new homes or take advantage of the low interest rates by refinancing their mortgages.”

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How We Coped

As move through the phases of re-opening in Illinois, we thought it would be fun if our Prairie family shared what they did as well as some thoughts that kept them going during the weeks of sheltering-in-place. With that in mind, we have postponed the next iteration of Prairie Faves until the Fall issue. Some of what occupied our time in between a deluge of refinancings that we completed while social distancing:

- A 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle helped one of our team members and her daughter get through the evenings and weekends. You will surely agree that this would be a dizzying test of nerves and perseverance to reproduce the Sistine Chapel on a dining table and keep track of all the pieces.
- Another mother told us she liked dancing and creating Tik Tok videos with her daughters. One young family enjoyed playing traditional games like UNO and Trivial Pursuit.
- A busy mother of three growing boys told us that one big positive take-away was the decrease in dirty laundry, which she attributes to the practice that the boys adopted of only changing clothes every four days.

- A favorite "quarantine purchase?" Noise-canceling headphones

We heard some very heartfelt expressions

- My favorite parts of quarantine: The thought of the earth healing. The peace and quiet and calm outside, especially at night. Bike riding around the neighborhood with no traffic. Spending time with my family in ways we never have.
- The worst parts of quarantine: What is actually going on in the world. The news. Not being able to see my grandson and daughter. Not seeing my family. Not seeing our friends. Not being able to go out to restaurants and bars. Not being able to go shopping with my friends. Those annoying masks.
- My family and I actually received a benefit from the quarantine. Prior to it, we only had the occasional opportunity to attend masses at Holy Name Cathedral. Now we have been provided with the consistent weekly opportunity to attend via the internet and/or Channel 7. In the past, you would rarely be able to see the Cardinal, but now he can be seen and heard every week.

Prairie Title's Andrew Kuhn told this heartwarming story in the midst of the pandemic:



Going into this closing, I wasn't sure I'd ever step foot inside (for obvious reasons), but even more so because this closing was rescheduled twice due to their lender not confirming Verifications of Employment on the day of the closing. So in general it was nice to be able finally see the family's faces.

The fun didn't stop there, as we then ventured to their back porch to sign documents and their two daughters decided to join in by channeling their inner Frida Kahlo. I was lucky enough to leave with one of their masterpieces.

Resources for Attorneys from Prairie Title



Prairie Secure –Go Paperless!

Our paperless system now allows you to access documents your or your clients may need in the future. Eliminate digging up that old paper file at tax time! Documents you can access through Prairie Secure include:

- Signed master settlement statements
- Waived commitments
- Recorded deeds
- City of Chicago Water Certifications
- City of Chicago Zoning Certifications (good for 12 months)

Through Prairie Secure, you also can upload:

- Closing documents
- Your closing statement
- Payoff letters
- Real estate commission statements

Prairie Secure offers 24/7 access to your title file in a secure environment you can always count on. Go to PrairieTitle.com and click on For Attorneys, then Prairie Secure. To sign up, contact your account representative.

If you do not yet have a user name and password, contact Natasha at nwojicki@prairietitle.com or 708-386-7900.



Rate Estimator

Have you checked out Prairie Title's rate estimator, and recommended it to your clients as they look to purchase or sell real estate? Just go to Prairietitle.com/rate-estimator and get instant estimates of Prairie Title's charges for buyer or seller in any residential transaction.



New Partnership for Wiring Instructions

Prairie Title has teamed up with leading fraud prevention firm CertifID, providing us with a highly secure portal for the transmission of wiring instructions.

The system uses KBA (knowledge based authentication) to verify identity. Once verified, a buyer gains access to our wiring instructions and a seller will be able to view their own wiring instructions given to us by a trusted party: their attorney.

Let your account representative or customer service know you want to use this service, at no charge. For each transaction, we'll just need the buyer's or seller's

email and cell phone number depending on how you want to use the service.

Go to certifid.com for more information about our new partner in fraud prevention.

CONTACT US

You can contact any member of our management team or department heads via e-mail. Or dial our main number at 708-386-7900 and ask for the following extensions:

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Notarization Types and Terminology

alta.org/digitalclosings



Notarization Type	Definition	Authorization Type	Document Type	Multi-Factor Authentication (Credential Analysis & KBA)	Recorded and Retained AV Record	eNote Capability	In Person or Remote
Remote Online Notary (RON)	Remote online notarization of electronic documents with use of multi-factor authentication.	Permanent State Statute or Temporary Notarization Executive Order or Legislation					
Paper Remote Online Notarization (PRON)	Remote online notarization of paper documents (delivered via mail, courier, etc.) with use of multi-factor authentication.	Permanent State Statute (RULONA 2018) or Temporary Notarization Executive Order or Legislation					
Remote Ink Notarization (RIN)	Remote notarization of paper documents via audio-video communication platform (Skype, Facetime, etc.).	Temporary Notarization Executive Order or Legislation	Some electronic document solutions may exist		Based on GSE and State Requirements		
Traditional Wet Ink Notarization (TWIN)*	In Person notarization of paper documents.	Permanent State Statute					
In Person Electronic Notarization (IPEN)*	In person notarization of electronic documents.	Permanent State Statute					

*Not a touchless transaction. In person contact required.

Legend
 Electronic
 Paper
 Yes
 No
 Remote
 In-Person



Jan Kerr (right), shown with Frank Pellegrini, was recognized for her 40 years in the real estate industry by the Oak Park Area Association of Realtors at an event hosted by Forest Park Bank before the COVID-19 shutdown. Congratulations, Jan!

Nancy Goggin, Prairie Title Senior Closer, was surprised to find a custom basket of cookies from a grateful person involved in one of her closings. All in a day's work for Nancy!



Prairie Title's Nicole Caputo, closing officer, was busy walking back and forth to a curbside closing at our Oak Park office. The back window rolled down and the 3-year-old daughter of the buyers stuck her hand out the window holding a small trophy. Nicole told her that she had a nice toy. The buyers explained that their daughter wanted to give the trophy to Nicole. Nicole responded that she didn't want to take her toy. The little girl then piped up with, "I want to give it to you because you came out here so my parents didn't have to go inside."



Five Fast Questions

Five Fast Questions is a feature which aims to help you get to know the Prairie Title team members you work with on a more personal level. Here are Five Fast Questions for Gary Snyder and Dave Bartoszewski.



Gary Snyder, Underwriting Counsel

Where were you born?

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, therefore, weaned on Pabst, Blatz, Schlitz, and some Miller.

What do you love most about the real estate business?

I am proud to be part of an industry that is deemed "essential."

What's your favorite vacation spot?

Anywhere in Italy which offers:

- Phenomenal horticultural aspects.
- The ability to walk around on the roof of the cathedral in Milan.
- The opportunity to find out that the "Last Supper" is not simply a painting in a frame hanging on a wall in a museum, but actually a painting on an entire wall of a cafeteria where you walk through the painting to enter the kitchen.
- A fantastic meal at your fingertips, always.

Why do you like working at Prairie Title?

Great people to work with – great in the business sense, but can also tell that they are flat-out good people in their daily lives.

What historical figure is most important to you?

Dwight D. Eisenhower – he served and worked for the common good in his daily life and his careers in the military and presidency.

I am thankful to all of the military people that have fought; those that have lost their lives; and those that are presently fighting, so I can have all of the freedoms that I too often take for granted.



Dave Bartoszewski, Title Searcher

Where were you born?

I was born on the southwest side of Chicago in a neighborhood called Archer Heights, in St. Richard Parish.

What do you love most about the real estate business?

Love is a strong word. I like the title business most of the time. LOL. What I really like about it is being a part of the elite title department of Prairie Title.

What's your favorite vacation spot?

I have two: Fish Lake, IN, and Pardeeville, WI. I have been going to both since I was able to drive. Still going and raising you know what but not as late at night.

Why do you like working at Prairie Title?

The lifelong friendships I have made and continue to make.

What historical figure is most important to you?

Well, I have two. I am not really into historic figures, but here we go. First Jimi Hendrix, great guitarist and songwriter. And John Belushi, comedic genius.



In The News



Coronavirus Delays new Uniform Residential Loan Application until March 2021

Based on the Mortgage Bankers Association's 2020 Commercial Real Estate Finance Outlook Survey, commercial and multifamily mortgage originators anticipate 2020 to be another strong year.

It's been nearly four years since Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac announced that they were changing the standard mortgage application form for the first time in 20 years, but implementation will be delayed still further by the Coronavirus pandemic. Fannie and Freddie announced in April that mandatory use of the new Uniform Residential Loan Application (URLA) has been delayed until March 1, 2021.

Prior to this change, the use of the new URLA was supposed to be mandatory on Nov. 1, 2020, and the original target date for implementation was this past February.

Housing a Leader in Recovery?

Unlike the role it played in the Great Recession that started in 2008, the housing industry may help lead us out of today's pandemic-induced economic recession, according to Daniel McCue, Senior Research Associate at Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

As reported in *DS News*, while housing was more of a barrier than a balm in the last economic recovery, it is more typical for the housing industry to serve as a source of strength during an economic recovery. In fact, this has been the case in nearly every recession over the past five decades, according to McCue.

One of the main points of difference between the housing market leading into the Great Recession and the market heading into today's economic downturn is that the housing market prior to 2008 had a "substantial overhang of distressed and fore-closed properties," which "needed to be absorbed before housing construction could be a driver of recovery," McCue said. The housing market early this year, however, had tight supply and low vacancies.

"Hopefully, what these vacancy numbers do suggest is that, in terms of supply, housing construction is not likely to be a barrier to recovery and instead may once again be a source of strength that helps the economy turn around once the worst is over," McCue told *DS News*.

MISMO Issues Standardized Templates for Closing Instructions

The Mortgage Industry's Standards Organization, known as MISMO, has issued a set of standardized templates for closing instructions lenders can use to communicate with settlement agents, reported *Nextmortgagenews.com*. The templates aim to improve data exchanges between lenders and settlement agents, reduce mortgage loan closing errors, save money, reduce operational overhead and compliance violations, and provide better customer service, MISMO said.

MISMO also has developed an implementation guide to assist users. The standardized instructions and the implementation guide are available free of charge to MISMO members, lenders and other organizations.

"Closing instructions communicate important loan details and requirements, these templates mean settlement partners will no longer have to search through pages of instructions for the information they need," said Kate Steineman, Senior Vice President Business Liaison Manager, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage. "We all win through increased efficiency, quality and happy customers."

MISMO offers two standard closing instructions templates, the Master Closing Template and the Transactional Closing Template. These standard templates are in "candidate recommendation" status, meaning they have been thoroughly reviewed by a wide range of organizations and industry participants and MISMO believes that they are ready for industry to use in implementations.

The Master Closing Instruction Template contains lender instructions that are common to all loans closed for that lender. It includes items such as instructions for conflicts of interest; data security and document destruction; verification of signer identity; and recording.

The Transactional Closing Instruction Template includes information relating to a specific loan. It includes items such as borrower contact information; property information; critical dates; and conditions and stipulations. MISMO has also developed an Implementation Guide to assist with the adoption of the new templates.

For more information and to access the templates and implementation guide, visit: www.mismo.org > Standards and Resources > Residential Specifications > Other Residential.