

LaBelle Real Estate Group

Keeping Pace With Mobility

By Susan Cushing



Cutting edge and collaborative are words frequently used to describe the LaBelle Real Estate Group. From concept to customer, Broker/owner Mike LaBelle's vision was to create an entity that provides the highest level of personalized services for both the agent and client.

By 2010, LaBelle had more than 17 years of success in the real estate industry under his belt, but he imagined a better alternative. Envisioning a unique philosophical and spatial business model, he began creating his new working environment.

"I found an ideal location," he says, "situated literally at the intersection of Interstate 494 and Interstate 94. The building I bought was essentially a big box, but I saw it as a blank canvas allowing us to design exactly what we wanted."

With the help of an architect, LaBelle set about creating a synergistic space that is both contemporary and welcoming.

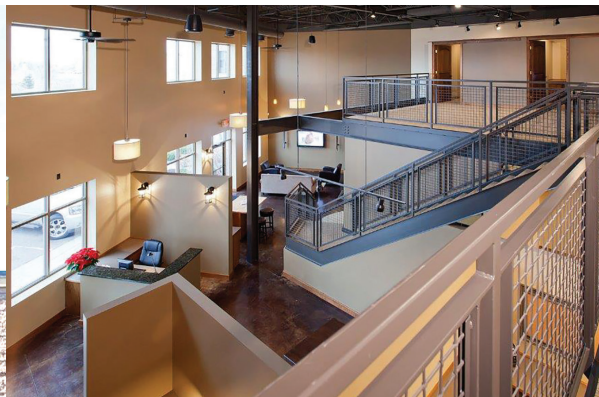
"We didn't want to have the traditional office with tile ceilings and little cubicles," explains LaBelle. "The idea was to create an environment that is functional and yet warm and hospitable and suited to today's on-the-go agent."

The result is quite dramatic. Soaring 20-foot ceilings, glass enclosed conference rooms, ample windows and artful lighting present a bright, airy atmosphere. Conference rooms feature big flat-screen TVs with wireless

independent contractors and in our business model, our job is to help them build their business whether that's individually or as teams. At traditional brokerages the focus is on marketing the company brand whereas here, we are agent-centric, we try to fly under the radar. The agents, in turn, are client-centric.

Not quite four years old, LaBelle Real Estate Group already has nearly 60 agents and receives inquiries on a weekly basis from agents throughout the area. Agent turnover is virtually non-existent. Money is definitely a factor, according to LaBelle.

"The beauty of our model is that the agents get compensated at a higher rate," he says. "We have no monthly fees and yet agents don't sacrifice anything. We provide the tools, training, webinars, office space, support staff and technology; really we offer virtually the same things that a bigger, traditional company can provide, yet the agent makes more money. I know there are agents out there who will be skeptical about our fees; I say to them, contact any one of our agents and ask to see their invoice for last month's fees. It will be zero."



keypads, rich wood tables and comfortable chairs creating an ideal space for meeting with clients and viewing virtual tours. Mobile stations designed for iPad or laptop use accommodate agents on the go. Or they can opt to use more traditional areas for sit-down work that provide more privacy. In addition, a resource center, featuring a network of six computers, printer and other tools, makes it easy to print everything from forms to full-color brochures. The main level offers a lounge with coffee bar for agents and guests, while the upper level includes a loft space as well as private offices that house professional services, including mortgage, title and even a small law team.

As impressive as the office space is the driving force behind LaBelle Real Estate Group seems to be the unique structure of the business. LaBelle describes it as "something of a hybrid."

"There is constant change in our industry, our business model has to evolve with it," explains LaBelle. "More and more, REALTORS® are realizing that the so-called big-name company brand isn't as important as other aspects such as efficient operations, agent-friendly office space, tools and support. Our agents are

LaBelle's vision has not only become a reality, the business has grown so quickly that he is now seriously considering adding more locations.

"We've been conservative," he says, "because that's just my nature. The expression I like to use is, 'I want to get the boat out of the dock with no holes in it.' But, we're now in the position to make it happen. Oakdale will remain our hub, that's where everything will continue to be processed, but additional locations will just be another way we can accommodate our expanding client list as well as our growing roster of agents."

"One thing though," LaBelle adds, "regardless of how much we grow, the most important thing is to retain our original ideology. We want to always provide the personal touch. We don't want to be the biggest, we want to be the best. The way I see it is, you can have the 'big box' experience or one that focuses on the individual. You can go to a WalMart or you can go to a small, custom shop. We don't want to fall under that 'big box' experience."

As with every industry, technology has had a tremendous impact on the field of real estate. LaBelle notes that it's imperative to not only keep up but to also, when pos-



Designs by KJ



sible, pave the way.

“It’s all about being mobile,” he says, “whether from their laptop, tablet or phone so that’s our focus. We have our eye on the ball with mobility in mind. Social media is now playing a huge role as well. That’s another advantage to being a smaller brokerage, we can adapt and implement change quickly. In fact, we have an electronic survey

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worksheet and encourage good ideas from everyone. If somebody brings up a suggestion we can literally implement it the next day. We certainly haven’t reinvented the wheel, but I think we’ve added some things in such a way that we’ve got a unique company and strategy.”

Support for agents at LaBelle Real Estate Group comes in many forms: providing ample meeting space and resources, leveraging social networks, offering various meeting platforms, and facilitating networking and sharing of information. With the Book-A-Showing platform and Insta-Net forms it just takes a click of the mouse for agents to stay on top of all their clients and day-to-day business.

“We have a wonderful support staff,” LaBelle says enthusiastically. “Jeni Kisling and Lisa LaBelle handle all of the office and administrative duties. Between the two of them they have about 17 years of experience so they are very good at keeping things running smoothly. Jeni is the full-time administrative person; she kind of runs that side of things in addition to being the glue that keeps it all together.”

“I’ve worked for many different brokers over the years,” offers Kisling, “and this is the most ethical company I’ve ever had the pleasure to work for. Everyone knows that Mike and Lisa are the heart of the brokerage. They encourage free thinking and out-of-the box ideas, but still provide the leadership. Mike’s door is always open for advice, questions or just someone to listen. There are no stupid questions as far as he’s concerned. It’s just a wonderful place to work that’s why I’m never leaving.”

Pat Tuccitto, a top-producing agent at LaBelle, expresses similar sentiments. “I’ve been in the business since 1990, all with big companies,” she says. “I’ve never been happier selling real estate. First of all, I’ve never received more one-on-one personal support or been more comfortable as I am now. Here, you have the oppor-

tunity to work as an independent contractor running your own business and still be under the guidance of someone you can go to with absolutely anything. Mike is always available and provides all the resources you could hope to have. My only regret is that I didn’t start here sooner.”

Although Mike and Lisa LaBelle stay plenty busy with their three children, 16-year-old, Jack, 13-year-old, Ava and 9-year-old, Sofia, they still have big plans for their other family.

“Our vision for the immediate future includes another office location, although this office will remain our hub,” he says. “Beyond that, we will aim for consistent growth, keeping an eye on the future of real estate, and staying relevant and up-to-date with the changing face and needs of today’s agents.”



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Jeni Kisling joins Mike & Lisa LaBelle.