



**Karl Jennings, Jr.** earned a BAAS degree in Business Management from Southwest Texas State University in 1998. Karl has been a licensed REALTOR® since 1999 and worked for Gold Key Real Estate for nine years. Karl currently manages 160 doors. When not working, which seems like all the time, Karl loves to listen to music and play with his dog Winston.

## Stepping Away from the Edge: **NARPM® Changed My Life**

There is no question—joining NARPM® has changed the way I do business for the better. About four years ago, my broker came in and informed me he was purchasing about 125 more property management accounts to add to the 50 he already managed. He has always managed the original 50 himself. After three months, he gave them to me to manage and said, “Go get ‘em Tiger!” I had managed four units of my own for about 10 years up until that point, but it did not prepare me for what I was about to do.

Suddenly, I was the leasing agent and property manager for a total of 175 properties and my cell phone was ringing off the hook. My broker had always let the tenants call the office and turn in repair requests orally, whether it was for burned out light bulbs, a faucet dripping, or an air conditioner not working. Of course, when my broker was managing the properties, there was more than one person in the office to help facilitate these calls. When that person left for family reasons, all the phone calls relating to the lease properties were directed to me.

The phone calls came in fast and furious. I was running around with no plan in place on how to manage my sanity, much less how to manage all the people coming at me with their problems and the calls from prospective tenants.

After doing business by crisis for two years, I nearly had a nervous breakdown. Prior to taking over these properties, I operated solely as a listing agent for my broker, who was a member of a large real estate franchise. At this franchise, I met and become friends with Terry Godbold, MPM® RMP®, who was in property management. He always had a bronze tan and looked well rested. One day, I called him up to seek some advice. He introduced me to Rick Ebert, MPM® RMP®, who told me about NARPM® and strongly suggested I join. I figured I had nothing to lose, so I followed his advice. What a change it was!

Soon after I joined in 2007, the National Convention in Scottsdale, Arizona was to take place. I have been to many national franchise conventions with

respect to sales, so I had an idea of what to expect (or so I thought). They always had great motivational speakers who, when they were done, made you feel like you wanted to go out into the world and take it over. Not many agents I met at those conventions wanted to give up any “secrets” on how they did business.

I really expected the same with NARPM®. What I found was unbelievable cooperation and a willingness to generously share knowledge. I started by taking two classes at the Scottsdale Convention that gave me a host of information I didn’t have before. To my surprise and appreciation, the other attendees were more than happy to give advice and share war stories and how they dealt with various issues. The featured speakers were great as well. Particularly Marsha Sue Petrie, who taught me a lot in dealing with “toxic” personalities. Before NARPM®, I was starting to feel like everyone I came in contact with was toxic.

I came back to Austin on a mission to take back my life—at least as much as I could with what seemed like an overwhelming amount of things to handle everyday. My first order of business was to streamline my day by focusing just on property management. This meant I had to let someone else do the leasing.

My fiancé is a lawyer and would occasionally help me when I was stretched too thin and couldn’t show a property. As an attorney in Texas, she wasn’t required to have a real estate license but decided to get it when potential tenants were hesitant to deal with her. She kept her license inactive since she wasn’t really using it. During this time, she listened to me come home at night beat down and on edge. She said she was interested in leasing and offered to take it over if it would help me. Of course, I jumped at the offer. My broker agreed to sponsor her so she activated her license. What a huge difference she made! All the incoming leasing calls were routed to her, taking a lot of the pressure off me.

The next ordeal was managing the tenant’s repair requests. My first task was to set up an e-mail address

### **PHOTO ABOVE:**

**Jennings family paddles up the Waimea River to bring NARPM® to the natives.**

for repair requests and to send letters out to all new and existing tenants to let them know that e-mail was the preferred way to submit repair requests unless it was an emergency. Incredibly, I also had to explain to many tenants what constituted an emergency. Almost immediately the repair requests started to slow and most of the nonsense ceased.

Setting up the e-mail address also helped with owner communication. I used to have to call them to get permission for larger repair expenditures. Now, I can get permission within hours, sometimes minutes, and manage the tenants' incoming repair requests in a reasonable fashion. The e-mails also provided a paper trail of communications which might otherwise have been forgotten.

My next dilemma was contractors. Many of my broker's original 50 clients were people who were used to the lowest prices or even doing the work themselves. The phrase, "You get what you pay for." was never so true. Some of the contractors I would call would never call back or I would hear complaints from tenants that the contractors would do shoddy work if they even showed up. Again, I called Terry for his advice. He informed me that NARPM® members were there to help each other and would offer their contractors if I needed them. I told him, "There is no way another agent is going to share their contractor list to help me out in my business." After all, weren't we competitors? He advised me to go to a local chapter meeting and see for myself. But first, he gave me his A/C contractor's contact information since the one I was using unexpectedly passed away. I called the contractor and I am still using him today. Happily, he is more economical than the guy I was using.

My first year as a NARPM® member, I made every chapter meeting. I soaked up as much information as I could from knowledgeable guest speakers and talked to as many members as possible about what they were doing. After every meeting, I would tell my broker what I had learned and how I was going to implement the ideas into his business. Sometimes he would agree, sometimes he would say, "Well I have been managing property for over 30 years and that's not how I would do it." I soon learned to tune him out, to trust my gut, and to do what I felt was right.

At the chapter meetings, I would also talk to Rick and he would ask me if I was working on my Residential Management Professional (RMP®) designation. When I was in sales, I would see other people's business cards with various designations. It seemed to set them apart from other REALTORS® and made them seem more knowledgeable about the real estate business. Since I had never seen the RMP® designation on any other agent's card, I felt that if I achieved this designation, it would set me apart from your average property manager. The more involved I became with NARPM® and saw the benefits of membership, it sur-

prised me to see so few RMP® designees, so I decided to start down the road to designation myself.

When NARPM® announced that the 20th Annual Convention would be in Hawaii, I was very excited. I had a friend who lived in Honolulu that I have not seen in 10 years, and I thought it would make a great family vacation. Once I invited my folks and my fiancé to go with me, the excitement was off the charts! I told my folks all about NARPM® and I wanted to give them a chance to experience the opening ceremony as well as get a better understanding of what I did as a career. My fiancé went with me last year to Scottsdale and in between her riding horses (and getting thrown off) and the spa, she took in all the convention had to offer and we exchanged ideas on the way back home. I was looking forward to that this time around as well.

We arrived in Hawaii the Friday before the convention began, met my friend and his wife, and had a blast! We took a breathtaking dinner cruise around Diamond Head, saw beautiful waves on the North Shore, watched tourists from a rooftop deck in Waikiki, and ate raw salmon at a luau. When we landed in Kauai, the real work started. I took the two classes I signed up for and, again, learned a lot more from the other members at the convention. I took my parents to the opening ceremony and we listened to Donna Hartley talk about surviving a plane crash and finding the will to live—something she didn't have before.

Just before the convention, Hurricane Ike landed on Galveston, Texas, home of my folks. My mom's place of work was destroyed, but the family home was spared. My folks got a lot out of what Donna was talking about—surviving and pressing forward. I also told my parents about the RMP® designation I was working towards and pointed out all the people who were in line to receive their certificates (I was the one screaming out "Austin, Texas!" when an Austin designee was introduced. Sorry!). I told my folks I would be receiving mine in Orlando, Florida at next year's convention. They said they would not miss that for the world so we are already planning the trip!

Once I was back at the hotel, I started taking notes on what I wanted to accomplish in property management and in my personal life. My broker informed me some time ago he wanted to retire soon, and we have talked about me taking over the company. Early next year my fiancé will be taking the test to get her broker's license, so I will have the opportunity to work for her—an idea she just loves. However, before all that happens, my goal is to learn as much as I can from my fellow NARPM® members and to be the best property manager I can be. Each year I am involved with NARPM® improves not only my business, but my quality of life as well. 🏠

#### PHOTOS BELOW:

**Karl and his dad aboard the USN Bowfin at Pearl Harbor.**

**Karl and his friends aboard the Nautilus for a dinner cruise around Diamond Head. He ate two whole lobsters, enjoyed the sights with his fiancé Laurie, and got to show off his dancing skills when the waitress pulled him out of the crowd.**

