



**WOMEN'S REAL ESTATE NETWORK**  
Connecting women in the real estate industry

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Women network with personal safety in mind**

The inaugural Women's Real Estate Network (WREN) luncheon held in Brisbane recently attracted about 40 women keen to learn more about personal safety at work.

Founded by RE/MAX United Vision Broker/Owner Lenore Sieber and Australasian Real Estate Marketing Consultant Paula Shearer, the group is designed to allow women in the real estate industry a chance to network and hear from relevant speakers.

Lenore said the group was open to all women working in real estate and the luncheon attracted much interest from principals, salespeople and property managers from a number of agencies, along with representatives from the REIQ.

All thoughts of competition in the field was put aside as the women discussed the potential dangers of a job which often saw them working alone with strangers. Paula said that on a daily basis a female real estate agent could find herself meeting unknown clients in vacant premises, traveling alone with buyers in her car, working late at night to perform contract negotiations or simply being alone and vulnerable at an open house.

Paula spoke about the dangers female salespeople often unwittingly placed themselves in and the dire consequences that could result.

"Just a few weeks ago a real estate agent in Dallas in the United States was found murdered in an empty home," she said. "The woman had been stabbed more than two dozen times and her body was discovered by prospective buyers.

"Statistics show that between 1982 and 2000 there were more than 200 real estate agents in the US who were killed on the job. Many more were raped or mugged.

"But, closer to home, the Australian industry was shocked by the rape and murder of a Melbourne real estate agent last September. Lorelle Makin, a 48-year-old mother of two, was found dead in a vacant house she was selling.

"Lorelle left her office just after noon to carry out an inspection at the house. She did not leave a diary entry listing on who she was going to see and it was 5pm before her colleagues raised the alarm when she did not return to the office."

Many of the women attending the luncheon had their own stories to tell of situations when they felt unsafe while working.

Most shocking of all was the tale of RE/MAX United Vision Sales Associate Jenni Mcknight who was bashed with the butt of a gun and left for dead at an empty house while waiting for a building inspector.

She survived only due to the quick-thinking actions of the inspector who arrived shortly afterwards.

The attack, which occurred in suburban Brisbane in 1998, left Jenni clinging to life in intensive care for many days. She then spent about four months in the head injury unit where she had to re-learn basic skills like walking and talking.

It was two years before she was able to drive a car again and, most heartbreaking for Jenni, she was never able to return to her love of auctioneering.

Luncheon guest speakers, Senior Constables Holly James and Debbi Reeves, offered a number of strategies for dealing with confrontation and encouraged women to develop their own personal safety plan incorporating tactics they felt comfortable with.

Among their top tips were: understand your right to safety; keep your fear of violence in perspective; be committed to your personal safety; be confident and use body language to your advantage; be aware of your surroundings and, trust and act on your instincts.

"Many people have a fear of crime that is significantly disproportionate to the reality," Debbi said.

"By educating ourselves about the source of our fears we can gain an understanding of the real risks involved and develop strategies. This way, your preventative strategies are based on the actual risk, rather than restricting your lifestyle based on an exaggerated fear."

Holly said confidence was one of the most valuable tools a woman could use to protect herself.

"In the context of personal safety, having and displaying confidence plays a vital role in keeping you safe," she said.

"Offenders target people they perceive to be vulnerable and who would offer them the least amount of resistance. As a result, the vast majority of threats can be deterred if you appear to be confident and self-assured.

"Confidence is also reflected in a person's ability to maintain their safety.

"A confident person is more likely to identify and implement preventative safety strategies; to have faith in their own abilities and to take action if their personal safety is threatened. A person without confidence tends to lead a restricted lifestyle, diminishing their quality of life."

Lenore and Paula expect to hold the next WREN luncheon in Brisbane during September, followed by further events in other States. More information on safety for women working in the real estate industry is available through WREN. For more information, or to join the newsletter database, email your details to [info@wren.net.au](mailto:info@wren.net.au) or phone Janet Schaffer at RE/MAX United Vision on (07) 3843 9103.

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