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NATE STEELE Gail Liniger was front and center in the real-estate industry as a leader of one its most dominant companies.

Pioneering Real-Estate Executive And Leader of Remax

OBITUARY

GAIL LINIGER | 1945-2026

Alongside her husband, she disrupted the realty industry with a radical commission model while overcoming a tragic plane crash

BY JONMOOALLEM

Gail Main was excited—she had never flown in a seaplane before.

It was October 1983, and Main and her business partner and fiancé, Dave Liniger, were hosting a convention in Ontario for Canadian affiliates of Remax, the real-estate venture they'd started together 10 years earlier and were on their way to building into a behemoth.

Main had accepted the offer by an associate to fly Remax people to his nearby lake cabin. Lifting off on their return flight, the seaplane went into a stall-spin and sputtered into the trees.

Main fell into a coma and, for three weeks, seemed unlikely to wake. When she did, a doctor told her she wouldn't walk again; she had a traumatic brain injury and was paralyzed on her left side. Even in that condition, however, Main managed to grab the man by his white coat and tell him: "You get this straight. I am walking out of here."

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"We played hours and hours of motivational tapes by the greatest minds in business," Dave Liniger recalled. "She never once cried. She never once said, 'Why me?'" And after a yearlong recovery, Main relearned to walk and got back to work—this time, as Gail Liniger. She and Dave had postponed their wedding, but married in June 1984.

Over the next two decades, the business and international reach of the company, then known as Re/Max, exploded. By 1997, it had expanded to Europe and South Africa and was closing more than one million transaction sides a year in the U.S. alone. It currently has more than 145,000 agents working in 120 countries and territories around the world, and was No. 4 in the U.S. by sales volume, according to consulting firm T3 Sixty when, last month, the company was sold to The Real Brokerage in a deal valued at roughly \$880 million including debt, to form Real Remax Group.

Gail Liniger, a co-founder of Remax, died Aug. 21 at home in Castle Rock, Colo., at 81, after serving as its CEO from 1991 until 2002 and in other leadership positions until 2018, before retiring from its board of directors in 2023. She is survived by Dave and three children from his earlier marriage. She was preceded in death by a fourth, Dave Liniger Jr. Together, Gail and Dave Liniger popularized an unorthodox business model, in which agents kept 100% of commissions in exchange for paying a fee to Remax for advertising and other management costs. It was a staggeringly disruptive way of doing business which, more than 50 years later, has been replicated across much of the industry.

A Wild Imagination

Gail Ann Myers was born July 23, 1945, in St. Louis, and, after earning a marketing degree from South--ern Illinois University, worked as a customer-service supervisor at Ralston Purina in her hometown.

She moved to Denver in January 1973 at age 27, when her first husband, Carl Main, was transferred there to manage a department store. Looking for short-term employment while they got situated, Gail interviewed with Dave Liniger, who was trying to launch a realty company built around the unconventional, agent-friendly business model he'd encountered while flipping houses in Arizona. He'd call the outfit "Re/Max," short for "Real Estate Maximums." (The slash was dropped last year.)

Dave needed a partner. He was bullish about his ability to sell the concept, but knew he didn't have the organizational aptitude to run a business.

"Gail convinced me in the first minute that she was absolutely the one for the job," he recalled.

She seemed completely unintimidated—by anything. "She didn't see herself being a personal assistant or secretary," he said. "Her imagination had gone wild, and she felt the sky was the limit."

The duo quickly opened eight offices around Denver. But the Arab oil embargo that fall flattened the market, and Remax's backers pulled out, leaving it more than \$600,000 in debt. "We were being overwhelmed," Dave said—hounded by bill collectors and, briefly, the IRS. He and Gail gave up their salaries and lived off credit cards while Dave flailed, trying to keep their creditors at bay.

Finally, Gail leveled with him. "Look," Dave recalled her saying, "You can't handle the bill collectors. It's against your personality." Gail took over the company's financials, swiftly gaining the trust of their creditors and negotiating payment plans that kept the business running until they had peeled themselves out of short-term debt.

Taking that initiative saved Remax, but it also solidified their division of labor: Dave would spend 200 days a year on the road, recruiting agents and setting up new franchises while, back in Denver, Gail "would handle everything else."

The Linigers and their inner circle began working so obsessively, seven days a week, that, "every officer in the place that first year ended up being divorced within 10 years," Dave said. This included both him and Gail. In 1983, after each of their marriages had ended, they started dating each other.

Remax had fewer than 5,000 agents across North America at the time. Less than three years later, that number had doubled. By 1998, there were 50,000 agents worldwide.

A Target on Their Backs

Their success provoked animosity. In 1991, The Wall Street Journal reported that Remax "has enraged many established brokers by raiding their shops or top agents." The company's rise, it wrote, was "undermining the whole real-estate brokerage system," squeezing out some competitors while fomenting a "sudden explosion" of imitators.

"I know this is going to sound weird, but I think the two of them loved it," said Remax chief marketing officer Abby Lee, who joined the company in 1998. "I think they loved being the target, because they knew they were doing something right." For many in the industry, Liniger's stature as a woman CEO was as radical as Remax's model. The business was almost exclusively male when Remax was founded. But from the start, the Linigers relied on an underused talent pool—women—in part because established male agents were skeptical and dismissive of their model. Lee said, "They probably wouldn't have survived without attracting women agents—who really had no other place to go and weren't welcomed by anyone else."

By 1978, most real-state agents industrywide were women—and that's still the case, according to the National Association of Realtors. But Liniger, front and center as a co-founder and leader of one of the industry's most dominant companies, would remain an anomaly for many more years.

"She was the first woman in any kind of senior leadership position among the national companies—and that was the case for a long time," said Steve Murray, a partner at RTC Consulting. "I think over time her visibility made an impact."

'She didn't see herself being a personal assistant...she felt the sky was the limit.'

DAVE LINIGER Husband and business partner

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