

## PHENOM

By **JULIAN SERENO**  
CORRESPONDENT

Kara Pittman Hart, the new president of the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors, has a passel of impressive professional accomplishments under her belt, as one would expect.

A licensed Realtor since 1996, Hart has been a partner at Terra Nova Global Properties since '99. She also has a contractor's license and has built three houses "on spec," or on a speculative basis.

She has also not yet seen her 30th birthday.

When Hart is installed as president at the New Year's Banquet for the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors on Thursday, she will be the youngest president in the board's 51-year history.

"I got started when I was a student at UNC," she said, "at Career Day. I met with Kit Baller of Franklin Street Realty. I got my real estate license before my senior year."

During her final semester as a senior, she sold two houses.

"Both closings came in May," she said, around the same time as finals and graduation.

Mariana Fiorentino, who has handled real estate abroad, had just started Terra Nova, and Hart, with a degree in international studies from UNC, got her first job with her.

"Right off the bat, we hit it off and were friends," she said.

She joined Terra Nova in 1998 and became a partner the next year.

"It was just the two of us. Now, we have 10 agents," she said, motioning around their expansive new office in the new building at 605 W. Main St. in Carrboro.

The building near the intersection of West Main and Hillsborough streets has come under some criticism, both for

architectural aesthetics and for being out of character with the surrounding buildings. "You can't please everybody," Hart said with a rueful smile. "You go with what you know."



Photo by Julian Sereno

Kara Pittman Hart will be the youngest president in the 51-year history of the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors.

Part of her interest in real estate is historical properties, Hart said. "I sold all new construction when I started," she said.

Hart sold so much new construction that she got her contractor's license and built some houses, too. She currently resides in a house that she built at Roberson Place in Carrboro.

"I built three or four for fun," she said.

Most of the property she sells is in Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Durham, "evenly divided."

Hart's work with the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors has been an even more recent phenomenon.

"When I first started, I wasn't into the board at all," she said. "For several years I wasn't involved at all."

Jeff Rupkalvis, who has been board president and Realtor of the year, called up Hart and got her to take on the role of assistant treasurer

That was three years ago. All terms are one year; she followed that in subsequent years with postings as treasurer and then president-elect. She got more experience than most presidents-elect do because last year's president,

Erika Buchholtz, gave birth in the first month of her term and took maternity leave.

"She was absolutely gracious and fantastic regards to that," said Buchholtz. "She and Jeff Rupkalvis represented the board at a lot of meetings, local as well as state and national."

For her part, Hart enjoyed the meetings, which included a week in San Francisco in October when 26,000 members of the National Board of Realtors got together for their annual meeting.

"It's a great educational experience," Hart said. "I come back with so many ideas. It's been a lot of fun."

"She is a spitfire," said Sue Millager, executive director of the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors. "She is just amazing. She is this tiny, petite little thing who can take on the world. And she does it in a precise, determined, accurate manner. I am really looking forward to my year with her. She is a no-nonsense kind of gal."

Buchholtz is happy to see Hart take over as board president.

"The board is extremely lucky to have Kara as president," Buchholtz said. "She is very efficient and pragmatic and a fantastic consensus builder and incredibly dedicated."

"For her age, she has accomplished so much in her career, and she gives back so

much to the community. I can't say enough good about her. I think she will have great success in her year as president."

The goals that Hart has set for the board stem from the years when she started out.

"My goal is to show agents that we are a resource and can benefit you and your business -- not just a monetary obligation," she said.

Another priority concerns the board's legislative affairs committee, "to keep our agents apprised of local issues," she said.

What kinds of issues do Realtors face now?

"We've seen great appreciation and a great market," Hart said. "There is a new business model for real estate. Instead of commissions, new companies have flat-fee sales. We've got the Internet and a lot more information from the phone. There's a change in our client base -- lots of second home buyers."

And of course there are the skyrocketing prices of houses in Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Hart says that restrictions on development cause the crisis of affordability.

"It's a double-edged sword," she said.

Hart begins her term as a newlywed and as the new mother of a 5-year-old daughter. "I married a builder in October," she said. "I'm now Kara Pittman Hart." The couple is building a new house in Carrboro that they hope will be ready by mid-winter.

Much to the relief of Sue Millager, Hart said she has no plans to expand her new family for the time being.