

REAL ESTATE

# EXECUTIVE

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## Lee Mather Co.: Generations of Personal Services in Real Estate

Coronado-Based Company Thrives  
with Expertise and Caring Attitude

# Lee Mather Co.: Generations of Personal Services in Real Estate

## Coronado-Based Company Thrives with Expertise and Caring Attitude

By Donna Kozik

When Lee Mather Co. Realtors opened its doors at 944 Orange Avenue in Coronado during March, 1953, a tradition for friendly, personal service began that is unmatched in the San Diego real estate industry. Whenever anyone walked into the office, Lee or one of his agents stood up, extended a hand, offered a chair and a cup of coffee, and then leaned forward to ask, “Now, how can we help you?” Everyone was treated the same — whether they wanted to buy a home, rent an apartment or simply find a good restaurant — with a level of courtesy and attention to detail that made more than one person smile.

Lee’s roots can be traced to his upbringing 10 miles outside of Grinnell, a small community in western Kansas. Working on the family farm during the Great Depression, he completed his elementary school education in a one-room school house. After graduating high school, 1 of a class of 12, he worked for a deed abstractor, doing the work that title companies do today. He then joined the Agriculture Adjustment Administration (AAA). It was here that Lee learned the concept of personal service as he worked closely with farmers, placing limits on their crop rotations (how much to plant versus how

**From left: Tom, Debbie and Mike are the owners of Lee Mather Company. These three real estate professionals are true experts in their own right.**



much had to be left fallow). At the outbreak of World War II, Lee enlisted in the United States Navy and, in 1943, found himself in Coronado. He bought his first home in 1943, and by the end of the war, he decided to pursue his career in real estate — where the dedication to friendly, personal service developed and prospered.

More than 50 years later, this tradition is the key management precept for a second generation of the extended Mather clan. They continue to provide the top-notch customer service and real estate expertise that people in Coronado and Greater San Diego have come to treasure. Three real estate professionals in their own right — Mike Herlihy; Lee's daughter, Debbie Riddle; and her husband, Tom — have taken the reins of the family business and demonstrate daily what it takes to serve clients in the uncompromising customer-oriented style set forth by the company's founder.

“While we may be more than 50 years young, we are still clearly focused on preserving the simple, yet effective, philosophy that has engendered our firm's success,” said President Mike Herlihy. “That is, to provide sound, actionable real estate advice in a friendly, professional manner to all our clients. We want our customers to rely on the competence and excellence of the professional team at Lee Mather Company, and yet value their relationship with us as friends and fellow San Diegans.”

## DEDICATED TO PEOPLE

Serving as president of Lee Mather Company, Mike Herlihy has expertise in commercial, investment and residential real estate.

“In the days before fax machines, cell phones and pagers, Lee mentored me, and all of his agents, on providing that unsurpassed attentiveness to customers that he was famous for,” Mike said. “It was an education that most people don't get in real estate — truly a hands-on experience. Lee has always been the broker's broker. I learned a good deal through his guidance.”

Mike's clients agree. Phyl Kraus has been going back to Lee

**We are clearly focused on preserving the simple, yet effective, philosophy that is the cornerstone of our firm's success.**

— Mike Herlihy



The founder, Lee Mather, and his wife Phyllis.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LEE MATHER FAMILY

Mather Company for the past 20 years, and has worked closely with Mike during several real estate home and investment transactions. “They've handled all of my transactions, and there's almost never been a problem,” said Phyl. “I have a great deal of respect for Mike and his expertise, and Debbie and Tom, and their involvement in the community. They're helpful, generous and bright people.

“They have a great sense of integrity, and certainly do their homework,” said Phyl. “They're efficient, and respond just like you would want a business to respond.”

Since 1984, Dr. and Mrs. Scott Markel have purchased 10 homes in Coronado, and have worked with Mike and his agents on all those transactions.

“When I first met Mike, I knew he was a real no-nonsense guy,” said Dr. Markel. “He knows just about everything there is to know about every home on the island, and has a keen sense for good investments.

“We were newly married, and Mike insisted we buy an 800-square-foot house — he said it was the best buy on the island,” said Dr. Markel. “I can't believe we survived a year-and-a-half of marital bliss in that small house, but when we sold it in 18 months, we made so much money that I became sold on working with Lee Mather Company.

“Mike knows where the gems are; he knows where the dogs are. He will relentlessly steer you away from the dogs and toward the gems,” said Dr. Markel. “He is unbelievably ethical, and is only happy when all parties in the deal are happy. The guy is

Mr. Integrity. In fact, thanks to Lee Mather Company, I have made more money in real estate than in my entire practice of medicine,” he said.

## ACTING IN THE CLIENTS’ BEST INTEREST

Debbie Riddle grew up learning real estate as a second language. She became a fixture at Lee Mather Company when she was just 14, starting as a receptionist for \$1 an hour. She worked there through high school and college, sitting for her real estate license in 1977. Life took her away from Coronado for a time, but in 1991, after returning from three years of sailing around the Pacific with her husband, Tom, Debbie returned to the company, and they have avidly pursued a career in real estate for more than 15 years.

“Real estate was a natural solution for us,” she said. Now Debbie and Tom make up Team Riddle at Lee Mather Company, where they’ve shown clients time and again their commitment to customer service and professional values.

**We pay close attention to the needs of our clients and the ever-changing market conditions.**

— Debbie Riddle

A unique aspect of the selling team is Debbie’s attention to detail, which comes from a background in accounting. “We pay close attention to the needs of our clients and the ever-changing market conditions,” she said. “I’m ready to act in my clients’ best interests.”

Rob and Wendy Moore called on Debbie’s expertise during what at first appeared to be a typical real estate deal, but ended up being very complex. “Debbie did her best to help us, and was right there with us all the way,” said Rob. “She’s upfront and honest, and represents her clients with integrity. Being a U.S. naval officer, I have a lot of respect for that.”

Rob says the same goes for the entire company. “They’re all cut from the same cloth,” he said. “I know every time I go to

**A unique aspect of the selling team is that each member pays close attention to the needs of the client and ever-changing market conditions.**



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Lee Mather Company with a question, I will get a straight answer. I would feel very comfortable going back to Lee Mather Company for my real estate needs. In fact, I don't think I'd go through anyone else."

"The good work by our agents has furthered a stellar reputation in Coronado and throughout San Diego," opined Debbie. "We are the 'Realtors' Realtor,' and other Realtors we do business with look to Lee Mather Company for advice and market knowledge. We are well respected by our competitors, and have had other agents refer new agents to us."

Craig and Lori Turley worked with Debbie when buying their Coronado home. "She was great to work with and easy to talk to," said Lori. "I felt like she really cared about us, and it was more than about selling or buying a house — we became very good friends. The people of Lee Mather Company take the time to get to know their clients, and I think that makes all the difference."

## THE AGENTS

The life-blood of any company is the people, and Lee Mather Company has a stellar family of employees and agents.

"We place the same emphasis on training, market knowledge and a healthy curiosity that Lee instilled in each of us," said Debbie Riddle. "We are proud to have agents that embrace the company's philosophy, and are confident that it will continue far into the future."

Realtor Laura Concannon would agree. "When it came time to hang my license, Lee Mather Company was the most logical choice," she said. "They had already helped me buy a condo, and mentored me through learning the real estate basics. But I wanted more than just being an independent contractor. I wanted to be part of a team focused on helping clients, from the beginning of escrow through the transaction, and even beyond closing. And that team spirit of customer service lives on every day at Lee Mather Company."

The company counts 39 hard-working people, 30 of whom are Realtors, making for a busy and dynamic office. "One of our many advantages is that our office and employees and agents are really a team versus a group of individuals," says Herlihy. "There's a camaraderie here you don't see in a lot of big companies. We take and give advice freely in sales meetings — there is a sharing of ideas and problems that enables us to help each other and learn from each other's experiences. That interaction and exchange provides a sense of belonging and a great retention of agents."

Realtor Mercedes Estrada adds, "My seven years with Lee Mather Company has been an exciting period of personal and business growth. The support we get from the brokers is phenomenal. The tools we have are the best in the industry, and that makes it that much easier to serve our clients better in every way."

## KEEPING PASSIVE INVESTMENTS PASSIVE

As vice president of Lee Mather Company, former computer industry executive Tom Riddle both serves as general administrative manager for the company and oversees its property management department of seven professionals responsible for a large and far-reaching portfolio of properties.

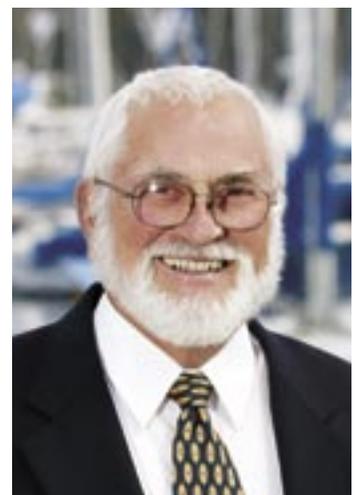
"Lee Mather Company has been in the business of providing property management services since we opened our doors more than 50 years ago," said Tom. "From day one, our goal has



Mike Herlihy



Debbie Riddle



Tom Riddle



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**The property management team is responsible for a large and far-reaching portfolio of properties.**

been to help our clients to maximize the benefits of income property ownership. That entails keeping rents at levels that the market will support, keeping vacancies low and maintaining the property so that it achieves maximum market appreciation — no small chore.”

Tom points out that income from real estate investments are considered “passive” for tax purposes. “But anyone who’s ever managed their own property, and taken that late night call from a tenant with lost keys or a flooded bathroom, knows that this is far from reality,” he said.

Providing that 24/7 responsiveness is a key to happy tenants — and happy owners as well. “It’s about providing service to our clients, and the key to that service is that our clients’ interests always come before our own, whether it’s property sales or property management,” said Tom. “We pay every bill, keep meticulous records

and provide our owners with a detailed monthly statement of our activities. All our owners do is count their money and concentrate on when to buy or sell again in the future.”

Lee Mather Company currently has more than 550 doors on the property management side of things, representing upwards of 150 property owners — doors that lead into single-family detached homes, condos and apartments. They also manage nine condominium homeowner associations and a number of commercial properties.

“Our mission is to provide customers with the highest possible return on investment property,” said Tom. “A large part of that is making sure property is maintained properly, and that appearance is kept up and general problems are taken care of immediately.”

The highest compliment a client can pay a property manager is to refer them to friends or colleagues. “We’re proud to say that we

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**Our clients' interests always come before our own, whether it's property sales or property management.**

— Tom Riddle

earn referrals from not only our owners, but also our tenants and our vendors. In short, our property management team hopes to make a thankless job look easy and allow our real estate investors to enjoy the fruits of their wise decision to own property.”

## LOOKING AHEAD

What does the future hold for Lee Mather Company? “We’re a full-service real estate company in a boutique market. Every office has licensees, and then there are the producers. Our goal is to consistently have 10 to 12 producing agents who are well trained by us and are prepared to provide the personal service our customers expect,” said Herlihy.

Mortgage broker Jim Yeager has been working with Lee Mather Company as a lending partner for more than 10 years. “I enjoy working with this professional team because they are a great family

that shares the ethical foundation and customer service ideals,” Jim says. “Everyone in our business knows that in order to build a successful career you have to put your clients’ needs before your own and always deal honestly with both your clients and industry peers. The Lee Mather Company family of agents does just that. It is a great combination of a knowledgeable and experienced management team and enthusiastic and reputable agents that are moving the real estate business forward in Coronado.”

“In an industry dominated by corporate giants, being a family-owned business that’s been around for more than 50 years is now quite rare,” noted Tom Riddle. “We’ve been fortunate to grow and flourish. Through good markets and bad, we’ll be here.”

In the end, Mike, Debbie and Tom know the agency will no doubt continue to thrive as its professionals stay committed to Lee Mather’s mission of providing customers with real estate expertise and unbeatable personal service. In fact, if you walk into their Orange Avenue office today, a Lee Mather Company real estate expert will most likely shake your hand, offer you a chair and a cup of coffee and ask the question, “Now, how can we help you?” It’s a true demonstration of how the good things in life should never change! ■

**Started by real estate giant Lee Mather, the management and sales team of Lee Mather Company is really a team versus a group of individuals. Their approach to business is: Provide real estate advice and service in a friendly, professional environment.**



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