

The National Association of Real Estate Agents (AREA)

The second reading of The Real Estate Agents Bill 2020 saw it pass through the House of Representatives and the Senate in May. AREA celebrates its contribution to bringing the real estate sector to this moment in history.

Having accepted the challenge thirty years ago of crafting regulations to govern the day to day practice of the infant real estate sector, AREA created a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice as well as educational opportunities for its membership. Education was, and remains one of the pillars of AREA's purpose and mission to continuously raise the standards of the profession.

The Association set its sights on representation of the entire sector, but without legislation, it was severely restricted. Membership was voluntary, and despite the support of a network of peers, a range of standardised contracts, FIU compliance manual, arbitration service, monthly practical and theoretical workshops, annual courses and seminar, many agents chose to work entirely unregulated rather than join a professional body.

AREA has been served over the years by a succession of respected brokers. Gerald Kenny and Cecil Quesnel created the Principles of Real Estate Sales course, Richard Saunders achieved accreditation, Irwin Elder started the Multiple Listing Service, Sally Singh looked to PR and AREA's public profile and Patricia Lazzari was passionate about outreach and education. Today, AREA courses are publicly offered via UWI/ROYTEC collaboration, and AREA's current President Mark Edghill maintains that focus on education as well as legislation. Presidents have come from all over the country, from small agencies and large, included women and men, very senior brokers or relatively young ones.

Agents from both islands have been welcomed, supported and directly represented on the governing board. There is a chair also for an elected Corporate member, presently a Valuer, and a discretionary chair now held by an Attorney with special interest in real estate. Each Director, and particularly each President, brings their own style and passion to their two-year term on the Board.

By 2010, FIU legislation was introduced and AREA realised it was the optimum time to push its own legislation. By 2012 it had incorporated by Act of Parliament on the advice of government and the Board prioritised completion of its draft Bill. By 2017 a good working draft had been finalised, and the Attorney General offered to take over the drafting, using the full weight of his office, and close collaboration with AREA, to inform the final drafting of the Bill. After circulation by the AG for public comment, several red flags were formally raised by the Board, but its stipulations went unheeded and the Bill was placed as drafted before Parliament and passed unopposed by 20th May.

President Mark Edghill : "We are very proud of having reached this far with legislation that will at last require all agents in T&T to register. With our sector so targeted by criminality, it is in all our interests to protect the public and be protected ourselves via this legislation. However, the Board must continue to lobby for certain amendments to the Bill which significantly impact the way real estate business is transacted. I would, nevertheless, encourage Agents to see this development of mandatory registration as a positive step forward, enhancing the reputation of all real estate professionals. "

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