

Neighborhood HERO

by Taylor Arnold

Jill Heineck and Christine Harper are on a mission to make homeownership a reality to their clients, and they are doing it one hero at a time.

For the past four years, these women have been the dynamic powerhouses behind Heineck & Company, at Keller Williams Realty First Atlanta. They have built their business on close-knit client relationships, and now they are taking their vision one step further with the launch of Neighborhood HERO, an organization that encourages homeownership for police officers, firefighters, teachers and health care providers. "These service providers deserve to live in the com-



something every day for people who have such a profound effect on other people's lives?"

And rescue workers aren't the only community heroes that this program has set out to reach. Giving back to educators is equally important to them as well. "My mother has been one for almost 35 years, and I married one!" Heineck says. "It is one of the hardest jobs, besides parenting, and it gets the least amount of compensation. My



Christine Harper



Jill Heineck

munities in which they serve," Harper says. "So many lives have been touched by a neighborhood hero, and we want to show our appreciation to these incredible individuals who help others in time of need."

Founded in 2007, HERO stands for healthcare, educators, rescue, officers. As part of the program, Heineck & Company credits back to the HERO homebuyer or seller a portion of its commission on the sale at closing. "Atlanta is a city of givers and a city of people who need assistance," Harper says. "So far, the response has been overwhelming. Businesses really want to be a part of the program."

In partnership with more than 20 local organizations, HERO is offering free products, services and deep discounts to anyone employed in the areas of healthcare, education or first response. Benefits include special loan programs, substantially reduced rates for moving and discounted closing costs. "Participants can ultimately save thousands of dollars when purchasing a home," Heineck says.

The idea for HERO originally came to Harper after her own son, Simon, was saved by an EMT-trained priest when he needed emergency help

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at a church festival. "My husband, nephew, family friend and two-year-old son were making the rounds of rides and games while I sat and caught up with friends and other family members," she says.

"Suddenly, a friend of my sister ran up to me and told me that Simon was hurt. What I saw next was something no parent ever wants to see. My son was lying on a counter unconscious. His lips were slightly blue, and the church priest was administering CPR. Another woman was assisting; I later learned she was a pediatric emergency room nurse at the local hospital."

As it turned out, a city police officer who was at the festival with his family had called 911. He also had two cruisers there to take Harper's family to the hospital. "I learned at church the next week that there were five other nurses at the festival that night, and another police officer," she says. "This is why the idea of having a HERO in every neighborhood is such a passion for me. If it weren't for the EMT-trained priest, nurse and police officer, our son may not be the happy and healthy six-year-old he is today."

Four years later, it is this memory that inspires Harper to uphold HERO. "On my desk is a picture of Simon the day he was released from the hospital," she says. "I look at that picture every day and feel so grateful for those people that helped save his life. How can that not inspire me to do

husband is in his twenty-third year and has been committed from day one. You have to be a very special person to be able to balance all the facets of the education system and still step into the classroom and maintain order, respect and teach lessons."

When asked if they have any advice to others who are looking to spread a little goodwill, these ladies say it all depends on the people behind you. "Work with someone," Harper says. "Have a great team you can toss ideas around and learn not only what sounds good but what will make sense to the general public. Get the word out as early as possible. If you have passion for your cause, other people will sense it and want to help."

As for the future of this program, both women see nothing but great things. "I see the Neighborhood HERO program expanding, having its own staff and being franchised across the country," Heineck says. "Five years from now, we would each like to see a HERO living in every neighborhood."

For more information, call (404) 531-3219, e-mail info@neighborhoodhero.org or visit www.neighborhoodhero.org.