



## Q & A with Bill Greiner

By: David Winzelberg ⌚ June 22, 2016 💬 0

*At 92-years-old, Bill Greiner has no plans to retire.*

*For the founder of the venerable commercial real estate brokerage Greiner-Maltz, the secret to his longevity, he says, is keeping himself busy and his mind sharp by working all the time. Since he and Richard Maltz started their firm in 1953, Greiner has been a well-respected source for providing real estate market values to bankers, appraisers, attorneys and business owners. Though he no longer owns the company, Greiner is still very much involved in its day-to-day activities, working out of the Plainview office at least four days a week.*

**What first attracted you to a career in real estate?** When I was discharged from the army after World War II, there were no jobs around because it was first in first out and I was not first in, so many, many returning veterans took up all the available jobs. All that was around was very insignificant work and someone recommended that I go to this real estate firm in midtown Manhattan and they were happy to take me on. The main assignment was to canvas the loft buildings, usually 11 or 12 stories high. The procedure was to take the elevator to the top floor and work your way down one flight at a time handing out real estate flyers and making notes of the occupants so the real estate firm could update their records. That was my introduction into real estate. Then being in the office you pick up all the pointers on how deals are negotiated. It's just like going to school.

**Did you have any mentors? What did you learn from them?** The main mentor there was Dick Maltz, who was third-generation real estate; very, very smart. He was my mentor plus others there who were very helpful to someone new to the business. They had other rookies who started but they didn't last because there was no salary and it was a straight canvassing job. Dick taught me the technical aspects of the business, how to negotiate a deal, which was totally brand new and how to make notes. In those days, all the records were on five-by-eight cards. You had the customer card and you made dated entries of activities and the listing record with changes in price, etc. That was the basic training in real estate.

**You were instrumental in the industrial market's movement east. How did that start?** What happened was that industrial companies in multi-story loft buildings in Manhattan had problems shipping and receiving. If the loading dock was busy and they had a shipment coming in, the truck would have to circle around the block until there was an opening at the loading dock and then there were also restrictions on floor loads. Dick Maltz noted that there was a movement from these loft buildings, which have since been upgraded to a higher use, to Long Island City and Queens area where they had the luxury of a one-story building, good shipping facility, no floor-load problem and decent ceiling heights.

**What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in the area's commercial real estate landscape?** It was an ongoing process, a gradual movement over the many years from the congested west going east. And one of the motivations, besides getting the space that functions well for business, was that the owners of the businesses lived out on Long Island, so there was a big incentive to move so they wouldn't have to travel into the city.

**What are the biggest obstacles that Long Island commercial real estate brokers face today?** It's definitely all the permits necessary to do business. All purchase deals are subject to environmental OK and engineering approval, so the approvals are needed to occupy the space and do business.

**That was more onerous here than when you were moving people to Queens?** Oh yes. It takes time and the problem is that sometimes a business will wait before they decide they have to acquire space for whatever reason. When they have to move quickly and they're under pressure and they have to deal with all the regulations required.

**What do you enjoy most about your work?** I like to keep busy seven days a week and I have projects that I work on even to this day. I'm working in the office and I take my computers home on the weekend and I work there. So I'm always busy doing something. It gives me the chance to create certain projects. For example, we created maps of Long Island. I would drive around industrial areas and make rough drawings of where the streets are and then I'd have an architect draw it. So it was a big project. We used color photography and one of our big projects was the Route 110 corridor map. I divided up morning and afternoon to make sure that one side of 110 had sun on it and then in the afternoon the other side. I only went out on days that were sunny, primarily on Sunday, so that the pictures would look good, not like a car lot. That was a major achievement. Then we drew up another map of about 100 buildings and mailed it out with a form letter and it made a big hit.

**What do you like to do when you're not working?** I'm always doing something. Working is everything. I don't golf. All my hobbies are related to work, either photography or scouting around. I'm going out on Saturday to different industrial areas to gather information, such as who occupies space, how big is the space, and then to determine if they are working on Saturday, which means they're busy and may be a prospect. Then of course, to take a picture of their facility and send it to them as a complimentary item, because it's like sending them a baby picture, a picture of their building. That was one of our selling tools.

**Can you share some of your longevity secrets?** Because of concerns about hormones in red meat going back 40 years, I ate primarily fish and chicken. With food consumption, like with working, it's a matter of discipline. I eat a lot of unseasoned vegetables. You have to avoid junk food. And then of course, it's a question of exercise. In the past I've been to a gym maybe a couple of times a week, but the real answer is exercising daily and the key word is 'move.' You've got to move the body one way or another. If you have the desire to do so, you can find a way to do it. I have an exercise cycling machine in my office and I take an exercise break. I also have light weights which I use, but in general just get up and move around.

**When you look back at your career, what do you see as your biggest accomplishments?**

Probably, other than real estate transactions, the fact that I developed a database of records. We currently have over 12,000 contact records in our database, broken down by different categories. And then of course, we have a photo library of Nassau and Suffolk buildings which is very extensive, both exterior and in some cases, interior. A full photo presentation is very helpful in order to market the property.

**What are your thoughts about the future of Greiner-Maltz?** Well right now Greiner-Maltz has upgraded its technology under the leadership of Tom Attivissimo, who is a very talented individual. He has been really running the place the last couple of years very effectively and his wife Ann Attivissimo is a super smart lady who is my personal help desk. With some of the technical programs, which I'm not too good with, she knows how to fix it and make it work for me.