

# Flying High with Compassion

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Randy Friend '86 is living proof that where there is a will, there is a way.

Not always top of his class, Friend had a vision of how he wanted his career to unfold and the determination to succeed.

At an early age, Friend's father-in-law, a well-known small-town lawyer specializing in tax and trust and estate law, took him under his wing and encouraged him to major in accounting and go to law school.

He applied to California Western.

"Dean Castetter took a risk on me after receiving a letter of endorsement from a prior alumnus," recalls Friend.

Emboldened by the opportunity, he did not disappoint.

"During law school, I held the coveted position of a paid law clerk at Higgs, Fletcher, and Mack," says Friend. "I graduated from Cal Western cum laude, received several American Jurisprudence awards, was on Law Review, and wrote an article on Civil Rico."

Friend parlayed his law degree from California Western into an LL.M in Taxation from NYU.

"Real estate was in my blood, but having a Masters in Tax would open a whole new world," says Friend, who on graduation took a job with top real estate law firm Allen Matkins in Los Angeles.

Making a somewhat rash decision, Friend left Allen Matkins after a comparatively short time to go into real estate.

"I was young, a bit naïve, and possibly too confident," admits Friend. "My bold move into the apartment business coincided with the savings and loan crisis. Bad timing for everybody!"

Not to be discouraged, Friend fell back on his California Western training and repositioned himself as a sole practitioner, working in the law offices founded by his father-in-law.

“Cal Western had well prepared me to start my own law practice as its curriculum was practical, and honed my skills at problem-solving,” he says.

But Friend wanted more. He wanted to be the guy making the deals happen—his own deals! Backed by his father-in-law, he established a board of directors and started Eagle Real Estate Group.

“I picked up business cards on the way to present my first offer,” says Friend. “We got the deal, and Eagle was in the game.”

Friend hasn’t looked back since.

He has fond and enduring memories of California Western and credits the law school for teaching him to think, problem-solve, and not just regurgitate the teachings.

He and his wife, Susan Ballard ’86, both decided to go to Cal Western, and they took most of their classes together. He remembers that they were a great study team, with both graduating top of their class.

Friend gives a big shout-out to Professor Bill Lynch, who made a huge impact on him and his wife.

“He was a riveting professor, with a command of the law that impressed us all,” says Friend. “He was entertaining and always well prepared.”

“A vision we will never forget is the one with him pacing the classroom while swinging his glasses in one hand and calling us each by name on the first day of class,” recalls Ballard. “We mostly remember, though, the way he took an interest in our study of law. He became a mentor, a friend, someone we admired.”

Today, Eagle owns and manages five affordable senior communities. Friend specialized in offering affordable senior housing for several reasons, not least that he observed that the largest segment of the population was becoming “silver,” so there was a huge need.

“I also saw that a lot of cities don’t allow affordable family projects, but welcome with open arms senior communities,” adds Friend. “Ergo, affordable seniors!”

Friend takes great pride in these communities, and as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, he and his team have been doing all they can to care for these vulnerable folks. Each week, Friend and his team have been delivering food and essential supplies to their tenants.

“What started as a small effort to help these seniors grew exponentially, as often acts of kindness do,” says Friend. The first week it was pizza, the second week spaghetti and meatballs. The third week, the effort took flight as we partnered with Bracken’s kitchen and were able to provide soups and stews, which we hand-delivered to over 1,000 seniors each week.”

Eagle’s acts of compassion have drawn wide local media coverage, and Friend and his team are just pleased they can bring some relief to their tenants in these difficult times.

“Giving back to our communities is a top priority for us,” says Friend. “We treat our tenants like we treat our Eagle employees, like family.”

Friend advises aspiring California Western students never to underestimate themselves or their dreams.

“Believe you can accomplish all that you desire,” says Friend.

“I was not always at the top of my class, but I had a vision, and when it came time, my team and I rose to the occasion.”