



*The Vaughan family at the military school they used to manage, in addition to apartment units.*

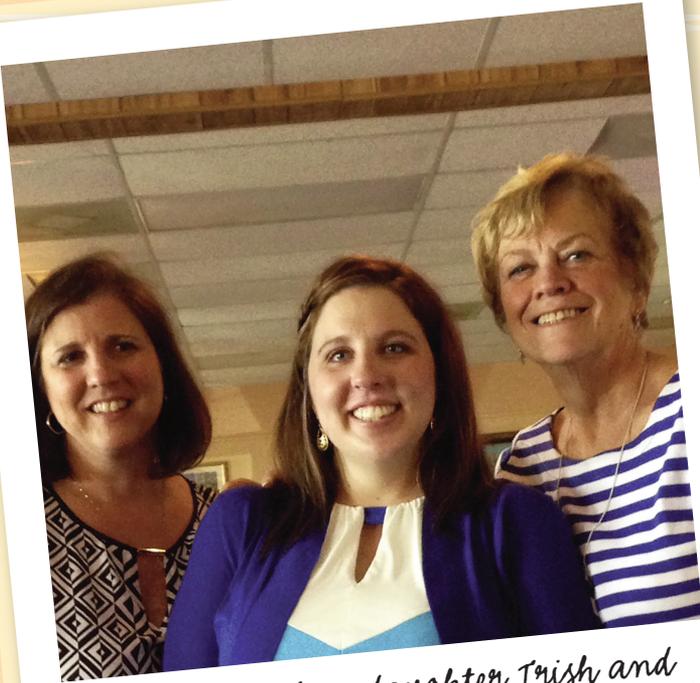


*Jerome Makowsky, wife Evelyn, and son, Garry, at an employee function in the mid-1980s.*

# WE'RE FAMILY. MULTIFAMILY.



*The Makowskys and Ringels at a meeting announcing the company would be passed to the next generation: Garry, Jimmy and Michael.*



*Eileen Subinsky, daughter Trish and granddaughter Morgan all work in the apartment industry.*



*Veronica Chavez-Costello and husband, Victor Costello, part of a large family of multifamily housing professionals.*

## For many NAA members, the apartment industry has been a multi-generational affair.

BY LAUREN BOSTON

**W**e like to think of ourselves as part of one big family—multifamily. But for many NAA members, that’s quite literally the case. As NAA celebrates its 75th anniversary, several industry families share their unique stories of growing up in the business.

### Built-In Babysitters

Eileen Subinsky walked into the apartment industry.

In 1970, the former elementary school teacher was searching for an apartment to rent in Jacksonville, Fla. Subinsky found a community under construction and walked into the office, but was asked to fill out a different kind of application.

“They assumed I was there for a job,” Subinsky, CPM, says. “I wound up speaking to the owner, who hired me as their first resident manager with no industry experience. Earning \$75 per week plus a two-bedroom apartment exceeded the salary to teach elementary school class. It was a no-brainer. Daycare, however, was \$55 per week, so getting rich as a resident manager was not going to happen.”

Subinsky’s early years were trial and error, “using common sense as a guideline.”

Says Subinsky, whose husband was a construction engineer for 40 years before retiring from the apartment industry, “I had never even heard of an apartment manager as a job, much less a career. There were no educational programs or classes available.”

Living onsite with her husband and two children, Subinsky says her job allowed her to spend more time with her family (no commute!). In exchange, her children spent a lot of time around residents.

“Anyone who has managed and lived onsite with children knows that they grow up under a resident microscope,” she says. “Everyone seems to know who the manager’s children are and what they are doing every moment they are not in school. And even when they are in school, should you ever lease to any of their teachers.”

On occasion, her children were the ones keeping an eye on the residents.

“When our son was about 6 years old, he wanted to be a garbage man ‘because people throw away the neatest things,’”

Subinsky says. “Very early one Saturday morning, unbeknownst to me, he was inside a Dumpster checking out the trash when one of my older residents was tip-toeing to deposit several empty vodka bottles inside. Her story was that the Dumpster said, ‘Good morning, Mrs. Smith.’ She immediately took the pledge and swore off alcohol for the remainder of her days.”

Fortunately, the Subinsky children didn’t swear off the apartment industry.

Her daughter, Trish Thompson, CPM, started cleaning the community pool when she was 12. In 1980, 15-year-old Trish approached Subinsky’s former employer—and former NAA President, Roger Greer—and asked if he could give her a summer job so that she could save for her first car. She spent the next three months organizing files for the forthcoming conversion to computers.

Now 48 and a mother of four, Trish works on the commercial side of the industry and teaches a course in property management at Houston Community College. She says her mother taught her to put family before career—advice she has heeded throughout her life. Her husband has worked for the last 20 years at The Liberty Group, a national executive search firm representing the multi-family housing industry.

Trish’s daughter, Morgan White, CAM, has also followed in her grandmother’s footsteps. After growing up in the business—frequently joining her grandmother at 5 a.m. to hand out donuts and orange juice to residents—White joined Milestone Management in 2008. She spent three years working as a leasing agent and assistant manager before transitioning to the vendor side.

“I’ve learned most of what I know about the industry from my grandmother,” White says. “My mother, grandmother and I talk about work all the time. I think after my first day I came home and said, ‘Oh my goodness, all my residents are crazy’ and they said ‘yep!’”

Now Vice President of Houston-based Michael Stevens Interests, Subinsky says the industry has evolved tremendously since 1970—most notably on the educational front.

“The national, state and local apartment associations have made tremendous in-roads in teaching and training industry members how to lease, manage and maintain rental housing,” she says. “Additionally, we now have curriculum in community colleges and universities that offer anywhere from an associates to a master’s degree in real estate management. In 1970, property management was a job. Today, it is a profession.”

And a great one for women, at that.

“You can advance to your true potential without gender bias and be recognized for your contributions and hard work,” Subinsky says. “Equal pay is not the issue it is in many arenas and the benefits you receive are the equivalent of most well-respected fields.”

## War Stories

For Earle Vaughan, Santa Monica Boulevard will always be associated with 1970s furniture shopping.



*Earle Vaughan with his sister and grandfather in the 1970s.*

“Apartment owners used to furnish all of the apartments in Los Angeles, so I would go with my dad to stores on Santa Monica Boulevard, or buy other pieces at auctions,” Vaughan says. “My dad was pretty pleased when he didn’t have to do that anymore.”

Although the late 1970s ushered in many positive changes, Vaughan says rent control permanently altered the Los Angeles apartment industry.

“Rent control changed the tone and complexity of the business and made everything far more litigious,” Vaughan says. “It was beyond anything my grandfather ever had to deal with; today it’s more stringent than he could have imagined.”

Vaughan’s grandfather, whom he was named after, started buying apartments buildings after World War II. Nicknamed “Major” for his rank in the military, Earle split his time between managing apartments and running a series of private military schools. He also became very involved with the Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles (AAGLA), serving as president for three years in the late 1960s.

By the time Vaughan was in and out of furniture stores, his grandfather and father were both independent rental owners (IROs) and active AAGLA members. At 11, Vaughan started spending his summers working onsite with the maintenance team, doing everything from assisting with plumbing and dry-wall to yard work and painting.

After graduating from college and going to graduate school, Vaughan began working for another property management company in Los Angeles. Four years later, in the early 1990s, he returned to the family business and began buying a few small buildings. Vaughan says his early years as an IRO were during a very depressed time in Los Angeles. Properties were cheap, but vacancy rates were over 20 percent.

Today, Vaughan and his father, Russell, own and operate 300 units in Los Angeles. His grandfather passed away 25 years ago, but Vaughan says his stories of the apartment industry live on.

“He frequently went to Washington, D.C., to lobby senators on important industry issues,” says Vaughan, who served as AAGLA president from 2009-2011. “He always told me stories about those trips. My grandfather always thought this was a good business for the family.”

## A Father, a Son and a Sewage System

Years before presiding over NAA as the 2004 Chairman of the Board, Deane Dolben was painting apartments, cutting the grass and clearing away snow for his father’s Boston-based company.

“At 13, I learned the value of the dollar and an hour’s worth of work,” Dolben says. “It was an invaluable lesson of working shoulder-to-shoulder with wonderful people who were trying to raise a family on a modest income. I learned a lot about having a strong work ethic. I also learned that I wanted to go to college and get paid to use my mind.”

Dolben says he was entrusted to go in and out of people’s homes as a young person, an “eye-opening experience” in seeing how other people live.

However, after graduating from Tufts University in 1984 with a mechanical engineering degree, Dolben didn’t see a place for himself in the family business. His brother, Drew, and cousin, Dana Pope, were already working as partners at The Dolben Company, specializing in development and acquisitions, respectively.



*Partners at The Dolben Company—  
Dana Pope and Drew, Deane and  
Don Dolben.*

“I didn’t have as much of a vision as I should have and I thought, ‘What the hell am I going to do here,’” Dolben says. “I remember sitting on the curb with my father, Don, explaining this, and he said, ‘What you don’t understand is this is an opportunity.’ Of course he was right, and I’m glad he had the patience to hire me.”

However, it was Don Dolben’s actions that perhaps spoke louder than his words. He showed Deane there was plenty to do, assigning him the immediate task of unclogging a sewage system at one of the communities.

Now president of the Dolben Company, Deane says it’s been an interesting three decades in the industry.

“I graduated from Tufts in 1984 at the tail-end of the mom and pop stage of our business,” he says. “Most apartments were managed by private firms and quasi-professional husband and wife teams. The husband did the maintenance and the wife leased the apartments. They would lease out of a unit they were living in onsite and prospective residents would walk in and trip over their dog and kids and see the dirty dishes in the sink.”

Dolben says a proliferation of REITS did an amazing job turning the business into a professional industry in the 1980s. It was during this time that life insurance and pension policies also accepted multifamily housing as an institutional class, which attracted investors.

However, Dolben says at the end of the day, it’s still a bricks and mortar business.

“We’re still taking care of people’s homes,” he says.

Dolben’s two children are in college, and he says it’s too early to tell if they’ll join the family business. Drew also has two kids, both of whom work for The Dolben Company.

Should his own children come aboard, Dolben says he’ll share the advice his father gave him.

“My dad always said, ‘If the day ever comes when you enjoy firing people, you need to have your head checked,’” he says. “‘It happens, and it’s business, but if you enjoy it, something is wrong.’ He also advised us to foster a culture of being stewards. You’re a steward to the residents’ homes that you manage, a steward to your investors and a steward to your employees.”

## Breaking Down Barriers

Veronica Chavez-Costello, CAPS, NALP, works from the ground up.

“My mother, Maria, was a housekeeper at an apartment community and she taught me that the quality of an apartment is very important,” she says. “She made me look at things that I did not notice before, like the smell, the perfectly cleaned windows, the little extra something like a decorative kitchen towel or toilet paper with a ribbon. She made me pay attention to those little things. I learned to be on time, be organized and be ready.”

Such lessons served her well. Now a regional manager for Houston-based Trigild Inc., Chavez-Costello says her work ethic and attention to detail have paved the way for future generations in the Hispanic community.

“My experience is that the more involved you are, and the more industry leaders know you and your productivity, everyone will see that you bring something to the table,” Chavez-Costello says. “The wall falls down.”

Such involvement extends beyond this mother-daughter duo. Chavez-Costello’s husband, Victor Costello, earned his CAMT and is a maintenance supervisor for Aimco. Their daughter, Ashley, is a leasing agent. Their son, Aaron Franco Chavez, NALP,

moved up the ranks at Houston’s Guardian Equity, and now works as a senior leasing agent for Greystar Residential. His earliest memories are working with his mom, who was organizing events and parties for the apartment communities where she worked.

“I always lived where I worked, so my children were basically raised in the apartment industry,” Chavez-Costello says. “It was natural for them to get into the business.”

Chavez-Costello’s two sisters, Candys and Claudia Franco, also joined the industry 11 years after she did. Chavez-Costello recruited Candice and, despite initial apprehension about working for her sister, Candys says all anxiety vanished as she was taught the ins and outs of the business. Today she is an assistant manager with U.S. Residential Group.

“As an apartment industry supervisor, it helps me to have members of my family in all areas of the industry, from housekeeper to manager,” Chavez-Costello says. “When I listen to their struggles, challenges and what motivates them, it helps me understand my staff better and know that what motivates me does not necessary motivate them.”

## Memphis Mischief

While most children spent their Sundays running around the neighborhood with friends, Jimmy Ringel was looking at vacant land in Memphis.

His father, Nick, began investing in apartment communities with partner Jerome Makowsky in the late 1960s. By 1970, he was building and managing them, too. Reluctantly, Jimmy was along for the ride.

“Some of my earliest memories are of my father taking me on Sunday drives when I was 5 and 6 years old to look at vacant land,” Ringel, CPM, says. “He would take my sister, brother and me out of the house to give my mom a break, but we couldn’t understand what we were doing looking at open ground. We just knew that in order to get lunch and ice cream afterward, we had



*Father and son Nick and Jimmy Ringel at a company picnic in fall 2005.*

to look at land. At 5, I didn’t know it was real estate.”

Ringel spent the next five years visiting construction sites and speaking with resident managers. His father was the “management guy” and Makowsky specialized in the construction and development side of the business.

When Ringel was 15, he spent the summer cleaning the community pools. The following year, he and his best friend were hired as landscapers.

“It was 1981—it was a different business then,” Ringel recalls. “This was before they hired professionals. You’d just buy a lawn

mower and get college kids to do the work.”

However, his father soon learned the pitfalls of hiring amateurs.

“When I got my license, my dad drove us around to show us the communities they owned around the University of Memphis,” he says. “It was a bunch of 40-unit places in the university district, but there were other communities under different management that were sprinkled in there. I was 16, spaced out and half paying attention, and I cut the wrong lawns. My dad said, ‘I guess you just gave our competitors a free cut because I don’t think they’re going to pay you.’ He still likes to tell people that story.”

Ringel wasn’t the only one causing trouble. His father’s partner, Jerome, also had a son. Five years older than Ringel, Gary Makowsky grew up on the construction side of the business. He spent his teenage summers working as a maintenance technician and his winters cleaning two pools at a 340-unit community.

“My job was to ready the pools for summer and pass the health inspection,” Makowsky, CPM, says. “I butted heads with the Health Department and didn’t have a great reputation with them. During one visit, I was with the health inspector when I realized I had forgotten to put chlorine in one of the pools, which was on the opposite end of the community. I gave him an excuse to leave and ran back and threw in three or four buckets of chlorine. The health inspector knew something was up and started chasing me until he tripped and broke his leg. Needless to say, the Health Department didn’t like me.”

Makowsky eventually left pool cleaning behind, but stayed in the industry. After graduating from college he returned to Memphis and worked on the management side of the business before returning to his construction roots.

“I needed to learn that side of it but realized management wasn’t my forté,” Makowsky says. “I spent three or four years as a district property manager, learning sales and customer service, but my personality was to start something, finish it and move on

to the next thing. The construction end of it spoke to that and I had a real passion for it.”

Ringel also found his stride, but not before temporarily stepping away from the industry. After gravitating toward an onsite position as a leasing agent during his college summer breaks, Ringel graduated from the University of Michigan and moved to New York to pursue a career in advertising and marketing.

In 1991, 26-year-old Ringel returned to Memphis and began working his way

up from assistant manager to district manager. A decade later, Ringel and Makowsky took over the business from their fathers. With a third partner, Makowsky’s brother-in-law, they merged the brokerage, management and construction businesses into one company, Makowsky Ringel Greenberg LLC.

Today, Ringel says he still returns to the lessons he learned early on.

“I was taught from the ground up,” he says. “What I know about swimming pools, I know from the summers I spent

cleaning them. When I was put on a lease-up, I was there to learn everything I could. When we teach a class to a new person, they know we didn’t develop policies and procedures from some ivory tower, having never done any of the things we’re teaching. Gary and I have done it all.”

However, with the changing of the guard comes the changing of the times. Ringel says the apartment industry is now a far more institutional, competitive, formal and short-term business than the days when the majority of his father’s long-term clients were family friends.

Makowsky, who now runs the company’s construction department, agrees.

“There weren’t a lot of national property management firms in the 1960s, and certainly none in Memphis,” he says. “I think we were one of the first companies that had resident managers in uniforms. We were cutting-edge for Memphis.”

But it wasn’t all forward thinking. Ringel says his father—who retired 13 years ago and now works as his son’s client—was reluctant to put computers onsite for fear that managers would start focusing on a machine instead of their residents.

“Dad had it right—he wanted to shift all of the finances to the corporate department and let people onsite do what they do best,” Ringel says.

Still, the company hired someone to write a software program in the late 1970s and early 1980s, enabling them to computerize all of their data on a mainframe machine.

The other big development: Rent. Ringel says he remembers apartments leasing for \$395 in the mid-1980s. Today, they’re going for \$700.

But of course some things never change.

“When my dad dragged me to vacant lots every Sunday, I swore I would never do that to my own kids,” Ringel says. Thirty years later, I did that every Saturday with my two boys. It all comes around.” ■

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## Breakthrough Monitors Water In Real Time

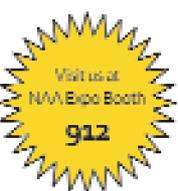
### How California’s 20 x 2020 Water Conservation Plan Can Be A Model For Your Property



**John Lie-Nielsen**  
CEO  
WaterSignal  
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Systems

Former CEO  
Johnstown  
American  
(180,000 Units  
Managed)

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Instant Leak Alerts

With summer we face another season of increased water use, drought restrictions and high water rates. Instead of viewing water as an uncontrollable budget item, you can take proactive steps to reduce usage and cost.

California is promoting its 20x2020 Plan to achieve a 20 percent per capita reduction in urban water demand by 2020. It stresses conservation and utilization of new technologies.

With that in mind, here are a few ideas to reduce consumption.

#### Conservation:

- Check water pressure on each building. Excessive pressure (more than 80 psi) can increase leaks.
- Reduce lawn irrigation. Most communities overuse water. Train your grass to grow with less water. Make sure your rain sensors work.
- Monitor water line to swimming pool (notorious for leaks). Saves chemicals too!
- Inspect all units for leaks quarterly while doing preventative maintenance.
- Check basements and crawl spaces for leaks. Leaks here can also cause structural damage.

- Check your property for wet spots and alligatored paving – clues to underground leaks.



WaterSignal detected leak. When repaired saved over \$5000/month.

#### Implement New Technologies:

WaterSignal provides a new technology that monitors water meters in real-time.

When water spikes above the preset hourly or daily limit, staff is immediately alerted via text or email. This helps eliminate being blindsided by a huge water bill later.

Charts show water consumption data for the month, day, or even down to the hour to analyze trends, target problems (like watering on rainy days), and allow comparisons between properties.

This technology — being utilized by such companies as Gables, Greystar, Milestone — can help properties go on a water diet cutting costs by 14% or more.

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