



# Texas Star



*Brad Williams' politically proactive nature and consummate leadership will shape his year as NAA's 2014 Chairman of the Board.* BY LAUREN BOSTON

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## Brad Williams still dreams about that 1986 red Jaguar.

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**"O**ur industry was experiencing an apartment boom and I was doing so well that I bought this brand new car," Williams says. "The payments were \$700 per month, but it was the most beautiful car in the world." And then the market crashed. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 devastated the real estate industry, driving nearly every small and medium-sized company out of business and pummeling both Williams and his employer, Lincoln Property Company.

"The car payments become a huge burden, but I also couldn't afford something new, so I had to run that Jaguar into the ground until it fell apart," Williams says. "I actually drove it for 10 years—when it would run."

Lincoln Property Company relied on its reputation and leadership through the downturn, and Williams experienced firsthand the impact legislation could have on his livelihood.

"In the wake of the market crash, I realized that you have to get involved, participate and protect this industry," Williams says.

Williams has done just that during his 40 years in multifamily housing—all of which have been spent at Lincoln Property Company. The Dallas native began working as a porter for the company when he was 19, and returned summer after summer while attending the University of Texas. He toyed with the idea of

running for public office after graduating in 1972, but he lacked both the capital and confidence.

Instead, he returned to Lincoln's Village Country Club and was soon invited to apply as a manager trainee at Lincoln's flagship Village Apartments.

Four decades later, Lincoln's Regional Vice President, Southwest Region, oversees 53,000 units and 1,200 employees. He credits his tenure to the company's stable leadership and dedication to promoting from within.

Beyond Lincoln, Williams has been actively involved with NAA since 1990, and says his year as Chairman of the Board will be defined by a strong push for lobbying.

"I want to double the size of our Capitol Conference attendance, boost NAA's Political Action Committee (PAC) and encourage 1,000 volunteers to visit Capitol Hill," Williams says. "We shouldn't ride the coattails of those who are trying to protect our livelihood. We all have to give back to the industry that provides for our families."

### The Elephant in the Room

Williams was born and raised in North Dallas with his older brother, Jimmy, the sons of two politically minded parents with opposing allegiances.

His father, Jimmy Sr., was a Democrat who started working when he was 7 years old to take care of his mother and sister. Later in life he owned an aircraft sales brokerage, and became the leading aircraft broker in the nation.

William's mother, Helen, was a stay-at-home mom, active PTA member and passionate Republican.

"My parents canceled out each other's votes every year," Williams says. "My mother loved politics and current affairs, and took me to see every presidential candidate who came to Dallas. I was following the Nixon/Kennedy race in great detail at the age of 10."

With several uncles in public service, Williams seemed destined for a political career. But, in addition to being shy, the timing was off.

"Essentially you have to be an attorney—which most everyone in my family was except me—and you have to have enough money to finance your campaign," Williams says. "I aspired to go to law school, but when I was 25 my Dad passed away and I had to work. God has a plan and a purpose."

That plan led Williams to Lincoln Property Company, where he started working in the summers during college as a porter and janitor.

Williams adopted his mother's political affiliation, but he says it was his father who taught him that there is value in every person and every job.

"He believed in following the rules and working hard, no matter what the job was," Williams says. "He also taught me the importance of integrity and honesty, and saying what you think if you're asked, even if that means you're overly direct at times."

Such lessons served Williams well. In his three summers working for Lincoln, he says he learned a phenomenal amount about work—and life in general—from other porters and maids, who knew more about what was going on than the people above them.

After graduating from the University of Texas with a degree in history and political science, Williams was accepted as a manager trainee with Lincoln. He was promoted to onsite manager within a year, spending his days on the property and his nights taking every real estate course Southern Methodist University had to offer. After receiving his Certificate of Real Estate, Williams enrolled in the Institute of Real Estate Management program, earning his Certified Property Manager designation at 26.

The following year, he won a Gold Medallion—Lincoln Prop-



**"I realized that you have to get involved, participate and protect this industry."**

erty Company's top award, and one of the proudest accomplishments of his career.

When Williams was promoted to the company's largest single asset, The Village, at 29, he says his years as a porter and trainee paid off.

"I already had a plan in place—I'd already been in every unit and I knew what I was going to do at every property," Williams says.

## Rising Star

What the Texan lacked in years, he made up for in confidence.

Williams says when he was in his 20s, almost everyone who worked for him was older. Still, he never had any doubts about his capabilities as a leader.

"This industry is reluctant to give young people these opportunities, but I went in to every new job fully prepared," he says. "I was so intense and career-driven back then—I was no fun."

He was also tired. Williams says he used to work 12-hour days, but has since recruited a tremendous staff that carries the burden for him. With less on his plate, he now makes a conscious effort to be cheerful and less intimidating around his employees.

"It's so important to be encouraging, and to mentor and train younger people along the way," Williams says. "Every day I get to work and deal with one problem after another—but fortunately I love that. That's why we're here. We call it real estate but it's really people management."

Williams aims to walk his properties weekly and visit with his team members—his favorite part of the job.

"In this business we tend to focus on the underperformers, but raw data can only tell you so much—you have to go to those assets and visualize it yourself," Williams says. "I loved puzzles as a child, and today I love uncovering data and trends that no one else has noticed. I enjoy the problem property, and mentoring and training younger people along the way."

That includes allowing others to make mistakes.

"Once you hear both sides, you need to make a decision—even if it proves to be wrong," Williams says. "In this business, a bad decision is better than no decision because at least you know what doesn't work. Sure, we're going to give someone a hard time, but we don't fire someone over a bad decision. We just expect them to fess up to their poor choice and learn from it."

Jay Parmelee, Vice President of Lincoln Property Company, says Williams' decisiveness is a true asset.

"Brad is such a quick study when it comes to key issues and how to deal with them," Parmelee says. "He is a consensus



Brad Williams, CPM, and his wife, Ginny, vacationing in Greece. They visit Europe frequently, counting Rome and London among their favorite cities.

builder, but generally knows how he wants things done.”

Scott Wilder, Executive Vice President of Lincoln Property Company, agrees, and says Williams brings history and stability to the company.

“He’s the company’s biggest cheerleader and supporter,” Wilder says. “He’s seen the boom and bust cycle multiple times in his career and always comes out of each cycle with a positive, can-do Lincoln attitude. He’s done every job in property management and when he speaks about an asset, it’s clear he is one of those guys who has been there, done that. There’s no substitute for his experience and expertise. Plus, he has a heart as big as Texas.”

## Home Away From Apartment Homes

Property management runs in the family.

Williams’ colleagues encouraged him to date Ginny, a “leasing superstar” at Lincoln in the early ’80s. Thirty years later, Williams says his wife—now a Regional Property Manager at Milestone Management—is his biggest cheerleader.

His son, Bradley, is also in the business—a Regional Property Manager for Pinnacle.

“The more Bradley wanted to be in the business, the less I encouraged it,” Williams says. “But I think he’s an up-and-

comer in this industry because he grew up in it.”

Although it’s a family affair, Williams says the apartment industry is the last thing he and Ginny want to talk about when they’re off the clock.

“I’m into escapism at home,” Williams says. “Unless Ginny and I have a major work problem that we need to solve, I’m riding my bike, fooling in the yard or reading mystery novels and history books.”

Williams is particularly fascinated with the Civil War, and makes an annual trip to Gettysburg before the Capitol Conference. His prized memorabilia include signed documents from Presidents Abraham Lincoln, John Tyler and James Buchanan.

Described by friends as “one of the smartest people in any room,” Williams can go toe-to-toe with any historian.

“One night in front of the Alamo he

was giving us his thoughts about the battle and along came a group of people who actually thought he was the paid tour guide,” says Rick Graf, President and CEO of Pinnacle Family of Companies. “Brad never skipped a beat and continued as if he was the guide. We told him it was because he was the only one wearing a sport jacket, which made him look very official.”

Williams not only dresses the part of a Southern gentleman; he acts it, too.

“Brad was doing a site inspection at The Village and he got distracted and walked straight into the [full] pool,” says Wilder, who insists Williams has never passed a mirror he didn’t like to look in. “He didn’t miss a stride—he walked right out of the pool and kept going. He’s always cool, calm and collected.”

## Fighting for the Industry

After making a name for himself at Lincoln, Williams was elected to the Apartment Association of Greater Dallas (AAGD)’s Board of Directors. The first person he met was Gerry Henigsmann, CAPS, a former assistant city manager who was working for a well-known developer at the time. Williams says Henigsmann, now the Executive Vice President of AAGD, helped him recognize that great political strides could be made with a little organization.

**“His leadership style is one of quietly bringing together diverse groups and getting them to see a common goal and act on it. He does not beat you up—he makes you want to participate.”**

—Ron Shelton, CAPS, Senior Vice President  
Amalgamated Management Company Inc., Dallas



Williams, who has been with Lincoln Property Company for 40 years, discusses his portfolio with Vice President Joyce Eldredge (left) and Vice President Jay Parmelee (right).

On his end, Williams showed Henigsmann he was a man of his word.

“The year before Brad became AAGD’s President, he frequently voiced his unhappiness with the quality of the food and drink at the hotel we used for our evening membership meetings,” Henigsmann says. “The night of his inauguration, Brad laid out an impressive business agenda for the coming year, and topped it off by pledging that he would find a better hotel with ‘no chicken, better booze and shorter meetings.’ It was a promise he kept.”

Colleagues attribute Williams’ victories, both big and small, to his unyielding persistence.

“Brad tries to find the solution rather than focus on the problem,” says Gale Lively, Executive Vice President of the Louisville Apartment Association. “He’s a quiet but phenomenal leader who always looks for the positive. I’ve known him for more than 15 years and I’ve never once seen him get angry.”

With a reputation for level-headed leadership, Williams also was elected to the Texas Apartment Association (TAA)’s Legislative Committee, eventually serving as TAA President.

“The legislature decided to levy a sales tax on porters’ and maids’ salaries, and that really incensed me,” Williams says. “I spoke in front of the committee and told them how unfair I thought it was. We’d have to lay off employees as a result of this sales tax. Bob Bullock, a Texas politician and friend of George W. Bush, got involved with the issue and helped us to overcome it. That’s when I realized how crazy legislation can be, and what an impact it can have on our industry.”

Inspired to achieve legislative victories nationally, Williams became an NAA delegate in 1990. Six years later, he met with NAA members Sam Merrick and Tom Day to discuss creating a Political Action Committee (PAC).

“We had a big committee meeting and no one else showed up, so we voted in favor of the PAC and wrote the by-laws right there,” Williams says. “We raised \$30,000 that first year, all in Dallas.”

Williams says he has worked to build a culture of generosity in the industry, with the expectation that members give back to the industry that has given them so much.

“Our core members are not wealthy people, and they’re writing hard-earned checks to help this industry,” Williams says. “It’s amazing. Our members want to make a difference and leave this industry better off than we found it.”

## Leading the Charge

Change starts from within—a lesson Williams learned years ago.

“I was at a TAA meeting in 1992 and we were complaining about NAA,” Williams says. “After a while, Hap Hunnicut turned to me and said, ‘Bradley, who do you think NAA is? We are NAA!—if we don’t like it, we can change it.’ We found the enemy and they are us.”

Since then, Williams has led by example, focusing on the solution, not the problem.

“There was a time when NAA was really struggling and we didn’t think we’d make it,” Williams says. “Today, the organization is booming and has everything in place to succeed—we just can’t get off track from our mission. We need to help the affiliates grow and become better advocates for the industry.”

Ron Shelton, 2009 NAA Chairman of the Board and Senior Vice President of Dallas-based Amalgamated Management Company Inc., says Williams is the perfect man for the job.

“Brad sees the big picture, but can focus on the minute details when necessary,” Shelton says. “His leadership style is one of quietly bringing together diverse groups and getting them to see a common goal and act on it. He does not beat you up—he makes you want to participate.”

Encouraging greater industry participation is one of Williams’

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*—Scott Wilder, Senior Vice President  
Lincoln Property Company, Dallas*



The ultimate University of Texas Longhorns fan, Williams has a long-standing rivalry with Oklahoma Sooners' supporter and former TAA President Cheryl Pucci.

top priorities for the coming year. He aims to generate a \$1 million PAC, double 2014's NAA Capitol Conference attendance and enable at least 1,000 members to meet with their congressmen on Capitol Hill.

"There are so many legislative changes, both regionally and nationally, and the actions of the government can have huge ramifications for our industry," says Williams, who is particularly concerned with HUD's disparate impact regulation and the privatization of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. "You expect the real estate challenges, as well as those from your owners, but dealing with the government is the hardest part of our job."

Henigsmann says Williams' involvement and love of politics matches up "extremely well" with NAA's legislative efforts.

"Brad has always believed that our industry must be politically proactive in order to survive and prosper," Henigsmann says. "With his years of experience, he knows our industry inside and out, which

allows him to quickly assess the positive or negative impacts that we face from our legislative and regulatory challenges."

In addition to strengthening NAA's voice on Capitol Hill, as well as its partnership with NMHC, Williams aims to reach 7.5 million units and build an integrated data platform to better serve NAA's affiliates.

It's a tall order, but Williams is prepared to hit the ground running.

"Someone once said there are three types of people: Those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who say, 'What the hell just happened?'" Williams says. "You have to be a participant."

### Living Legacy

In 1972, Williams invested in a TI-30 handheld calculator—one of the first of its kind. He says it gave him an edge over his colleagues, and also taught him a valuable lesson.

"We all resist change, but you have to innovate and be flexible," Williams

says. "You either change with it or it passes you by."

Although technological advancements have changed the industry drastically, Williams says the heart of the business—people management—is still the same, and he can't imagine hanging that up any time soon.

Eventually, Williams plans to spend four months of the year at his second home in the mountains of Angel Fire, N.M., while continuing to vacation in London and Rome—his favorite European cities.

When he isn't traveling, Williams says he'll likely volunteer for political campaigns. "I can't conceive that I'd totally stop working," he says.

But for now, Williams has more to accomplish.

TAA Executive Vice President George Allen, CAE, says Williams will make the most of his year as Chairman.

"Brad has a keen understanding of the inner workings of apartment associations at all levels," Allen says. "He's a great thinker and visionary leader, and every association needs an expert on the Civil War to liven up the dinner table conversations."

In addition to his goals as Chairman of the Board, Williams says he also wants to recruit and retain the best in the industry and grow Lincoln Property Company's Southwest region to 60,000 units in the near future—100,000 units in the long term.

As for NAA, Williams has a clear legacy in mind.

"I want to be remembered for being on the front lines, fighting for our industry, next to a lot of great friends." ■■■

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## Military-Minded

*Lincoln Property Company and its affiliate, Lincoln Military Housing, currently employ 172 veterans. For more about the ways in which the apartment industry is supporting the troops, check out our special military section, beginning on pg. 42.*