

# *Celebrating 70 Years*

**THE STORY OF HAPPEL REALTORS  
AS TOLD BY MIKE HAPPEL**



*Happel Realtors today, 2025, 70 years later*

## THE STORY OF HAPPEL REALTORS

This 70 years of history of Happel Realtors is told from the perspective of Mike Happel, son of Gus Happel, who began Happel Real Estate in 1956. This history was captured to commemorate 70 years of Happel Realtors in Quincy, Illinois. This book a tribute to Mike Happel and the 50 years he has spent building Happel Realtors to what it is today. The story of Happel Realtors is also the life story of Mike Happel, his legacy, and a gift from Stephen Gramke to Mike, current owner of Happel Realtors.

*\*All newspaper clippings are shared with the permission of the Quincy Public Library online archives*

# INTRODUCTION

WRITTEN BY STEPHEN GRAMKE

Dear Mike,

As I sit down to write this, I'm flooded with memories—of you, of Happel Inc. REALTORS, and of the incredible journey we've shared since I first stepped into real estate in 2006.

This year, as we celebrate 70 years of your family's legacy, I find myself more grateful than ever for the man who built so much of it and for the privilege of carrying it forward.

This book, a labor of love, is my gift to you—a way to honor your life, your work, and the indelible mark you've left on me, our team, and this community.

When I bought Happel Inc. in 2018, I wasn't just purchasing a business; I was inheriting a tradition, one your father started, and you nurtured with unmatched passion and integrity.

You've been more than a mentor to me; you're a friend, a guiding light, and, through our families' lifelong connection, a part of my own story. This company feels like home because of you.

Your presence in the office every day is a gift I never take for granted. Your wisdom—shared in stories, advice, or just a quiet nod of encouragement—grounds us all.

You have this remarkable ability to make everyone around you feel valued, to turn challenges into

opportunities, and to remind us why we do what we do.

Even as you've teased retirement year after year, your heart has never left this place. This year, when your health gave us a scare, it hit me hard. It reminded me that time is precious, and I knew we needed to capture your story, your father's story, and the legacy of Happel Inc. while you're still here, still lighting up the office with your presence.

This book is more than a history; it's a celebration of you—of the values you've instilled, the lives you've touched, and the community you've helped build.

It's a way to ensure that everyone who comes through these doors, now and in the future, knows the heart behind Happel Inc. and the man who has been its soul for so long. I hope when you read these pages, you see the love and admiration we all have for you. I hope it brings you pride, knowing that your legacy will live on, not just in the business, but in every person who carries forward the principles you've taught us.

Mike, thank you—for your trust in me, for your friendship, and for never truly retiring from the work and the people you love. This book is my way of saying that your story matters, and it always will.

Here's to you, to Happel Inc., and to the many more moments we'll share.

With deepest gratitude,  
Stephen Gramke



# Happel Heritage

## AS TOLD BY MIKE HAPPEL



*Mike pictured with his father in his toddler years*

My father, Joseph August Happel (Gus), was a transplant from Germany. He was born in 1912. His family immigrated in the early 1900s from Germany to St. Louis, Missouri.

His dad, Joseph Happel (1886–1964), and his mother, Louise Muetze (1886–1973), were grocers. At one point, the family actually had two grocery stores in St. Louis. Their grocery stores were really doing well until the depression came along. The depression really put the kibosh on things.

My dad was in college at Principia during the Depression until they couldn't afford it. He quit school after two years and that's when he started working in sales. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had gone into the grocery store business, had the depression not happened.

My father was not in combat during World War II. As a child he lost an eye in an accident so they wouldn't put him in with only one eye, but he did serve as a translator as he was fluent in German.



My mother, Vera Hermsmeier, was born in 1924. Hermsmeier is a good old Quincy name. Her parents, Walter Hermsmeier (1891–1959) and Selma Gaebel (1891–1969), had a little store on 24th and Chestnut called Hermsmeier’s Market.

## HOW MY PARENTS MET

That’s a funny story. My dad was selling tobacco for Reynold’s Tobacco. My dad sold tobacco to my grandfather’s store, Hermsmeier’s Market. My mom would be around the store at that time, but she was only 12 or 13 years old when he first started selling to the market.

My dad became really good friends with my Uncle Harold, my mom’s brother. Eventually, when she was 21, my mom and dad started dating and got married. They were married for 48 years. My dad used to tell me, “Mike, I want to be married for 50 years.”

Well, he made it to 48. I always kid my wife about the fact that we need to at least be married 50 years, so we made that. My wife Lynda and I have been married for 52 years now.

## QUINCY BEGINNINGS

Gus and Vera moved to Minnesota where two of my siblings and I were born, and then they moved to Florida to a place called Plant City.



*Published in the Herald-Whig on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1946.*

My dad had gotten into a little business that was doing fairly well but my mom hated it there. We



*Mike with his siblings, left to right, top row: Steve and Mike, left to right, bottom row: Becky, Sally, and Nancy.*

were only there for about six months, and my mom decided it wasn't for her. They came to St. Louis for a short time and then moved to Quincy.

I don't know how my mom talked my dad into moving to Quincy. That, I can't say. He did not have a job lined up.

When we came back to Quincy, I was five years old. There were five of us kids, total. There's Steve, who is the oldest, me, then Sally, Nancy, and Becky. The first three of us were born in Minnesota with the fourth child born in Florida and the fifth here in Quincy.

We lived in a little house on 27th and Chestnut. Later, we moved to 3032 Lawrence Road (seven people and one bath!), and then we lived in a house on the southside of town on Bradmoore until 1971.

## HAPPEL REAL ESTATE BEGINNINGS

When we moved to Quincy, my dad started selling real estate for a guy named Thompsen. He worked for him for a year and then went on his own as Happel Real Estate. He did this from 1957 until 1974. My dad was always a salesman, from selling tobacco to cars to real estate.

I remember sitting with the family at night for dinner, all seven of us. My dad had a picnic table made for our kitchen. It had benches on either side. My mom would sit on one end, my dad would sit on the other; my sisters were on one bench, and my brother and I were on the other.

My dad used to make all his own ads when he used the Herald-Whig newspaper for advertising. We would sit there, and he would have us kids help with the ads. We would have a good time trying to make funny ads. This was in the 1960s.



Above: Mike's father Gus' business letterhead.

Below: some of Gus' ads published in the Herald-Whig in 1966 and promotional materials:  
salt and pepper shakers and book of matches

**REAL ESTATE FOR SALE**

**Houses for Sale**

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

FROM HERE  
TO ETERNITY  
Is A Long Time  
BUT WE DO BELIEVE



**MORE HOMES NEEDED  
LIST WITH US NOW  
\$5,000 TO \$50,000  
FOR HAPPY HOMES**

**HAPPEL**

**REAL ESTATE**  
1258 BROADWAY , 222-2858

Jack Greifer, Salesman	222-9279
Jerry Kalmer, Salesman	223-3476
Leo Zanger, Salesman	223-8015

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●





His ads were cute, nice ads. When I started in real estate in 1971, I would get out his ad books to get ideas.

My dad had an extremely good business. Now, Stephen (the owner) has 20 or so people working here. Back when my dad had it, he had four people working for him—that was it. He had people working for him from the time he started it—good people, like Leo Zanger.

## THE UNPLANNED PATH TO REAL ESTATE

I attended Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I met my wife, Lynda, at college. We were the same age and we both graduated in 1971.

When I was graduating, I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I saw a job board at Augustana for a job at Mary Crest College as head of the men's dorm. I went and applied and got it.

I always found that interesting because I was only 22 at the time, and here I was going to be the head of a bunch of kids basically the same age as me. I was also supposed to be the associate manager of the student union there. Those were my two job descriptions.

I met with the nun the re and got the job. I came home for the summer and worked at Quincy Maid Potato Chips. While that was going on, I got my notice to take my draft physical. Before taking the

physical, I called the nun because I saw no reason I wouldn't pass it. I told her I would call her after to let her know what happened.

But I failed that physical because my eyes were too bad. I have had bad eyes my whole life. When I got back, I called the nun right away and said, "I have good news. I flunked that physical, and I can take that job."

She said, "Well, I have bad news, we hired someone else." So, there I was, in Quincy, working at the chip plant with my college degree.

“

**MY DAD SAID TO ME ONE DAY, “YOU KNOW, MIKE, WHY DON'T YOU GET A REAL ESTATE LICENSE AND WORK WITH ME AND SEE HOW YOU LIKE IT?”**

That was in 1971, and I have been doing it ever since. It wasn't necessarily part of the plan, but let's face facts, I grew up sitting at the table doing that all my childhood.

I am the only one of my siblings to go into real estate. My brother Steve is a retired economics professor from Arizona State. Sally is a retired teacher, while Nancy lives in California, and Becky lives in Omaha.

## DAD LEAVING THE BUSINESS

When my dad's retina detached in 1969, it was a big deal, especially because he only had one eye. He went to St. Louis and had what they called a "buckle" put on his eye.

He had to stay in his bedroom with the curtains closed, making the room as dark as he could for a year—a year!

After that year, he returned to work, but at that point, the business was going downhill because he was the pusher of that business. I am sure it was a little upsetting for him.

My mom was always a stay-at-home mom, but she started a drapery shop in 1969 so they could make some money. When she started that business, I was a senior in high school. All the kids were old enough to take care of themselves at that time.

When my dad returned to work, it was never what it was before his eye issue. There were a decent number of people doing real estate by then.

In 1975, my mom and dad decided to move to Phoenix. It was a good thing for them. In 1977, my siblings followed to Phoenix.



*Mike's business card when he went into real estate*



*Mike's parents, Gus and Vera in their later years*



*Mike and Lynda's wedding, 1973, St. John Church, Forest Park, Illinois*



I was 22 when I started in real estate. When my dad left, I was 25.

“

**SO, THERE I WAS AT 25, JUST MARRIED,  
AND NOW MY DAD IS GONE FROM THE  
BUSINESS, SO I AM DOING WHAT I CAN.**

## **BUILDING A BUSINESS & A FAMILY**

When my dad was leaving, he asked me, “Mike, what are you going to do? You are 25. It is tough being that age and going out on your own.”

But that is what I did. I started my own business with two ladies worked for me, Myra McGee and Mary Eising. For quite a while, it was the three of us. I had an office at 1258 Broadway. It was the building my dad owned; I bought it from him.

Lynda and I were 24 years old when we got married, but didn’t have kids until we were 28. Our first daughter Kate came along in 1977.

After Kate was born, Lynda didn’t want to be teaching while we raised our children. So, she quit teaching for a while. Madelyn was born in 1980, and then Claire came along in 1982.

Here we were in 1980, and the interest rates went nuts. In Illinois, they had usury laws. Usury was a limit you could set at what you could charge for a loan. In 1980, the usury rate was 12%. Interest rates went nuts. Loans for houses were going up to 18%.

It was a tough situation for us because when the rates got crazy, the banks said they couldn’t loan money to people because they couldn’t charge over 12%. They were paying 14% on passbooks.

It was a heck of a time. Lynda wasn’t working; we had three little kids, and I was sitting there trying to sell real estate, but I couldn’t.

Finally, after six months, the government said there would be no more usury. I had only sold one house in those six months. We were struggling.

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**BUT I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT LEAVING  
REAL ESTATE. I LOVED REAL ESTATE.**



*Mike, his wife Lynda, and daughter Kate, pictured with Mike's family, top row, far right.*

# Family Album

Setting goals and giving their daughters the independence to make their own decisions, even at an early age, is important to Mike and Lynda Happel.

"They want to do so many things," Mrs. Happel said. "We just ask them stay committed and to follow it through to the end — either to the end of the semester or to the recital."

Learning independence starts at an early age, but Mrs. Happel said there is a fine line between being overprotective and giving children the opportunity to make their own choices.

"It is really hard in this day and age," she said. "You don't want them to always need you, but there are so many outside forces like peer pressure."

With three children who have decided to be involved in many activities, the Happels have to get creative in finding time just for family. Whether it is making sure all five are in the same church pew on Sunday, or jumping in the car and taking off for a weekend, doing things as a group is important.

"Our lives are so centered around their activities that sometimes we have to get away," she said. "It is nice to take off in the car, all five of us with no phones."

Family getaways and vacations not only offer time to be together, but an opportunity for special memories. A trip to Hawaii years ago turned into a semi-family reunion.

"We met Mike's parents in Hawaii and some of his sisters came too," Mrs. Happel said. "Family



**The Happels: From left, Mike, Katherine, Lynda, Madelyn and Claire.**

ties are important to both of us and we got to see other relatives and have a wonderful time in Hawaii."

## The Happels:

### Mike Happel

Born: Northfield, Minn.

Job: Realtor, Landmark Realtors

Married: 19 years

Children: Katherine, 16; Madelyn, 12; and Claire, 10.

### Lynda Happel

Born: Oak Park.

Job: Teacher, Monroe School

Mike, pictured with his wife Lynda and three daughters: Kate, Madelyn, and Claire in the Herald-Whig "Family Album" section on April 25, 1993. \*Colorized version of photo above replaced the original newspaper photo.





*Mike, at his Landmark Better Homes and Garden office, 1980s*

I got a call from Lenore Peters in 1981, with a company in Quincy called Landmark Better Homes and Gardens. She asked if we wanted to merge with her and her partner. So, we did.

When I was growing up in real estate watching my father do it all, I think that is what caused his retinal detachment. He did everything: writing ads, doing the bookwork. He never had a secretary. When I got together with Landmark, they had a lady named JoAnn Tharp, a great real estate secretary.

They probably had five or six people working for them, and I brought along the two ladies working for me, so we had a pretty good-sized office. We left it named Landmark. We were merged together from around 1981 until 1994.

I was ready to do something else around the same



time Lenore was getting ready to retire. I didn't go back to just being Happel Realtors again. I partnered with John Schlipmann. It became Happel & Schlipmann. We were partners until 2008.

John did a lot of appraisal work at the time, and he got to the point where he would rather just focus on that. When we split, it became Happel Realtors.

I had about seven people working for me. Stephen Gramke, whom I have known since he was a kid, was working as a Business Manager for a physical therapy business at this time. I said to Stephen one day, "Stephen, you really should try out real estate, selling it part-time, to see what you think."

He did, and it clicked. He started working for me full-time because he was doing well. It got to the point that I said he should consider becoming a partner. I took him in as a partner, and I was starting to slow down a little because I wasn't a spring chicken.

At some point, I told Stephen he should take over the business, and I should keep my license and just do sales. He has really grown this business, and he is doing a wonderful job.

When my dad was doing the most business in Quincy, he only had three or four people working for him. There weren't a ton of people doing real estate at that time.

## REAL ESTATE TODAY

What's nice about real estate is meeting people. It's not the same thing all the time. I'm constantly in different houses and meeting new people. Now, I don't have to work as hard as I used to. I will sit here now, and my phone will ring from somebody who got my name from somebody else that I sold a house to in the past.

“

**WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I HAD TO GO OUT  
AND LOOK FOR BUSINESS; NOW,  
BUSINESS COMES LOOKING FOR ME.**

I don't do nearly what I used to, but it is very rewarding to have people come to me. If you upset one person, you are upsetting 20 people. Because the minute I do something wrong, they will say, "Don't use Happel."



*Mike at Quincy Board of Realtors accepting president's gavel from John Schlipmann*

What I have had for the most part is people will say, "Call Mike Happel." That's been a wonderful thing. It's been a great business for me. I can look back and say that I haven't been bad to anyone I can think of.

I try to do the best I can. We always tell people, "Whatever happens, you can bet we are doing the best we can for you."

I think I have probably sold more houses in Quincy than anyone else simply because I have been doing this for so long.

## CHOOSING TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR

I worked for a guy named Albert Scott one summer when I was saving money for a car. The next summer, I worked for George Ostermueller at the chip factory. These bosses were often difficult and demanding.

I wanted to do something on my own. I did not want to work specifically for someone. When you work in real estate, you work for all kinds of people. But it isn't like you are constantly working for them.

## NOTHING BUT SELLING

When I partnered with Landmark and hired a secretary, my business blossomed—nothing but selling. I'm at that point now. Stephen takes care of everything. I don't have to do a thing. It's his business, not mine. It's great for me. I come in in the morning and do my stuff.

Every two years, you have to renew your real estate license. I was going to quit at about 70 years old (I'm 76 now). I had a big deal cooking right when I needed to renew. I didn't want to lose that deal. That was in 2019. I kept telling people I was going to retire. Along came the next renewal. Guess what happened? I had another big deal.

Right now, every time I think about it, my intention at this stage in the game is to say I probably should

retire. Once again, there is a piece of land that I just listed that is a two-million-dollar piece of land.

The very first house I sold in 1971 was \$6,000. It's so funny, I see properties that I have sold before, and it is amazing what they sold for the first time.

## 50 YEAR PERSPECTIVE

In 50 years of doing this, I have seen markets that are one minute a seller's market and the next thing you know a buyer's market, and then it goes back the other way.

Right now, we are in a market where people are complaining about interest rates. 6% or 7% interest rates are great rates as far as I am concerned, but you have a lot of people who have only seen the 3% rate.

You have times when it is one way and times when it is another. Now, I have buyers that I can't find things for. That's a rotten market. There is nothing worse than when someone can afford something, and wants something, and you can't find it. I keep a list of people that I am looking for. I have about 12 people that I can't find the right thing for them.



# Third-quarter housing sales down in Quincy

■ But overall, home sales are up.

By Rodney Hart

Herald-Whig Staff Writer

Housing sales in the Quincy area cooled in the third quarter, but more homes have been sold this year than at the same point in 2004.

The Quincy Association of Realtors reported home sales in Adams County were down 3.3 percent from a year ago, from 246 homes sold in the third quarter of 2004 to 238 homes sold this year. Home sales were down 13 percent last month from the same time a year ago — 67 homes were sold in September, compared to 77 the year before.

But home sales overall are up, as 657 homes have been sold this year compared to 627 homes through the first three quarters of 2004.

"The market is very healthy," said Mike Happel of Happel and Schlipmann in Quincy. "As long as the interest rates stay down ... they are at about 6 percent for a 30-year fixed mortgage, and that's tremendous. It wasn't that long ago that when you got 8 or 9 percent, you were doing great."

"The phones are still ringing and that's a good sign," said Steve Flesner, board president of the Quincy Association of Realtors. "But we need more listings. We need people to step up to the plate, sell their houses and upgrade a little."

Home prices are also rising. The average cost of an Adams County home sold in 2005 is

\$105,400, compared to \$98,956 a year ago.

Flesner said the average price went up because Quincy has attracted a number of medical professionals who are buying "more expensive properties." Happel said houses on the mar-



Happel

**"The market is very healthy. As long as the interest rates stay down ... they are at about 6 percent for a 30-year fixed mortgage, and that's tremendous."**

— Mike Happel,  
of Happel and Schlipmann

ket tend to follow new housing prices, which have increased because of higher fuel and building material costs.

But Flesner said homes are still affordable, especially when several banks in town began offering 40-year fixed rate mortgages.

Third quarter state results aren't yet available, but Illinois home sales in August were up versus a year ago.

There were 19,957 total home sales, which include single-family homes and condominiums, in August 2005, up 8.6 percent

from 18,384 sales in August 2004. The Illinois median home price in August was \$215,000, up 11.1 percent from \$193,500 a year earlier.

The median is a typical market price where half the homes sold for more, half sold for less. Total home sales year-to-date (January through August) show an overall increase of 2.5 percent to 125,482 homes sold compared to 122,404 sales in the first eight months of last year.

Information from the Quincy Association of Realtors is based upon multiple listing service residential sales in Adams County by participating QAR members.

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(217) 221-3370

October 10,  
2005 article  
published in the  
Herald-Whig

## WHAT I HAVE ENJOYED THE MOST

It was a constant new person I was dealing with. That was always the cool thing, being in a house I hadn't been in before and dealing with someone I hadn't met before.

But now, I go into so many houses that I have been in before, and people I have worked with in the past.

“

**WHAT HAVE I ENJOYED THE MOST?  
THE PEOPLE.**

## PURPOSE IN LIFE

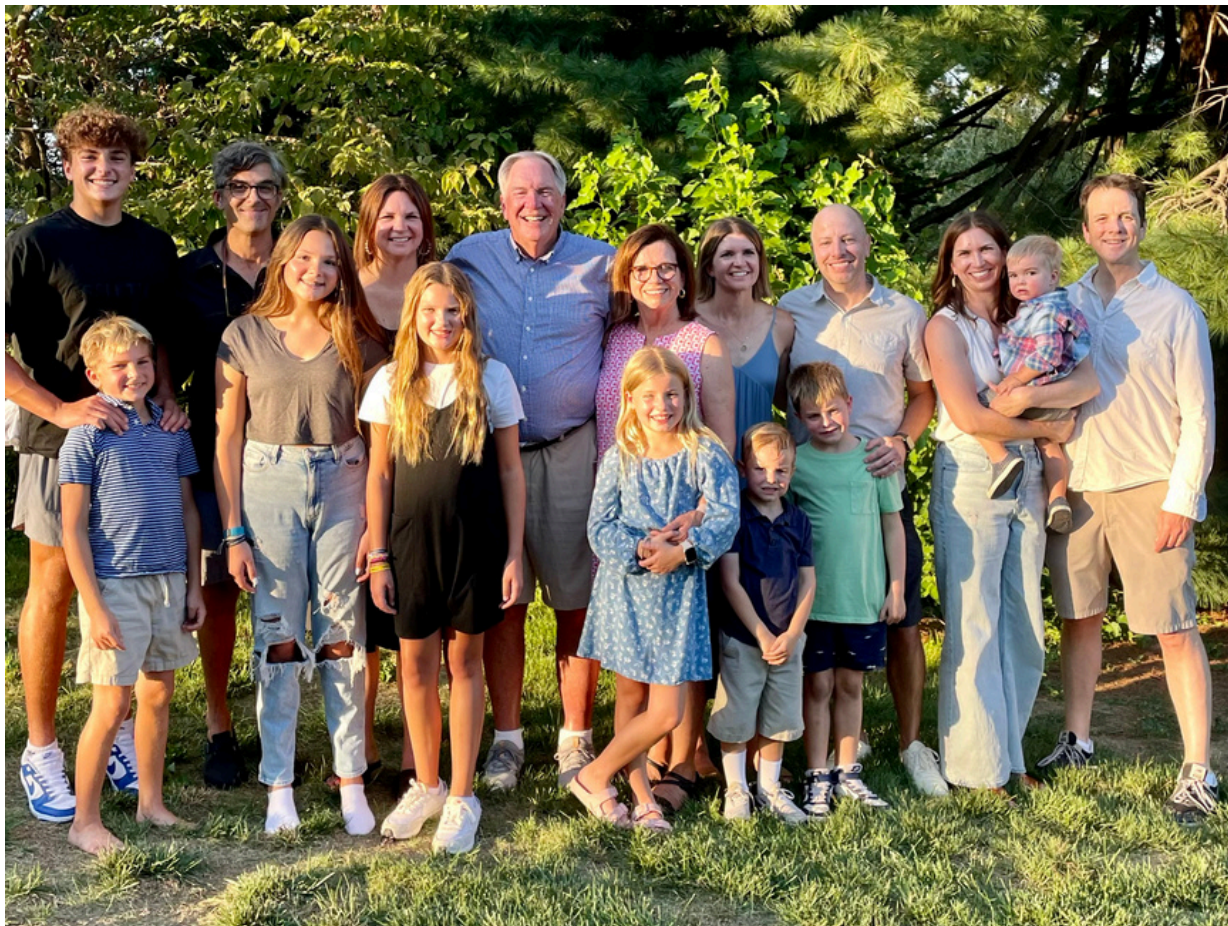
My life's work was by accident. Although my upbringing involved being a salesperson, I honestly had no intention of working in real estate. I had contemplated moving to Forest Park, where Lynda is from.

I didn't grow up thinking I would sell real estate by any stretch. It was all because of that situation of when I was taking that physical for the military and trying to be nice when I called the nun to tell her about it. I'm so glad that happened! I cannot complain about her giving the job to someone else. Obviously, it has been good for me because I have stayed with real estate all these years.



*Scan QR  
Code to  
view 70<sup>th</sup>  
Celebration  
video:*





*Mike pictured with his wife Lynda, children, their spouses, and grandchildren, 2024*



Memoirs  
by  
Maureen

Life Storyteller, Maureen Klues