

THE MOST INSPIRING BUSINESS WOMEN MAKING A DIFFERENCE, 2021

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A close-up portrait of Karen Leslie Simon, a woman with voluminous, wavy brown hair, wearing a dark top and large hoop earrings. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid blue color.

# Karen Leslie Simon

President & Managing Partner | Emersons Commercial Real Estate (Tarrant COUNTY)

**An Inspirational Leader and Role Model  
in Real Estate Industry**



COVER STORY

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Estate (Tarrant COUNTY )

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Karen Leslie Simon, President & Managing Partner | Emersons Commercial Real Estate (Tarrant COUNTY), has successfully negotiated the choppy waters of the commercial real estate and carved a place for herself among the most inspiring women leaders. It is a combination of three qualities that have enabled her to excel in professional life and command the attention and respect of her peers and seniors. Karen is always well-prepared, deeply informed, and open-minded. And she has achieved her goals because of her drive and determination.

Karen has more than 30 years of brokerage experience, specializing in retail, industrial, and land sectors in leasing and sales. Her name has appeared in Marquis Who's Who of Top Executives list. The biographical dictionary of accomplished individuals recognizes her dedication, achievements, and leadership in commercial real estate. And, earlier, Top 100 Magazine also included her in its list of Top 100 People in Real Estate.

A humble and passionate person, Karen believes that it is her job to train the new generation of young professionals and bolster those that

need a helping hand. So along with being a pioneer in the real estate industry, she is a mentor as well.

**First Woman to Practice Industrial Real Estate in Tarrant**

Karen has worked with several major real estate companies over the years. And she has been a top producer for all of them. A Bachelor of Science in education from the University of Texas, Austin, and a holder of Master's degree in American history from Texas Christian University, she worked as an assistant professor at Tarrant County Community College for five years. After that, she began her real estate career. In her 30-plus-year career, Karen has executed more than 2,000 transactions across thousands of acres and more than 6 million square feet of property.

In the real estate sector, Karen's first job was as an executive with the Department of Housing and Urban Development in charge of public relations and inter-governmental relations for a five-state region. While there, she grabbed the opportunity to study and take the brokers exam. "I did so that I might follow my interest in commercial real estate in the private sector" Karen says.

When Karen entered commercial real estate, there were very few women in commercial brokerage. It was completely dominated by men. In 1982, she became the first woman to practice industrial real estate in Dallas and Tarrant Counties. And she is also the first woman in the history of commercial real estate in Dallas/Fort Worth (DFA) to be named the highest industry producer. She overachieved her target while working for Henry S. Miller Company, then the largest real estate company in Texas.

After working with Henry S. Miller for six years as the head of its industrial division in Tarrant County, Karen decided to partner with other entrepreneurs to form a Real Estate Group called R.E Group Advisor Inc; a woman and minority owned company. The group engaged in leasing, sales, and property management primarily for the federal government. The massive foreclosures had made the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) the largest owners of commercial real estate in the U.S. And, "for a woman or minority-owned company, there were multiple opportunities available to handle real estate activities for the government," Karen says.

And, in the late 1990s, Karen got the opportunity to form an Industrial Division for The Woodmont Company, a large regional firm mainly doing retail sales, leasing, and development. "I was a good fit for their expansion into other areas of real estate," Karen says.

From early 2003 to 2014, Karen worked with Bradford Commercial Real Estate Services as executive vice president and managing partner. She founded the entity board for the company in Tarrant County-based office and opened the location. Soon after that in March of 2014, Karen started working for TIG, another industrial and office group, as president and principal of TIG DFW Metroplex West.

And Karen joined Emersons Commercial Real Estate in December of 2016 and opened its office in Tarrant County. It is a full-service commercial real estate firm that specializes in property management, leasing, and sales in and around Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas and Emersons is a partner in



2020

**Texas Women in**

**Commercial Real Estate**

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**WE'RE INV**

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**ESTING IN...  
OPPORTUNITIES.**



1045 which is a national management firm that manages all of Kroger real estate.

Karen is also associated with organizations such as the Urban Land Institute, the International Council of Shopping Centers Convention, the Fort Worth Board of Realtors, the Texas Association of Realtors, and Commercial Real Estate Women. “I was a founding member in 1987 of a chapter of commercial real estate women,” Karen says.

### Emersons Commercial Real Estate

Banker and real estate professional Richard Webb and his partner Matthew Price, a CPA and real estate professional, founded Emersons in Dallas, Texas in 2004. Karen says that the company currently manages and/or leases about 7 million sq. ft. in the DFW metroplex and in 17 states. Their 9,000 sq. ft. office holding in Dallas houses their management arm, brokerage arm, and their development group. The company has a team of 20 employees.

“In our Fort Worth office, we lease and sell but do not do management,” Karen says. “We intend in the future to have a management division but that takes time and is somewhat a duplication of effort since our offices are only 50 miles apart.”

Three years ago, Richard and Matthew partnered with St. Louis-based Priority Properties to form a real estate company called 1045. Karen says that its purpose is to manage all of Kroger's real estate nationwide and other national tenants. And the company's portfolio under management exceeds 70 million sq. ft.

Emersons and 1045 are also the home of a growth acquisition fund called E-gap. It is acquiring – and will also manage – grocery-anchored commercial real estate centers and affiliated properties. “It is an exciting place to be involved in the real estate industry,” Karen says.

### Extra Challenges on the Road to Achieve Success

Women still have to work harder to prove their capabilities in industries across all sectors. When Karen started her journey in real estate in the 1980s, she encountered more challenges than her male colleagues. “I have always felt that a woman has an extra challenge on the road to achieving monetary success and recognition,” she says. “We started a little behind the curve of our male counterparts.” Karen joined the industrial real estate after Henry S. Miller offered her a position as the head of their industrial division. It also offered to train her in industrial real estate. Karen says that it is her education and management skills that got her the big opportunity.

In a male-dominated business environment, Karen had to overcome gender issues as a woman. She had to be a little better than her male counterparts to get the same level of approval and achievements. “I felt if I did that then clients and colleagues alike would approve and accept me,” Karen says.

She made a mark for her abilities by studying more, creating lesson plans, and doing her homework. Drawing on her inner strength, Karen decided not to show her sensitivities and ask for any special treatment. And, soon, she was recognized for her ability to lead and command the room. Karen now believes that “challenges make you

think and help you call on your underlying strength.”

And Karen has never minded another feisty woman in the room. “I do not mind as long as I could hold my own and be a door opener for other women,” Karen says. She believes that women should have opportunities based on their skill set and not based on their gender.

### Evolved Over the Years

The industrial real estate landscape has changed in the last three decades. There are now more women than before, though men still dominate it. Karen, too, has evolved over the years. In the first fifteen years of her career, Karen only focused on industrial real estate. After that, she also started to take interest in office and retail, sales, leasing, and in part development.

Karen measures success in terms of how she has succeeded while treating others with dignity and respect. And she continues to demonstrate remarkable leadership because she continues to test herself. “I try to reach my potential each week while testing my capabilities and hard work,” Karen says.

### Clients and Family's Needs Come First

Karen does not give much importance to monetary success. The needs of clients and her family take priority over the swelling bank balance. “We are client-oriented and try to put client needs before our own but not at the expense of our own familial duties,” Karen says.

She encourages her team to have a good work ethic. But, at the same time, she also reminds them, not to lose sight of their familial responsibilities.



## **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: BE YOURSELF**

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Karen has been a teacher and mentor to many women, as well as men, in the real estate industry. She is known to lead by example. And her message to other aspiring women leaders is, “Be yourself- Remain humble in your dealings with others.”

“Show empathy to the people in your sphere of influence but don't be a personal pushover when it comes to making personal decisions that affect the company's performance,” she adds. “Be a friend but remain an inspirational leader and role model.”