

A group of six people, three men and three women, are standing outdoors in a park-like setting. They are positioned in front of a large tree trunk on the left and a river with a bridge in the background. The bridge has several arches and is reflected in the water. The people are dressed in a mix of casual and business-casual attire. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with lush green foliage.

We

A photograph of four women standing outdoors in front of a large tree and a body of water. The women are dressed in professional attire. The woman on the far left is wearing a blue patterned top and black pants. The woman next to her is wearing a red top and black pants. The woman in the center is wearing a black blazer and white pants. The woman on the far right is wearing a blue patterned top and white pants. The background shows a large tree and a body of water with buildings in the distance.

Are Family

With a combined 153 years of service to the rent-to-own industry, the APRO staff makes hard work seem easy—and fun
By Kristen Card

It's two o'clock on a Thursday afternoon in Austin, Texas. In a one-story, Southwestern-style office building—discreetly nestled within one of the capital city's well-manicured elder neighborhoods—a group of 10 colleagues gathers for a weekly staff meeting. Only it doesn't feel like a staff meeting at all. The conversation is easy. The laughter is plentiful. An over-sized orange tabby cat presides from his lounging spot atop the coffee table. It's much more like a book club among friends—everyone settled into seats around the living-room-like lobby with cups of coffee, a notepad here or there, talking about their common interest, which, in this case, happens to be the rent-to-own industry. Welcome to the chill vibe at the Association of Progressive Rental Organizations. Make no mistake—this is laidback, not lazy. The ease of APRO's office environment is a product of equanimity, expertise and elbow grease—everybody does what he or she is supposed to do and does it well. Add healthy doses of creativity, reciprocal respect and macro-management, and what you get is a culture of genuine caring and camaraderie, both within the office and with the APRO members this staff serves.

“A

PRO members should know that they have an extremely dedicated, professional association staff that has spent a combined 153 years working to create a safe and productive business environment for them,” says Bill Keese, APRO’s executive director for the past 21 years. “These people spend every day working to improve this industry—every company, every store, every job.”

Anyone who spends a little time with Keese quickly realizes that he’s happy to sing his staff’s praises. Talk with APRO staffers and it becomes clear that the feeling is mutual. Keese’s hiring and management style are mentioned again and again as big benefits to working at APRO and are key to the “family business” atmosphere of the place—where even colleagues’ foibles are treated not as annoyances or excuses for blame, but rather as endearing quirks.

“When I’m hiring, I make sure a candidate has the capabilities to do the job, but my decision depends on whether I feel the person will be a good fit,” Keese notes. “They can learn the work, but folks who don’t fit, don’t last.”

Additionally, Keese subscribes to a strong “family first, job second” philosophy—which, in turn, contributes to the family feeling among APRO staffers. Together, they have been through births and deaths, marriages and divorces, teenager angst and midlife crisis, serious illness and all the other stuff of life—always with the support and flexibility they needed from APRO to deal with it.

All of which helps explain the group’s impressive tenures. One staffer is at 30 years, three others at more than 20 years, another three at over 15 years, a 14-year veteran and just two relative newcomers. Senior reporter Murlin Evans was hired in 2008, but even the “newbie” has a full understanding of the extraordinary work environment he’s found. “It’s the kind of place where everyone pulls his or her weight, and if something needs to be done, it just gets done—no questions asked, no fingers pointed,” Evans says. “We realize we’re all interdependent on each other and that’s really cool. It’s one thing to have a great job, but to have to grit your teeth when you walk into the office—it’s not like that here. We have a good time at work.”

That is evident. The inside jokes fly across the cat-laden coffee table, amid serious discussion of convention logistics, fundraising challenges and congressional measures—and Bill Keese smiles the smile of a leader who sees his work approach working, wonderfully.

“I believe you should have fun at what you do,” Keese says. “Because people who have fun are more creative, more productive and, in the end, more successful as a whole.”

Bill Keese Executive Director

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

—John 8:32

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1989.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Oversees all association operations, managing staff and resources, and implementing APRO board policy; deals with unexpected problems and issues arising daily for the industry and the association.

HOMETOWN: Born in Houston, but has lived mostly in Austin.

BOOK-LEARNIN’: BA in government (with minors in history and classics), University of Texas at Austin.

PAST LIVES: High school cheerleader and student body president; school representative and state senator to Texas’ American Legion Boys State; clerk for Texas State Treasurer Jesse James; country café owner (raised revenue by 400 percent); vice president of Aspen’s Roaring Fork Railroad (dealing with regulatory issues of a passenger railroad between Aspen and Denver); vice president of franchising for Schlotzsky’s (turned a \$900,000 loss into a \$700,000 profit his first year on the job); Texas state representative (three terms); team member at the State Consumer Affairs Office under Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox.

FIRST JOB: It lasted one day. I was hired as a busboy at a Kip’s restaurant. I worked 10 hours as a dishwasher at 90 cents an hour. After 10 hours—and after taxes and paying for my uniform—I made 63 cents. I learned a great lesson that day: work smart, not long!

LIFELONG PASSION: Politics. When I was seven, I decided

I wanted a career in politics. I was just about to run for Texas State treasurer when I went through my divorce and custody fight; I abandoned my political aspirations in order to raise my daughter; best choice I ever made.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: The people in the rent-to-own industry are wonderful, caring and sharing people. I’ve had the opportunity to work with many

wonderful rental dealers who are good business people, hard workers, dedicated to this industry and willing to be innovative and let me create a staff and office culture that serves them well. Every board has given me the tools to succeed, grow and be innovative—and I try to do the same for our staff.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Keeping this industry united and building a positive future for it. We’ve been blessed to have survived, grown and prospered for 30 years. But if the many competing forces within our industry get out of balance, then it could rip this industry apart. When selfish, parochial interests become dominant, the common good is destroyed.



Bill Keese with former APRO President Bill White



Standing: Ed Winn III, Tulisha Carson, Jeannie Hutchison, Shelley Martinek, Richard May, Laurie Hill, Cindy Ferguson and Bill Keese. Kneeling: Murlin Evans and Neil Ferguson

TOP SECRET: I worry about the industry and the association. Every morning, Monday through Friday, I wake up between 3 and 4 a.m. thinking about an association or industry issue. They say people try to work out problems in their dreams—I know it's true.

LIFE LOVES: A divorcee for 26 years, I remarried two years ago to Debby, an architect. We knew one another in junior and senior high school, but had never dated. We reconnected at a high school reunion and fell in love. My wonderful daughter, Maura, is 34, a wife and mother to my grandson, Archer. She's expecting a second child this December. Debby brought two more lovely daughters into my life—Lindsay, 27, and Keely, 30, who also has a son, Lane. I love animals; we have four cats and a dog at home, and, of course, we have our APRO office cat, Sam.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I'm a collector—I collect first-edition novels, books by Byron, Keats and Shelley, books about Sam Houston and psychedelic rock posters from the 1960s. I've also got an extensive collection of Austin artists' work, thanks to my involvement with the Austin Visual Arts Association (past four years as a board member, past three years as president).

Tulisha Carson **Office Manager/Bookkeeper**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." —Matthew 22:37-40

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1991.

KNOWN FOR: Being hardworking, detail-oriented; a telecommuter, coffee addict, "The Church Lady."

JOB DESCRIPTION: Handles all bookkeeping duties, including accounts receivable and payable, payroll and benefits, and monthly financial statements; maintains checking accounts for the association, APRO's Political Action Committee, APRO's Charitable Foundation and 12 state rental dealer associations; coordinates the annual Rental Advertising Excellence Awards competition; helps proofread APRO publications, including this magazine; answers all billing questions.

HOMETOWN: Born in Jacksonville, Florida; raised in Atlanta, Georgia, and Lampasas, Texas, located approximately 70 miles northwest of Austin.

PAST LIVES: Army brat; typesetter and circulation manager for the *Lampasas Dispatch Record* newspaper; legal secretary; office manager; APRO receptionist.

FIRST JOB: I was a carhop at the Lampasas Sonic Drive-In. I picked up after-school and weekend shifts, but luckily, did not have to do the job on rollerskates!



BEST THING ABOUT APRO: The day Bill first interviewed me 19 years ago, one thing he stressed was “family comes first.” I was impressed and still am; I love that we’re allowed to live our lives and put our family first. I also love that Bill lets me telecommute from home part-time. I can log on at home to our server at the office and it’s just like I’m sitting at my desk. My phone calls are transferred directly to me at home, I can even print documents to the office printer. This generous arrangement has been working for 10 years and it frees up three hours a day I would otherwise spend driving in my car to and from the office.

LIFE LOVES: I’ve been married to my high school sweetheart for 25 years. Lee is a real live cowboy and we live on the G Bar M Ranch, where he is the ranch manager. Our son, Travis, is 21 and about to enter college, having worked for a few years. Our daughter, Abigale, is 12 and raising a Brahman show heifer named Lillie; they’re very bonded. Living on a 6,000-plus-acre ranch, we also have registered quarter-horses, as well as two house dogs and three cow dogs that help Lee work the cattle. Our middle child, Allison, passed on at the age of eight months due to complications from neuroblastoma, a type of childhood cancer. I had a tough couple of years coping with her loss and am thankful to Bill and all my co-workers at APRO for helping me get through it.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I’m an extremely active volunteer at our church, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in Lampasas. My great-great-grandfather was one of the founders of the church in 1875 and has an original stained-glass window there dedicated to his memory. I was baptized there at six months old, later confirmed and married there and our children have been baptized there, too. I’ve served on the vestry (like a board of directors) several times and currently am assistant to the treasurer, as well as the youth director, a eucharistic minister, Altar Guild member and Sunday-school teacher. Clearly, belonging to St. Mary’s is an integral part of who I am.



Murlin Evans Senior Reporter

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” —Aristotle

SERVING APRO SINCE: 2008.

KNOWN FOR: Prolificacy, likability, arduous travel schedule and a habit of leaving half-empty coffee cups all over the office.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Covers industry business and feature news for APRO’s Web site, including producing podcasts, videocasts and event photo galleries; creates a daily e-newsletter distributed to more than 4,000 subscribers; manages APRO’s social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

HOMETOWN: Born in Muenster, Texas (population: 1,400); moved to Austin 19 years ago.

BOOK-LEARNIN’: BS in radio/television/film, University of Texas at Austin; M.Ed. in special education, Texas State University.

PAST LIVES: Eagle Scout; award-winning newspaper reporter; pre-school teacher; special education teacher; author of *Pass the Journalism TEXES*, a testing manual for aspiring high school journalism teachers; instructional video producer.

LIFELONG PASSIONS: Writing and drums. When I was about 9 years old, I published a semi-annual family newspaper called *The Evans’ Tribune*. It featured Scotch-taped Polaroids of my little brother, mom, grandparents and pets involved in breaking news stories, such as “Doug gets grounded...again!!” I discovered drums when I was about 11 and played the snare in the fifth- and sixth-grade marching band and in a heavy-metal cover band during high school. I still play today in a rock band called Modfather. It’s a great, healthy way to relieve stress.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: Bill really trusts us and is unbelievably supportive of us professionally and personally. The industry is such a close-knit family; rent-to-own folks have a bond that I think is unique to this industry in that they share so much significant information with each other. It’s much more like an extended family and not so much a fiercely competitive climate.

TOP SECRET: The day I got the call from Bill telling me I got the job was one of the happiest moments of my life. It’s pretty much my dream job.

LIFE LOVES: My two sons—Sebastian, 12, and Ivan, 4—are my life. My eldest lives with me and they’re both with me every other weekend. Sebastian is a talented keyboardist and plays tackle football—his coach calls him “All-Day, Every-Day Evans” for his enthusiasm. Ivan is on a community soccer team, but prefers to sit on the sidelines and pour water on his dad’s shoe.



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Cindy Ferguson, CEM Marketing Director

"Life is what you make it. Always has been, always will be."

—Grandma [Anna Mary Robertson] Moses

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1989.

KNOWN FOR: Keen observation, optimistic nature, knowing everybody's astrological sign and cosmic compatibility, knowing—and genuinely *caring*—what kind of day you're having.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Sells exhibitor booth space, convention event sponsorships and publications advertising for APRO; assists the association's Vendor Advisory Committee; works with vendors and their budgets to help them reach the rent-to-own market successfully.

HOMETOWN: Born in Gainesville, Texas; raised in San Marcos, Texas; has lived in Austin for more than 30 years.

PAST LIVES: Telecommunications marketing representative at TSI (number 1 sales in Texas); advertising consultant for the *Austin Business Journal* (highest sales in the *ABJ Book of Lists*, *How-To Book* and monthly sales); certified in exhibition management since 2002; member and past chair of the Central Texas Chapter of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE); chair of the IAEE CEM commission; IAEE faculty member; Expo Group Show Manager of the Year (2004); IAEE National Merit Award recipient (2007).

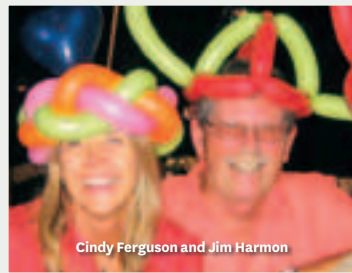
FIRST JOB: At the Wonder Cave snack bar in San Marcos, Texas. I was 16, made 75 cents an hour and worked in temperatures higher than 120 degrees. I never worked in the foodservice industry again!

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: Working with the vendors and rental dealers. Even though my job essentially is selling to them, I don't think of my vendors as a revenue source for APRO. I think of them as people. I do my best to get to know them and our rental dealers individually and personally, to be sincerely interested in them as people. For me, it's all about relationships.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Right now, it's the economy. A down economy means that many vendors are facing budget cuts and it's difficult to convince them that now is not the time to reduce their exposure; now is the time to increase their marketing budgets so that they can beat their competition with increased sales.

TOP SECRET: I was a runway model during my 20s and did some print modeling in my 30s.

LIFE LOVES: I'm a single mom to two grown boys—er, men. Luke, 31, was in the Army and served in Iraq and Afghanistan; he was honorably discharged in 2004 and is now enrolled at



Cindy Ferguson and Jim Harmon

Austin Community College. Jonathan, 24, is studying at Wyo-Tech in Laramie, Wyoming. Being a single parent was seriously challenging, but I'm extremely proud of the men they've grown into. They're the best thing to ever happen to me; I'm truly blessed. I also have two cats to keep me company, Sophia (Loren) and Lycan (my son's military nickname).

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I'm a runner and a golfer. I run about 50 miles a month and have run several 10K races and half-marathons. I definitely count my first half-marathon in 2008 and my 80-yard hole-in-one at Austin's Butler Park in 2009 among my greatest personal achievements.

Neil Ferguson Publications Editor/Art Director

"Life is what happens to us while we're making other plans."

—Thomas La Mance

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1996.

KNOWN FOR: Creativity and attention to detail, making afternoon coffee and making APRO look good.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Creates APRO's award-winning visual image; compiles, edits, designs and lays out all printed communications, including RTOHQ: *The Magazine*, the annual *RTO Almanac* and convention-related promotional materials; also writes for RTOHQ: *The Magazine*. Additionally, moonlights as a freelance designer and illustrator, including CD packaging for musical acts, such as the Austin Lounge Lizards, Ruthie Foster, Sara Hickman and Tish Hinojosa.

HOMETOWN: Born in Denver, Colorado; raised in Las Cruces, New Mexico; a proud Austinite since 1983.

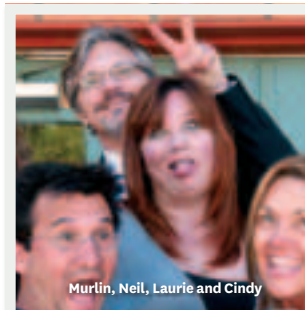
BOOK-LEARNIN': BJ, University of Missouri School of Journalism.

PAST LIVES: Public radio announcer and producer; printing company assistant art director (designed and produced 15 monthly four-color magazines); statewide association art director/assistant editor.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: The industry and association as a whole has a "family" quality about it. I especially appreciate the family-friendly culture Bill nurtures at the office. We all get along well and have been supportive of each other through thick and thin. Also, Bill is always supportive of our professional needs; for me, for example, he understands my need to keep my graphics design software and hardware up to date.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Deadlines—I despise them.

TOP SECRET: My older sister, Mary, and I were both born on Friday the 13th of May, five years apart, so 13 is considered a very lucky number for



Murlin, Neil, Laurie and Cindy

our family. Also, although I love working with her, Cindy Ferguson and I are not related, rumors to the contrary.

LIFE LOVES: I consider my greatest achievement finding the perfect spouse—my wife of 26 years, Teresa. She is the most positive person I've ever known and we share so many common interests; for that I thank my lucky stars. She works in public/community relations for a law firm and worked for more than 20 years as an on-air host at KUT-FM, Austin's public radio station. We have no kids, but two dogs, Ella (Fitzgerald) and Benny (Goodman). And incidentally, Teresa has not aged at all—she looks better now than she did when we wed in 1984. I adore her.

Laurie Hill Membership Director

"Humor is important in my family and my life. It makes it all a whole lot easier, that's for sure."

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1992.

KNOWN FOR: Comedic superpowers, excellent phone skills, technical talents, database prowess, overall irreplaceability.

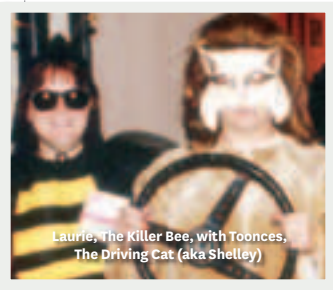
JOB DESCRIPTION: Markets APRO services and benefits to members; directs circulation for the association's publications; helps maintain APRO's Web site, including administering e-Communities and managing the registry for association meetings.

HOMETOWN: Born in Temple, Texas, but moved to Austin at age 2.

PAST LIVES: High school band drum major; licensed cosmetologist; manager of professional beauty supply business; APRO receptionist and administrative director.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: Our members. Our previous members. Our potential members. I've never met a friendlier, warmer, more supportive group of people. I used to think that Monday through Friday, they're competitors, but get them into a room together at a convention and they're best friends. Now I know better—they're *always* friends. I'm really not a naturally social person, but our members are so friendly that they make it hard for me to hide inside my shell. I really enjoy talking with them and helping them. So maybe, just maybe, I'm where I'm supposed to be.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Collections. It's a big part of the rent-to-own universe and we at APRO must deal with it, too. When members get behind on their dues, I hate making the call or sending the e-mail reminder; if we lose a member, it's usually because of one of two reasons: economic issues or we've failed them somehow. Either way, it's sad news.



TOP SECRET: At the beginning of my APRO career, I was rather bored. I was the receptionist, sitting behind a lonely desk, saying, "Good morning, APRO," or "Good afternoon, APRO." When Shelley's son, Josh, would call, I could never get it right; it always came through the intercom as "Shelley, Josh ish sholding." I wasn't sure how long I'd last. Then I went to my first APRO convention in 1993. I got to dress up as a Killer Bee from *Saturday Night Live*. I was hooked. I have never, ever not wanted to come to work since.

LIFE LOVES: My first marriage gave me my amazing son, Daxx. He's 15 now and we share a dry sense of humor and loads of laughs. My husband of 10 years, Steve, and I met via an online dating service and wed on Valentine's Day at a Sonic Drive-In. We were in our truck and the minister was in the kitchen, communicating through the ordering intercom. The whole thing was broadcast live on a local country radio station. We used an onion ring as the symbol of our eternal love. We've got two cats, kitten Cleo(patra) and "Spaztastic" Spartacus. Steve says about marrying me: "Third time's the charm!" to which I reply, "Oh, good—I've got *one more*."

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I'm an eager reader. My mom is my librarian; she brings me books whenever she visits. If she says, "Read it," then I do, and I've never been disappointed. I enjoy working in our yard, cultivating flower gardens. And I'm all about the 1982 Datsun 280Z—my favorite car as a teenager. Steve bought it for me last year. He's my happily-ever-after.

Jeannie Hutchison Administrative Director

"The journey is the reward." —Taoist proverb

SERVING APRO SINCE: 2003.

KNOWN FOR: Being a team player, voracious reader, Ethiopian-food connoisseur, generous provider of kind words and calm waters.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Organizes the annual APRO Legislative Conference; oversees the association's Political Action Committee; coordinates state rental dealer associations.

HOMETOWN: Born in west Texas; grew up in Texas and New Mexico; has lived in Austin since 1989.

BOOK-LEARNIN': BA in government (supporting concentration in business management), Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

PAST LIVES: Chaired projects and committees for the Junior League of San Angelo; trained mediator for the Junior League of Austin; director of Texas Adopt-A-Beach and Texas Lakeshore Cleanup Programs; coordinator of conferences, corporate recycling councils and in-house waste-minimization program at the Texas General Land Office; in-

house project coordinator for the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000).

FIRST JOB: I was a swimming instructor and lifeguard—an incredibly boring job occasionally interrupted by *way* too much excitement.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: Bill lets us do what we do best; he lets us work and I believe it's a key element of APRO's success. Also, the staff is success-driven; mediocrity is not part of the culture at APRO.



BIGGEST CHALLENGE: It's probably not my biggest challenge, but one part of overseeing the APRO Legislative Conference is coordinating the materials for attending members. Information comes from many dispa-

rate sources and we have to make sure each of our more than 100 attendees has his or her correct material, corresponding to each attendee's state and congressional district. Conversely, the most fun part of putting the conference together is researching locales for our networking dinner. I get to explore Washington, D.C.'s amazing historical venues, learn all about them and share my findings with the conference attendees.

TOP SECRET: I got my job at APRO because I happened to be walking my dog around the neighborhood. Coincidentally, APRO had just opened its new offices in our neighborhood and I ran into Bill. We struck up a conversation and I learned that Bill had a job available. I interviewed for it and he hired me.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I'm rather private about my personal life, but I enjoy spending time with my husband and daughters. I take care of some family business interests. I've got a wonderful circle of friends. If I've been a good daughter, granddaughter and mother, then the rest is icing.

Shelley Martinek, **CMP** Education Director

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."
—Thumper's mother

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1988.

KNOWN FOR: Being the best meeting planner in the business and a bright spot in the office; full-on themed events, positively maternal nature, contagious laughter.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Oversees the annual APRO Convention and Trade Show; organizes the association's other meetings and participation in other trade shows; works closely with the APRO education committee to offer top speakers

and topics for all seminars, as well as for APRO's Rental Training Online courses.

HOMETOWN: Born in Danville, Illinois, about 100 miles south of Chicago. Austinite since 1984.

PAST LIVES: Honor student; office manager; bookkeeper; independent salesperson; Texas Realtor; Certified Meeting Professional (since 1994); one of "100 Meeting Professionals to Watch" (*Convention South* magazine, 2000); recipient of Super Six Award for Excellence: Best Trade Show with Attendance Over 1,000 (*Successful Meetings* magazine, 2004); member of the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau Customer Advisory Board (2007–10).

FIRST JOB: As a waitress at a retirement apartment complex. A full meal, with drink and dessert, cost \$1.05; I was lucky to get a quarter tip and often got just a nickel. I was barely 15 and I never worked as a waitress again.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: The family-like environment. Most of the staff has been here for many years and we're really like a family; our office is like a second home. We've got so many wonderful members, too—I consider many of them dear friends.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Attracting more members to APRO meetings, keeping APRO events fresh and relevant, and appealing to the next generation of rent-to-own professionals.

TOP SECRET: My dad was a train engineer with C&EI Railroad, so the sound of a train whistle brings me back to childhood days.

LIFE LOVES: My family is my greatest achievement. I've been married for 40 years to Tom; we've got four grown children and three grandsons. We live in the country just outside of Austin and two of our grandchildren live next door to us—just like I lived next door to my grandmother growing up. My daughter and son-in-law even bought an RV with an extra bed for "Ahma" (that's me), so I can travel with them whenever possible. Having grandkids close by is heaven on earth.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I'm a huge music lover and, as many have witnessed, I carry a photo of Willie Nelson and me around in my wallet; just ask if you want to see it!



Shelley, center, with The Flying Elvi

Richard May Public Affairs Director

"Happiness is real only if shared." —Unknown

SERVING APRO SINCE: 1992.

KNOWN FOR: Being a political wonk; being a true creative, but without the artistic temperament; being hilarious.



JOB DESCRIPTION: Helps represent the rent-to-own industry before Congress, state legislatures, the media and the financial community; manages APRO's charitable affiliations; produces video for on-line and convention presentations.

HOMETOWN: Austin all the way.

BOOK-LEARNIN': BA in history, University of Texas at Austin.

PAST LIVES: Advertising/promotions associate for KLRU-TV's *Austin City Limits*; clerk for the Texas House of Representatives' budget and oversight committee; special events and activities coordinator for the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Groundwater District.

FIRST JOB: I lied to UT's Special Events Center—telling them I was 15 when I was really 14—so that I could sell processed-cheese nachos, hot dogs that shouldn't exist and watered-down sodas at basketball games and concerts.

BEST THING ABOUT APRO: The people. First of all, I can't believe a bunch of competitors can sit at the bar together as family. Second, I'm honored they made me a part of that family. Third, the personalities are as interesting and diverse as you can imagine. With 17 years under my belt, I can walk into the Legislative Conference reception, go up to virtually any person in the room and have a conversation that is unique and personal to our own selves, our history and our discovered commonalities.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: I'm part of the team with the responsibility of protecting the industry in Congress and improving the industry's image. The rent-to-own legislative and public relations mountain has been a tough one to climb and I have done so diligently, proudly and, I believe, successfully.

LIFE LOVES: I have a beautiful wife of 21 years, Kelli, and we have a beautiful daughter, Alaina, who turned 2 this month, as well as three pain-in-the-ass dogs that we dote on and adore. I'm also sibling-rich, as the youngest of nine children; my parents saved the best for last.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS: I'm a songwriter and musician. Last year I released a CD of my songs, *Richard May With...*, performed by professional studio musicians and singers [available on iTunes]. I also have two songs—"Get Up" and "Here I Am"—that play worldwide and from which I receive royalties. I produced a documentary movie about fulfillment entitled *A Documentary*, which won the 2002 "Best Documentary Feature Movie" at the BareBones International Film Festival. But my favorite pastime is hanging out with my family and a group of 10 friends who have stayed close for the past 35 years.

Sam Houston **Morale Officer**

"Meow." —Self-attributed

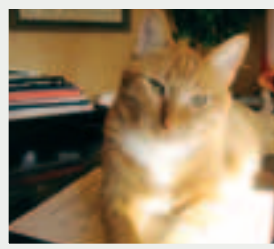
SERVING APRO SINCE: 2000.

KNOWN FOR: Cat-like doggedness, hunting prowess, good neighborly relations, impressive work ethic, superior self-grooming, shedding and sheer girth.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Provides 24/7 on-site security for APRO offices; monitors all in-house meeting activity; maintains rodent-free professional environment; acts as chief stress dissipater; serves as association's unofficial mascot.

HOMETOWN: Born and bred in Austin.

HIS STORY: APRO's current offices are located close to Lake Austin and are, therefore, attractive to dirty, destructive, water-loving rodents. I was just a crazy kid settling into Austin life and I happened to be staying with a mutual friend of Bill Keese's and mine. She thought Bill might have some work for me, so she gave him a call. Bill agreed to try me out for a day, just to see how I fit in and whether I could keep the vermin out. I've been at APRO ever since.



BEST THING ABOUT APRO: It's my home, my castle and the people here treat me with respect. I'm included—one way or another—in every APRO meeting. I enjoy the utmost flexibility in my daily schedule. Also, no one seems to mind when I bring a lizard into the office now and then to keep my

martial-arts skills honed.

TOP SECRET: I had a partner. His name was Ben and we actually looked alike, except his hair was long; not my deal, but it was okay. Anyway, we were like brothers—we hunted, ate and napped side by side. We ruled the 'hood. His company decided to relocate to El Paso and he offered to stay, but I didn't want to stall his career. I told him to go—it was a grave mistake. I was depressed for months and put on a lot of poundage. I feel better now, but just can't shake the weight. It works well for intimidation purposes, though.

FINAL THOUGHTS: I'm as user-friendly as they come, but not even a tad tech-savvy. I just don't "get" computers and refuse to listen to the gobbledy-gook talk about them; call me old-fashioned. Otherwise, I think I'm an ideal co-worker—I produce more than I consume and I'm always ready to lend a listening ear, sagacious countenance, soothing presence... especially over a snack. Is anybody else hungry? ✨

Kristen Card is a freelance business writer in Austin, Texas. In case you missed it, Card profiled Ed Winn III, APRO's general counsel, in the May-June 2010 issue of RTOHQ: The Magazine.