

# DREAM Maker

Through creativity and perseverance, **Realtor Marilyn O'Donoghue** helps buyers and sellers achieve their dreams in some of the Jersey Shore's most sought-after towns.

by **PHIL GIANFICARO**  
portrait by **ALISON DUNLAP**

**For beach lovers**, few pleasures come close to waking up on a warm summer morning with nothing on the schedule but spending the day with their toes in the sand, the sun on their face, and the ocean breeze soothing their soul.

Marilyn O'Donoghue would know. A self-described "beach girl," Marilyn has spent the past 14 years turning prospective buyers' dreams of owning a home at the Jersey Shore into a reality. Whether someone has their sights set on a \$300,000 condominium or a multimillion-dollar single family home in Avalon, Stone Harbor, or Sea Isle City, Marilyn uses her expertise, determination, and creativity to help them achieve their goal.

As an agent with the RJ Soens Group of Long & Foster Real Estate in Avalon, New Jersey, Marilyn has a history of helping buyers and sellers succeed. How successful has she been? Last year, while the COVID-19 pandemic raged, she had her best year to date, with \$35 million in home sales. We spoke with her about the white-hot real estate market, the ingenuity and drive needed to thrive in her line of work, and more.

## Q&A

**Owning or renting a beach home is a dream for many people. What's the current market for both buyers and sellers at the Jersey Shore?**





It's a seller's market. We're seeing historically low inventory levels for most of the country. But what's happening right now is we're missing the middle. By that I mean I have a lot of buyers waiting on the sidelines because if they own a condo, there's no way they can trade up if the next step up is \$4 million. And if you own a multimillion-dollar house, there's no way to trade down.

Lots of people point to the pandemic for this. It's different for our market. Lots of families have houses passed down from generation to generation. A few years ago, houses started turning over. It was a buyer's market a few years ago. That has changed.

**As you talk about finding the perfect shore property for clients, you sound as excited as those for whom you're looking.**

I am. I grew up in Margate, and have always been a beach girl. There's nothing quite like just standing there, looking at the ocean. It's an escape. For most people in the hectic



Marilyn's recent sales include this beachfront house in Stone Harbor, which sold for \$5.8 million.

get a home in a place they really wanted seemed so interesting to me even then.

**Can you share an example of your ability to be creative to sell a property?**

A few years ago, I did a video of a house in Stone Harbor, just four houses from the beach. I named it the most interesting one on the island, just beautiful from the outside. The owners had gutted the interior and were unable to complete the renovation. There was no kitchen, no bathroom—nothing but plywood on the floors and drywall on the walls. I told the people interested that, "I have the perfect opportunity for you. This location for this price is a great opportunity for you to put your mark on the house. You get to pick all the finishes." I provided them an estimated cost of what that house would cost in the area once the work was completed.

What I did to help them have an idea of what the inside of the house would look like after the work was done was do some virtually staged photos. I put them on the walls of the rooms, gave them a vision. It worked. I sold the house for more than \$2.7 million, and they transformed it into an investment property. Sometimes you have to be creative to let the buyer see the possibilities.

**What do you love most about the business?**

The fact that I get to help people relax and enjoy life is just ... well, I feel blessed to be able to be involved in the transaction. This may sound a bit hokey, but we do make dreams come true. There's a mindset that people think they could never own a second house, let alone at the beach. I say you can. If they're committed, then I'm committed. I can make it happen. ■

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With Marilyn as the listing agent, this bayfront home in Avalon sold for \$5 million.

society we live in, the ability to be able to cross the bridge to the island and leave all that behind them is so comforting. My husband and I live year-round in Haddonfield, but we love to get out of our work clothes and into our casual clothes, come to the beach, and smell the fresh air. It's a different mindset. You just forget about the woes of the day.

The beach is wonderful, but it's not just all about the beach. The island is becoming more recreational. People want other things to do. There's tennis, pickleball, exercise boot camps, and other activities they want to do before they go to the beach.

**You earned a degree in business administration from Villanova University. How did you get involved in the real estate business at the Jersey Shore?**

When I was a kid in Margate, my father's second job was selling real estate on nights and weekends. He sold everything—at the beach, offshore, everything. Helping people

people see me talking and they know it's like talking to a friend. And if I'm pitching a listing, I let the sellers know I may not be the No. 1 agent in town, but my goal is to be No. 1 to them. People know I will work tirelessly to get them the place they want.

**What are some of the realities or risks of owning a beach property that folks may not immediately understand?**

One of the issues people may not be thinking about is zoning restrictions. If people say they'd like to buy a property and tear it down and rebuild, I have to let them know the size of the new house is limited to the size of the lot. If the buyer wants to put in a pool, I tell them I have to check to see if it fits within setbacks on the property. People may not immediately think about whether a rental property allows their pets or has all the amenities they seek. My job is to make sure I provide all that information up front.