

PROFILE

Up close

David Fenley
President and CEO, Fenley Real Estate
Managing partner, Fenley Properties

Personal
Family: Son, Truman, 3
Hometown: Louisville
Date of birth: Nov. 24, 1967
Residence: Lime Kiln Lane area

Education
Bachelor's degree, economics,
Bellarmine College, Louisville,
1990

Career
1994-present: President and CEO,
Fenley Real Estate, Louisville
1994-present: Managing partner,
Fenley Properties
1992-94: Real estate agent,
Hoagland Commercial Realtors,
Louisville
1991-92: Intern in office of Sen.
Mitch McConnell's press secretary,
Washington, D.C.

Predilections
On his relationship with son,
Truman: "I'm not in the office at
5 a.m. until 9 o'clock at night. I
have a big family life, and it
revolves around him. That's No. 1.
It's a balancing act."
On knowing what types of develop-
ments to pursue: "You have to get
out of Louisville and go see where
the sizzle markets are and talk to
the companies that are cutting
edge."

On his employees: "There's a
tremendous amount of loyalty
that the employees have for this
company. They make a tremen-
dous amount of sacrifice. Their
loyalty and sacrifice has allowed
me to do what I do and allowed
this company to make the strides
that it has in the last seven
years."

On riding out an economic slow-
down: "I'm pretty conservative as
far as my investment criteria.
We've kind of kept doing the one
thing that we do. I don't branch
out a lot and do a lot of other dif-
ferent things, maybe we don't
have the big balls that some
companies do."

Hobbies: Fishing, deer hunting,
driving Winston Cup cars
Favorite vacation spot: Sea Island,
Ga.

Favorite movie: "Glory"
What drives: 2002 Land Cruiser,
400 miles

What they said
John Hampton, Fenley Real Estate:
Fenley "tames people and gives
them the room they need to do
their job. He's not a micromanager
by any means."

Derek Hill, long-time friend: "David
is just the kind of guy that you'd
like to hang out with, somebody
that you'd like to call your friend.
He's going to be there for you. You
get very few friends like that. It's
good to have someone to lean on.
David Fenley is not only a suc-
cessful businessman, but he's
successful in the other aspects of
life."

"It's really a balance between raising (his son) and running the company."

Building *a future*

Becoming a father has enriched the life of real estate CEO David Fenley

BY JOHN R. KARMAN III
BUSINESS FIRST STAFF WRITER

You often can tell a lot about a successful company CEO simply by looking around his or her office.

For visitors to the office of David Fenley, president and CEO of Fenley Real Estate, a quick inspection will likely find an unusually large number of children's toys strewn across the floor.

Not that things are all fun and games at the commercial real estate firm. Quite the contrary.

Since the family-owned company was founded in 1994, it has fast become one of Louisville's leaders in developing, investing in and managing class A corporate office space.

The toys are the property of Fenley's 3-year-old son, Truman, a frequent guest at the Fenley Real Estate offices. Fenley, who has never been married, shares custody of his son with the child's mother. He regularly brings Truman to the office with him.

"A lot of times, I'll have to clean up when I have meetings," Fenley says. "There will be kids' toys all around here and juice bottles and so forth. That's the way it's been for the last three years."

"My son is a big part of my life," he adds. "It's really a balance between raising him and running the company."

Maintaining that balance is important to Fenley, but he has no pretenses about where his priorities lie — Truman is No. 1.

Helping the family business grow

Just a few short years ago, things were much different. Fenley, 33 and a Louisville native, describes himself in those days as a driven person, totally dedicated to expanding his young real estate company. He owns the firm with his twin brother, Stephen Fenley, and two older siblings, Joe Fenley, 40, and Jennie Gomez, 39.

Stephen Fenley is director of project management, Joe Fenley is director of construction management, and Gomez is chief operating officer.



David Fenley, president and CEO of Fenley Real Estate, says his life dramatically changed after his son, Truman, was born three years ago.

It took some time and effort to generate name recognition for Fenley Real Estate, David Fenley recalls. The firm began making that name by developing several speculative, suburban office properties.

David Fenley owns the firm with his twin brother, Stephen Fenley, and two older siblings, Joe Fenley and Jennie Gomez.

Fenley, his siblings and co-workers worked hard to get the firm on the local commercial real estate map in the mid and late 1990s by developing the three-building Fenley Office Park at U.S. Highway 42 and Lime Kiln Lane and the sprawling Corporate Campus at Harshbourn Green, a six-building development with more than 470,000 square feet of space.

Stephen Fenley says getting the company established meant being innovative. He credits his brother with always being open to trying new things.

"David really saw real estate ... as being bland and uninviting," he explains. "He sought to bring a different dynamic to the market" and that he took "a cutting-edge" approach toward marketing.

Today, the firm has an annual revenue of \$20 million and assets totaling \$146 million. The company manages a class A office portfolio of 1.4 million square feet.

Fenley Real Estate also has \$63 million in new projects under construction. They

include Triton Office Park, a 378,000-square-foot development at Eastpoint Business Center; Olympia Park Plaza, an office and hotel development at Springdale Road and Ky. Highway 22; a six-story downtown office building at 614 W. Main St.; and an Embassy Suites Hotel at Corporate Campus.

With so many projects in the works, the hard work continues for Fenley. He spends his days overseeing the various operations under the Fenley Real Estate umbrella, including development, investment, service, construction, sales and leasing, and property management.

He negotiates deals with potential office tenants and works with banks to arrange financing for various projects. He also visits the existing Fenley developments and those under construction — often with Truman in tow.

Fatherhood has changed his priorities

But today, with his company established in the local real estate market, Fenley says he is more confident to delegate responsibility to other members of the Fenley team. He doesn't have to be in the office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. And he's not afraid to take an afternoon off to spend some quality time with his son.

"My fever and drive and priorities dramatically changed" after Truman was born, Fenley explains. "It's absolutely made my life so much better."

Truman has become a favorite around the Fenley Real Estate offices, according to John

FENLEY: Research, visits to other cities helped CEO establish his company

Hampton, the company's chief financial officer. It's not uncommon for the boss to conduct a staff meeting while his son sits on his lap, Hampton says.

Truman "is very attached to his father," he adds. "He's a nice kid."

Hampton praises Fenley for creating a family-friendly atmosphere at the real estate firm.

One example of that family-friendly policy came shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Hampton recalls that Fenley gave the company's 45 employees the option of taking a bonus holiday to spend with their loved ones.

Hampton says the boss isn't the only person allowed to bring his or her children to work.

"It's a family business," Hampton explains. "I think (Fenley) looks at his employees as part of his extended family."

Fenley's dedication to family comes as no surprise to longtime friend Derek Hill. Hill, also a single dad, describes Fenley as an "outstanding father."

"David is a natural," says Hill, who met Fenley when the two were students at St. Xavier High School. "I've never seen him put work ahead of Truman, which is very honorable. Being a parent clearly is more important to him, I think, than any of his financial success."

Preparation is a key to success

Fenley might laugh at the notion of being a "natural" at fatherhood. He admits that he hadn't spent much time around children before his son was born and that he had much to learn.

"I didn't know anything about babies," he says. "I didn't know anything about changing diapers or anything."

To prepare for becoming a dad, Fenley immersed himself in reading and research on the subject. He attended classes on raising children on his own so he would know what to expect.

Fenley approached fatherhood much as he approached the start-up of the family business. He says he had a lot to learn about commercial real estate when Fenley Real Estate was founded seven years ago. Through research, study and visits to other cities, he was able to gather a lot of information about the industry.

The Fenley family name has been associated with real estate — the residential variety — for 40 years in Louisville. Fenley's father, Richard Fenley, was a developer and home builder, but that kind of career didn't appeal to David Fenley.

Forging a different career path

After graduating from Bellarmine College with a degree in economics in 1990, the younger Fenley was uncertain about his career options. He moved to Washington, D.C., and, though he didn't have a degree in journalism, he says he "begged" and got a job working in the office of Sen. Mitch McConnell's press secretary.

His duties included reading Kentucky's daily newspapers and learning about the major economic development and construction projects across the state.

That job piqued his interest in commercial development, he says.

In 1992, he decided to return to Louisville and was hired by Hoagland Commercial Realtors, where he learned the ins and outs

of marketing properties as a real estate agent. He also earned his certified commercial investment member designation during that time.

Two years later, he and his sister started Fenley Real Estate. His brothers joined the company shortly thereafter.

Fenley explains he's always had "an entrepreneurial spirit" and "gravitated" toward the leadership role in the family-owned company.

"When I started, we were nobody, nothing," he says. "I had a big learning curve. I had a lot of guys (to compete with) a lot older than I was. But I was hungry."

Fenley's penchant for hard work is no secret to his employees. His success at such a young age is a product of that hard work, according to Hampton.

"He's not afraid to fail," Hampton says. "He doesn't go at anything unless he, in his mind, knows it's going to succeed. He thoroughly researches what he's about to do before he does it."

"David is intense, insightful, very creative and knows what direction he wants to move in," he adds. "He is a born leader and is always enthusiastic."

Gone fishing

He's also very competitive, friends and colleagues say. That competitiveness often manifests itself in one of Fenley's favorite hobbies — fishing.

Fenley travels to Florida several times each year to fish. He often takes a group of friends or company employees along with him.

His longtime buddy, Hill, also an avid fisherman, has made the trip on a number of occasions.

"He's competitive, no doubt about it," Hill says. "He likes to win. I think that's something you'll find in most successful people."

But while he describes his friend as "competitive" and "driven," Hill says Fenley also relates easily to people.

"He's just an outgoing person who always got along with everybody," he adds. "I never met anybody who had anything bad to say about him."

Aside from fishing, Fenley enjoys deer hunting and racing Winston Cup cars against his brothers at Kentucky Speedway. He lives in the Lime Kiln Lane area and recently bought an 80-acre farm in La Grange, where he likes to spend some peaceful time alone.

Quiet time is important to Fenley, who says he prefers a night at home with Truman to going out on the town.

Fenley is hesitant to predict what his life will be like 10 years from now because 10 years ago, he would never have guessed that he'd be a single father running a family business.

He says he "definitely" wants to get married one day. He'd also like to write a line of children's books geared toward single fathers. The books would illustrate the importance of fathers being active in the lives of their children.

"It's double for dads to play a larger role ... in their kids' lives," he says. "It's not that hard. It's making some sacrifice, but there's a lot of reward. It's a handful, but it's rewarding."

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