

Agent drives to growth with her first-time homebuyers

The first thing you see when you drive into the parking lot of Goree & Thompson Real Estate Inc. of Sacramento is a new moving van with the picture of company owner Zoritha Thompson on the side.

“Buy or sell a home with me,” says her smiling picture, “use this truck to move for free.”

The first thing you see when you walk into the office is Thompson, at her desk. “Hi, I’m Zoritha,” she says as she shakes hands, then sits down and starts to tell her story. “I eat, drink and sleep real estate,” she says enthusiastically. “Sometimes I get so excited about it, I can’t sleep at night. Real estate is me.”

For a businesswoman who got her broker’s license only six years ago, her business has grown fairly quickly. Thompson, 36, has seven agents, including her sister Juanita Tate, who doubles as the office manager.

She recently bought the Ford van, but her goal wasn’t to create rolling ad for her business. Thompson works with a lot of first-time buyers whom could use the financial boost of a free moving van.

She runs across more first-timers than the average agent because she has a contract with two lenders, Federal National Mortgage Association and Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp., to broker their foreclosures in Sacramento County. The contracts bring as many as 100 listings a year to her office, Thompson says, although the volume of foreclosures is down now.

The energy of her style and the splashy presence created by a van-sized photo are apparently no surprise to people who know her. Thompson has a definite ability to market herself — to “be everywhere,” says Sandy Redmond, president of the Sacramento Realist Association, a group African-American real estate agents.

Thompson’s strong marketing ability, Redmond adds, is aided by her assertive drive to make it in the business.

A top candy seller in sixth grade: “I’ve always been an entrepreneur at heart,” Thompson reflects. “I’ve been working since I was 9.” That’s when she took a job tossing advertising circulars onto front porches for Van’s Markets.

“In sixth grade, I was the top candy seller,” she recalls, chuckling, adding that she raked lawns on the side.

“My mom said I would always save my money and count it,” she says. “Not that I’m greedy. I learned a lot from my mother about the importance of saving.”

But in her 20s she was working as a grocery cashier, a dead-end job for a born business soul. She says a bad case of carpal

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tunnel knocked her out of that career, so she followed a friend’s advice and became a real estate agent, joining Century 21 in 1990.

There she met Carolyn Goree, an agent with whom she teamed up on some sales. Goree had owned a restaurant on Stockton Boulevard, so she knew the basic business ropes. Thompson, a friendly extrovert, was the public relations part of the team.

Yearning for independence, the two opened their own brokerage in 1996 using Goree’s broker’s license. But Goree was diagnosed with cancer shortly after. That forced Thompson to learn the basics of business.

She cracked books, attended classes and seminars and listened to mentors. Goree’s illness also forced Thompson to get her own broker’s license — a legal necessity for running a brokerage. She got the license two days before Goree died.

Without the license, the company would have closed as soon as Goree passed away.

“She was holding on,” Thompson says, now serious, “till I got my broker’s license.”

A \$1,000 offer; The van isn’t Thompson’s first foray into catching the eyes of potential customers. She also offers to pay \$1,000 to sellers who list with her if she doesn’t sell their home for a set price within 60 days.

And she’s ready to try more. Not long ago, she walked into a friend’s equipment rental store and found the store empty. Virtually everything had been rented out because he had aired his first television commercial.

So Thompson is trying to get her first television commercial aired in June. She recently ran her first radio commercials, and hired her first public relations expert, Kristene Smith.

“I see us expanding and getting into other ventures,” Thompson enthuses. “Maybe even a mortgage component.”