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Cheryl Hall

## Century 21 Judge Fite Co. reaches marketing deal with Cowboys

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Cheryl Hall

Published: 04 March 2014 03:00 PM

Updated: 04 March 2014 09:34 PM

Jim Fite gave his company a present on Tuesday, telling employees that Century 21 Judge Fite Co. is now the “official real estate company” of the Dallas Cowboys.

The three-year deal means the Fite organization can use the Cowboys’ world-famous emblem. It also gets cross-marketing on websites, stadium and game day program

advertising, social media tie-ins, radio spots and a promotion with kicker Dan Bailey that will raise money for Fite's favorite charity, Easter Seals North Texas.

At least twice during every Cowboys game, a Century 21 Judge Fite ad will wind its way around the stadium's electronic advertising banner.

"This is a new sponsorship agreement, and we're thrilled to be associated with them," says Rich Dalrymple, Cowboys vice president of public relations.

Neither side would say how much Fite is paying for the "official" designation, but I'm figuring a half-million, give or take.

For Fite, it's a "big hairy audacious goal," a concept popularized in Jim Collins' 1994 book *Built to Last*.

"This is the largest marketing investment that we've ever undertaken," says Fite, whose parents founded the real estate, mortgage and insurance company in 1937. "The real estate market has certainly improved, and we as a company are stronger than ever."

The Fite organization, which became a Century 21 franchise in 1997, has more than 500 agents and staff members in 20 area offices. It closed nearly \$1 billion in real estate transactions last year.

More than anything, the 60-year-old president of Century 21 Judge Fite wants to raise the visibility of his company and the spirits of his troops.

“When people join our team, they’re constantly telling us that we’re the best-kept secret in Dallas real estate,” Fite says. “We want to communicate that we’re a player in the marketplace.”

In that regard, Fite says he got a bargain. He credits his marketing director, Vicky Wu, for finding it.

### Thinking big

Wu didn’t know exactly what Fite meant when he told her last summer to dream large with the 2014 marketing plan. Since joining the company as marketing director in late 2011, she’d been working with an annual budget of \$100,000 — a fraction of the \$500,000 budgets in the boom days before her arrival.

She decided to take Fite at his word.

“I’ve seen how big hairy audacious goals can work better than just the sum of their parts,” the 45-year-old says. “They tend to generate excitement and buzz within and outside of an organization, beyond what you could get with a goal that wasn’t quite a stretch.”

She had done the quick math on how much it would cost for 20 offices to sponsor one to three local high school football teams at about \$5,000 a pop.

“It was quickly adding up to a large figure, possibly without an equally large return on investment,” Wu says.

She also considered a billboard blitz, but the costs of blanketing North Texas were higher with even less bang for the buck than team sponsorships. “I wanted to think bigger and find something that could potentially take us even past the company results we were aiming for.”

In August, Wu told Fite, his sister Jan Fite Miller and the other principals that the company should attach its brand to that of the Dallas Cowboys.

“We kinda laughed and said, ‘Sure, all right, OK. We don’t have that much money,’” Fite says. “Vicky came back to us with actual numbers broken down.”

And the dollars made sense.

‘The right fit’

“We knew we needed to do something different than our competitors, otherwise we would just be in the media clutter,” Fite says. “Both companies are family-owned and -operated, have a loyal client base and proven traditions.

Both attract a diversified market and cross all socioeconomic lines. It's just the right fit.”

Fite announced the agreement at the company's annual awards event in Fort Worth Tuesday afternoon and received a raucously positive response.

“Being the official real estate company of the Dallas Cowboys includes internal opportunities as well,” Fite says. “We're very big in the relocation business, so this fits right with them as they bring on players and staff. And we have a large investment team who will be able to put on seminars for their people as far as dealing with their expendable income and help them learn how to invest in real property.”

One aspect of the deal strikes closest to Fite's heart: the Kicks for Kids promotion for Easter Seals.

Every time the Cowboys' Bailey sets up for a field goal, the radio announcer will say that Century 21 Judge Fite will donate \$250 to Easter Seals North Texas if he scores. Bailey made 28 field goals last season.

“We've raised \$1.8 million for Easter Seals since 1997,” Fite says. “So it ties directly, not only to our marketing efforts but to our charity of choice.”