



AMERICAN DREAMING ON LAKE STREET

Wilson Molina, Molina Realtors®

Building a vibrant Latino community in Minneapolis, one home at a time

It was snowing on the day Wilson Molina and his family arrived in southeast Minneapolis in 1992. Freshly relocated from Cuenca, Ecuador, seven-year-old Wilson had never seen snow or felt bitter winter wind on his face. He longed for his homeland's warm subtropical breezes. But determined, skilled, and resourceful, he and his family were ready to embrace opportunities and pursue dreams they could never follow in Ecuador.

Molina didn't waste much time getting started. Enrolled in a bilingual school in North Minneapolis, he picked up English quickly and made friends with his natural, easy-going charm. At 16, he was flipping burgers at Burger King, and saving money for his first business venture. With \$2,000 of his own money, his parents helped him get an FHA loan for an abandoned single-family home that was owned by the city. Working together, they rehabilitated the dilapidated structure.

"I rented it out and thought I'd start making some money," Molina recalled. "But it turns out I rented it

to the wrong people. They trashed the place." Molina was crushed but his spirit remained unbroken.

It was a hard lesson. He flipped more burgers, saved money, and rehabilitated the property again. This time, he vetted the renters more carefully. By 18, Molina had his real estate license and went to work for RE/MAX. After a decade of learning the trade, he obtained his brokerage license and opened Molina Realtors® in 2013.

As his career grew, so did the Latino community in Minneapolis. Settling along Lake Street in the late 1990s, thousands of immigrants from Central and South America revitalized the declining commercial corridor with hundreds of small businesses and restaurants. A strong community began to take root.

Many of the new arrivals struggled to find decent, affordable housing. Molina made it his mission to help them find rentals, and when they were ready, homes of their own. As time passed, the city's real estate escalated in value, threatening to put homeownership out of reach for many. Ever resourceful, Molina worked with the city of

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Minneapolis to acquire and renovate the kind of abandoned dwellings that had first sparked his real estate career. In this and other ways, Molina and his team built a reputation for finding affordable homes where no one else could. It has led to some of his proudest moments.

“I met a family from Ecuador who couldn’t find a home. They’d been looking for six months and were really discouraged,” Molina said. “There was nothing they could afford. So, they thought they were going to be renting forever. We worked with them and eventually found them the right property for the right price. Now they live there with all the things they thought they’d never have, like a big backyard for the kids. They invited me to a barbecue after they moved in. It was so great to be a part of that—to see them living their American dream.”

Molina’s own American dream is to help more families like this one acquire homes—except on a much larger scale. His long-term vision is to become a developer and build affordable high-density housing, transforming Minneapolis into a city where everyone who needs a home can have one. To that end, he is pursuing his builder’s license, and plans to eventually put management of the 14-agent brokerage in trusted hands while he concentrates on urban development.

Molina believes in the potential of Minneapolis and its resilient Latino community. So, while times are difficult, he is confident that the environment will improve as people come together and build something better than before. Demonstrating his commitment, Molina bought a building on Lake Street that he will renovate and transform into the brokerage’s new offices sometime next year. More

spacious than their current location, it will also be more visible—underscoring Molina’s efforts to elevate the presence of his business and its central message: if you can afford to rent, you can afford to buy a home.

“A lot of people in the Latino community don’t know that they can get into a home of their own for a mortgage that’s lower than what they’re paying in rent. We need to educate them and show them what’s possible. They don’t need to be renters forever.”

Recently becoming a father for the first time, Molina thinks a lot about what the future holds for his nine-month old daughter, Victoria Antonella. He hopes that she will choose to follow him into the real estate industry.

“She could be an architect, an engineer, a designer, an electrician—they’re all connected to this business. You can do anything you want in real estate. The sky’s the limit. You just have to go after it,” Molina said.

