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## Lee Diamond, Historian, Tour Guide and Cycling Broker, Big Shoulders Realty



Check out Lee's personal Chainlink fan page:

[I Can't Get Enough of Lee Diamond](#)

### 1) How/when did you get into cycling as a profession?

I guess you could say it really began five years ago with the formation of [Big Shoulders Realty](#), but even before then I did some bike showings when I was an agent for Keller Williams. I have been an avid cyclist since I got the bug as a kid, and except for a period where I had severe carpal tunnel syndrome in both wrists, I've always biked—incorporating it into a professional context happened in real estate around 2005.

### 2) How does your organization directly benefit cyclists?

First, there is [Big Shoulders Realty](#), which is my company with my partner Carrie Weston. We are very bike-centric and help people search for properties in bike friendly ways. We offer bike showings and have a fleet of bikes in a variety of sizes and styles to accommodate those who are game, but don't have a bike. We donate time, effort, and money to a variety of bike advocacies, organizations, and causes, and sponsor many events that promote cycling and bike commuting. We also partner with various groups to bring cycling to Chicagoans, making it easier and more rewarding for those that bike, while providing fun things for them to do on their bikes.

Then there are my personal efforts, which include the [Chicago Neighborhood Bike Tours](#) and the [Chicago Velo](#) website. These all started under the [Big Shoulders Realty](#) roof, but have always been my solo endeavor. So, although the company still supports the tours, they really are my own little gig and my most serious cycling-related endeavor. The [Chicago Velo](#) website contains information about biking Chicago neighborhoods, communities, and surrounding areas. Originally, the site was based on a fill in the box kind of web-site build-up, but the nature of how I work and of the tours made this very limiting. I am in the process of learning to use Dreamweaver, so I can import html pages of all of the tours that are already complete and build the site out much more extensively than it is now. The site also offers a platform to sell the [posters](#) and [t-shirts](#) that my friend [Ross Felten](#) creates. For years people have been asking how to buy the posters and shirts, so I added them to [Chicago Velo](#) and it helps Ross out.

### 3) Do you specialize in a certain type of cycling?

City cycling. By that I mean that my tours take place on actual city streets and no one closes any roads for us or knows we are coming. This, combined with the fact that I bike commute whenever possible and bike all over the city, is what I know how to do and what I hope to help expand. I am in no way a racer. I don't care what kind of bike people ride, just that they ride, and try to be safe, which is a key component of bike commuting and city cycling... so... city cycling or commuting.

### 4) What are your "must-have" items for cycling (this could be a tool, an accessory, a food, etc.)

While I do indeed carry a full arsenal of tools, rain gear, water, and a variety of other things in my bag nearly everywhere I go, I think if you are talking about getting people on their bikes and letting them know how eminently doable commuting, short tours, real estate showings, or riding for fun is, then these are the essentials: bike, helmet, U-lock, and sturdy tires. I am a big believer that biking without a bike is very difficult. I am a big believer in helmet use. My wife and I have a son with a brain injury, which is very difficult for the person with the injury and the family as well, and wearing a helmet unarguably can prevent brain injuries. A U-lock in the city and proper locking technique is your only hope against the thieves of Chicago. A good set (don't skimp!) of puncture resistant tires and you will flat only infrequently. I am a big fan of Continental Gatorskins.

### 5) What is your favorite bike?

My Geoffrey Butler conversion. It is a late-70s Reynolds 531 steel frame built by an English bike shop which still exists today, but no longer hand-builds bike frames. I built the wheels on fixed-fixed flip-flop Formula hubs with 15t and 16t cogs onto chrome Sun ME13 IIs. The rest of the bike has a set of red-anodized Shimano 105 cranks and 44t chainring, a cheapo aluminum stem and bullhorns combo,

whatever the existing headset was, a Sugino sealed bottom bracket of some sort, a Brooks B-17 saddle, a set of cheapo Forte campus pedals, a front Campy Centaur caliper brake operated by a Cane Creek time trial lever of some sort, a nice old Dura-Ace seatpost, a giant bell, and front and rear blinkies. I am looking for the perfect set of fenders for it, but love the look without them, so I just ride a fender bike on nasty days.

**6) What is the biggest challenge you face or the biggest challenge faced by the cycling community?**

The biggest challenge we face as a cycling community is being able to get where we are going safely. There is a lot of work to be done and the “car vs. bike” debate is a tiring waste of time. I am betting that there are less than a dozen, if any, tickets issued for violating the 3-foot rule, for example, but on any given bike commute or journey, this happens to me DOZENS of times. So, while it might sound great that there is such a law, it is not enforced and therefore it does nothing to protect us or make us safer. I think we need to stop window-dressing and focus on really hitting home with the idea that we have rights, they are being abused, and the price for this is our safety as cyclists. Cycling can do much to change our world and its growth is severely capped by the safety of cyclists. It is hard to encourage people to try something they view as dangerous.

**7) What do you see as the biggest area of opportunity in your niche market?**

I feel that the popularity of cycling is still growing and that the people involved before it became fashionable have better roots in the community and can therefore grow with it. There aren't a lot of cycling realtors. There aren't a lot of bicycle history and architecture tours. There are, on the other hand, many people who would like to do these things that haven't heard of it yet, and being there for them when they do is the definition of opportunity.

**8) How do you think the cycling community has changed in the last year or two?**

As I mentioned, from my perspective the community has gotten bigger and that is an excellent thing. It is more connected in many ways, in no small part due to [The Chainlink](#). The nature of online communication has given it a lot of new tentacles into how people naturally interact and that is key. I think it has grown, and is growing, and that is the best thing about the changes over the last couple of years.

On the other hand, I do worry about the draw-downs in the community. It is great to have particular interests in cycling, or a style of cycling you like, or something like that, but I think we should simultaneously be celebrating all cycling. It is unfortunate that the closer I got to the Chicago cycling community, the more I heard cyclists bitching about other cyclists. It is like some people's favorite topic! At the risk of sounding trite, I think it would be good if there were more unity and appreciation of our shared experience, interest, and passion. If there is anything negative about the last couple of years, I think it is that there is less unity, not more.

**AND FINALLY...**

**9) If you could go on a bike ride with anyone (living or dead), who would it be?'**

Living: My son – I would give anything to have Jackson be able to ride a bike on his own and I would ride everywhere with him.

Dead: Abraham Lincoln – In addition to being a personal hero of mine, it would be great to draft behind him!

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