

COVER STORY



Los Gatos Travel

Precision and passion guide Maureen Conlin to profitability.

BY RUTHANNE TERRERO

Life in Silicon Valley is filled with opportunity. A combination of wildly successful start-ups and well-established high-tech firms generates a steady stream of affluent clientele to those providing services in the area. Los Gatos Travel, just outside of San Jose, gets its fair share of that business but its bread and butter is derived from the well-off families the agency has worked with for the nearly 35 years it's been in business.

"We have multigenerational families, retired professionals, young urban professionals, executives from Silicon Valley companies and venture capitalists. There's a great amount of new money here in the valley and it takes all shapes and forms," says Maureen Conlin, founding partner of Los Gatos Travel, which garners \$10 million in sales a year and is a top producer for Starwood's luxury hotels, Fairmont and Raffles hotels, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Crystal Cruises, Silversea Cruises, Classic Vacations, Swain Destinations, Journese, and other high-end suppliers.

Located on North Santa Cruz Avenue in charming Los Gatos, the agency's storefront fits in perfectly with the quaint tone and architecture of the town itself, where a mixture of towering oak, eucalyptus and pine trees provide dappled sunlight all day long. It all gives the northern California enclave a pretty, lazy vibe. Friendly avenues are flanked by homey coffee shops and clothing boutiques; virtually every retailer has some sort of beautiful planting or folksy motif to draw visitors to its front door.

But don't be fooled by simple appearances: Los Gatos is filled with a wealthy populace. In fact, right next door to Los Gatos Travel a wealth management office promises to "guide you and your family members along the path toward financial prosperity."

MAUREEN CONLIN in the Metropolitan Suite of the St. Regis San Francisco. Her agency, Los Gatos Travel, generates \$10 million in sales annually.

In the agency's early days, Conlin's clients were land developers who played a key role in evolving the area from a cozy western community to one that is home to uber-rich residents and commercial establishments like eBay. Today, former landowners who reaped millions by selling off their parcels of land and their children who have had those riches passed on to them comprise much of the agency's book of business.

Conlin and her team have served them from the same attractive location for over three decades (though it's expanded in size since then and undergone several remodelings), and they've never stopped coming back.

"Thirty-five years later we're doing something right if they're still here with us. They're very loyal and they've been very loyal for a long time," she tells us.

It's About the Client

Some in the community are still learning how a good travel advisor can help them amplify their vacation experience tenfold by seeing to every detail and using close connections to make everything go super smoothly. Conlin says many of her clients had not traveled much until they made money selling off their property and so they needed the assistance of her agency to advise them on where and how to travel.

"I think we still have that happening," she says, citing one new client who had been referred to her consistently for more than 10 years but never made an appointment to come in. When she finally did, she didn't blink when Conlin quoted her nearly \$170,000 for the trip they had crafted during her consultation.

"Everyday I get a phone call from someone who can't believe the value that a travel agency brings to the table," says Conlin.

Many of her clients could clearly afford the bling-bling vacations we all hear about, but Conlin insists that doesn't comprise the

LOS GATOS TRAVEL

Founding Partner: Maureen Conlin

Partner: Kristy Sion

Location: Los Gatos, CA

Number of agents: 14

Annual Sales Volume: \$10 million

Affiliations: Signature Travel Network

Boards: Signature Travel Network Hotel Committee, Starwood Luxury Travel Board, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts Advisory Board, Classic Vacations' Presidents Advisory Board

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