

Osceola's El Maximo Ranch deal helps Lakeland broker win national sales award



Dean Saunders, founder and broker of Polk County's Coldwell Banker Commercial Saunders Real Estate won the Realtors Land Institute (RLI) APEX 2018 Top National Producer Award. That means he was the highest-producing agent in the United States. (CBC Saunders Real Estate)

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A man with a love of Florida land has sold more than anyone else in the country.

Dean Saunders, founder and broker of Polk County's **Coldwell Banker Commercial Saunders Real Estate** won the Realtors Land Institute (RLI) APEX 2018 **Top National Producer Award**. That means he was the highest-producing agent in the United States.

"It's certainly very satisfying to be recognized by my peers across the county," Saunders said. "I was very honored and humbled at the same time." He received that award and three others at the annual conference this month in Albuquerque, NM.

Saunders was also named the 2018 APEX Broker of The Year in the Ag Land Sales- Ranches, the winner of the APEX 2018 Largest ALC-to-ALC Transaction Award, and the APEX 2018 Top 20 Producer by the Realtors Land Institute. He has also been the nation's top salesperson for Coldwell Banker Commercial five times.

In 2018, Saunders closed on transactions totaling more than \$210 million, including the [El Maximo Ranch](#) in Osceola County which was worth \$136.5 million. That wasn't his first land deal of that size. He closed a similar sized deal in 2005 and one worth \$565 million in 2014.

"There aren't many ranch transactions that get sold. It's a property type we focus on. It's the kind of work I enjoy." His firm just closed on another agricultural property called Green Meadow in Okeechobee worth \$2.5 million for more than 445 acres.

"Most of my people have a background in agriculture," he explained. "You need to know what you're talking about. You need to know the product type and the people."

Saunders, an eighth generation Floridian, has been a key fixture in Florida land use management since his time working in the governor's office and as a member of the Florida legislature in the 1990s. "I love Florida. I believe strongly in not developing every piece of property in the state," he said.

Although many of the properties he sells are for development, others are conservation easements or have restrictions on them that limit their use to [agricultural](#) or recreational purposes.

"I know there are hundreds of thousands of acres I helped protect, and I take great satisfaction in that," Saunders said. "I'm able to use my experience and my background to help people. There's not a day I wake up and regret going to work."

The key to him is meeting the needs of the sellers. "I try to stay focused on what my clients want to get accomplished." The awards lend a bit of credibility to Saunders and his firm. "I don't know why I'm different, but that's what my peers say."

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