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YEAR IN REVIEW

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Partner Spotlight: First Team Lending Group
Event Recap Inside

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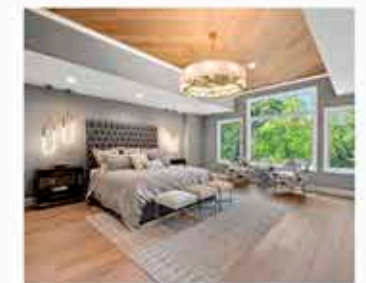
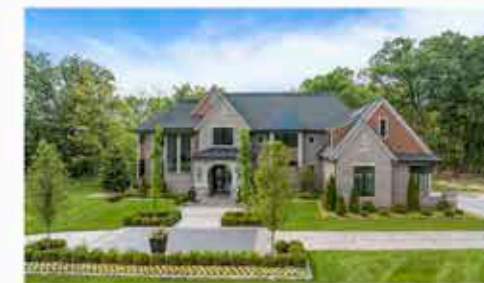
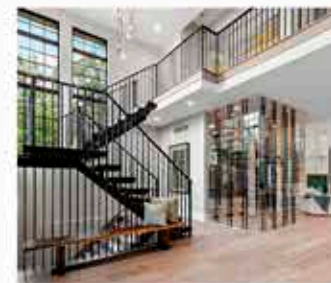
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TOP PRODUCERS IN 2023

▶▶ 2023 recap

JESSICA BELANGER
January
Photo by Skyview Experts



Jessica said she would like to be remembered for her failures alongside her successes. “I want people to remember that good, bad or indifferent, they will always get the real Jessica,” she said. “I want new agents to know that if I can do it, anyone really can. This is not a business you can treat as just a paycheck — it’s not sales. It’s customer service. If you treat the people first, the money follows.”

“This business can truly make all of your dreams come true,” Faye said. “We are all different and come from different backgrounds. I believe anyone can do this business if you really work hard, be honest and stay humble.”

FAYE MARAMAN
February
Photo by Stylish Detroit



BASHAR JANI
March
Photo by Skyview Experts



Bashar’s kids are his motivation to work hard every day. “I want to give them the things I didn’t have growing up in Iraq and Greece,” he said. “I’ve always worked extremely hard and put in the hours so that I would never have to go back to where I was before my success. It’s the hard times from the past that have defined my path and my future.”

MIKE MELDRUM
May
Photo by Melissa Douglas

“Being able to build my own business always intrigued me,” Mike said. “I liked the thought of being in control of my own destiny and not having to rely on a company to dictate my income or future.”



FLO ABKE
April
Photo by Stylish Detroit

Flo’s definition of success is having a job that’s inspiring to be at every day while making an adequate living and having a happy, balanced life.

CAROL LUKITY
June
Photo by Skyview Experts



As an associate broker at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices - Kee Realty, Carol is well known for her honesty, integrity and professionalism. “The Golden Rule in sales is to know your customer,” she said. “People have different backgrounds, cultures, goals and learning styles; therefore, it’s imperative to acknowledge and embrace their needs and treat them the way you want to be treated.”

“I’m a strong believer that if you treat people right, you will always get more in return,” Marvin said.

MARVEN NAFSU
August
Photo by Melissa Douglas



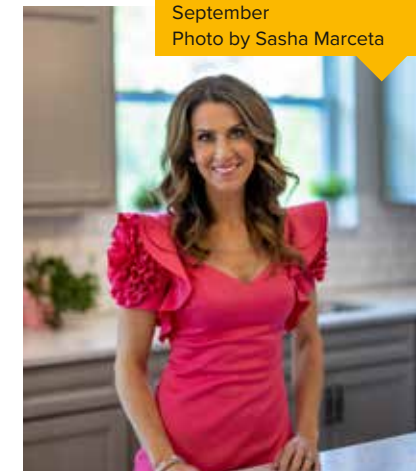
For Kinsley, success is being resilient in life, recognizing and giving credit for how you got to where you are, and having the ability to bounce back from adversity.

KIMBERLY DRESCHER
October
Photo by Melissa Douglas

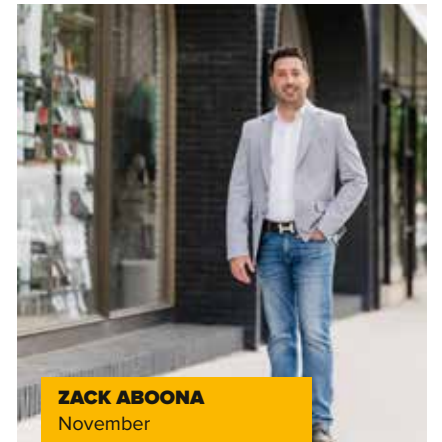


“My recommendation to others is to take the time to write a business plan and work on your business every day,” Kimberly said. “Do what you say you will do, and the results will come.”

KINSLEY BRANN
September
Photo by Sasha Marceta



ZACK ABOONA
November
Photo by Melissa Douglas

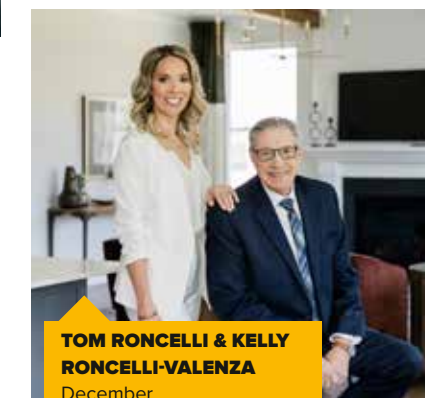


“To be successful in this industry, you must be hungry and hold yourself accountable,” Zack said. “It’s critical to set attainable goals and work hard every day to achieve those objectives. Personally, I don’t reward myself with days off unless I feel like I’ve earned them. If you put in the time, you will get the results.”

JENNIFER ARNOLD
July
Photo by Melissa Douglas



“It’s the little attention to details that new agents should never overlook,” Jennifer advised. “This includes staying in good contact with all parties and establishing solid credibility and trust with clients, fellow agents and partners. I am diligent when it comes to the fine points like writing a good contract — those details make a big difference.”



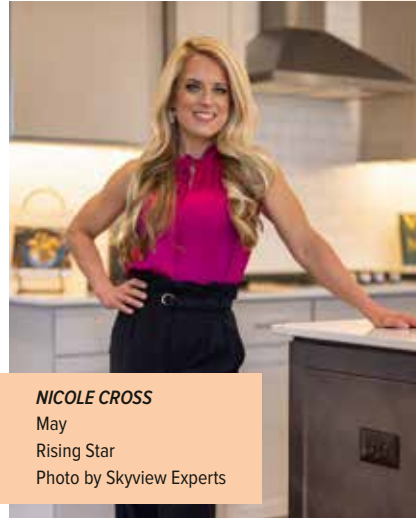
TOM RONCELLI & KELLY RONCELLI-VALENZA
December
Photo by Melissa Douglas

As they continue to thrive in the industry, Thomas and Kelly hope to be remembered not only for their negotiation skills, love of knowledge and commitment to helping others succeed but also for carrying on the family legacy in real estate. With their passion for real estate and dedication to working together, this father-daughter team shows that, in the world of real estate, it’s truly better together.

RISING UP IN 2023



CHRIS GRIFFIN
March
Agent on the Rise
Photo by Stylish Detroit



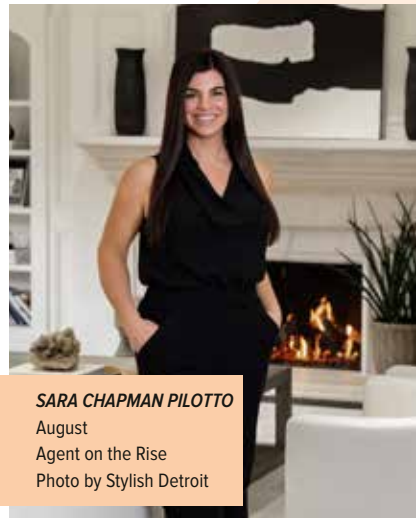
NICOLE CROSS
May
Rising Star
Photo by Skyview Experts



SAVANNAH HABBA
June
Rising Star
Photo by Melissa Douglas



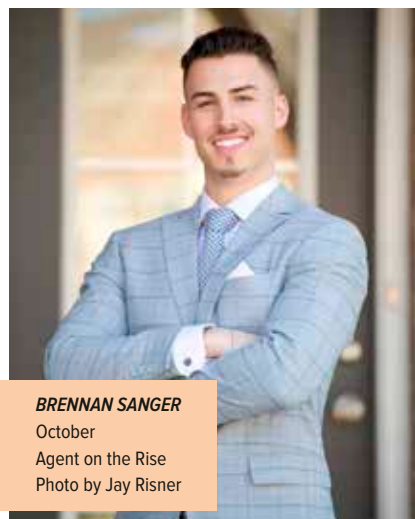
KATHERINE GRANT
July
Rising Star
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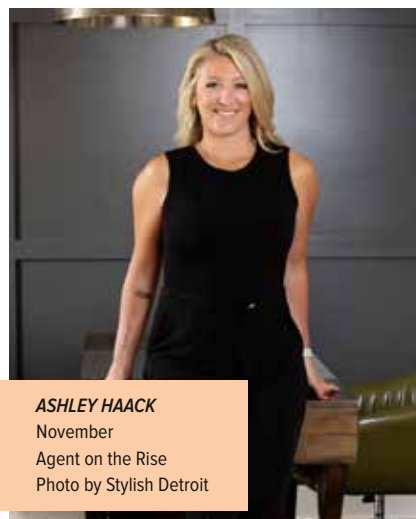
SARA CHAPMAN PILOTTO
August
Agent on the Rise
Photo by Stylish Detroit



ASHLEY MARDLIN
September
Rising Star
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BRENNAN SANGER
October
Agent on the Rise
Photo by Jay Risner



ASHLEY HAACK
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January
Celebrating Leaders
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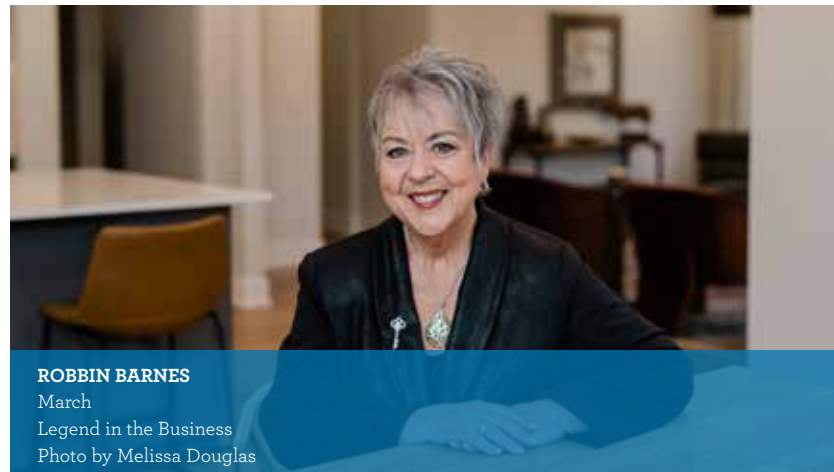
ERIKA BAKER
January
Agent Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit



ANDREW GORGEES
February
Broker Spotlight
Photo by Skyview Experts



MITCHELL ALLEN
February
Agent Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit



ROBBIN BARNES
March
Legend in the Business
Photo by Melissa Douglas



JOSEPH SINISHTAJ
April
Broker Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit



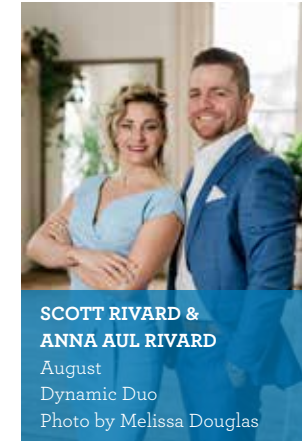
KIM AGEMY
April
Broker Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit



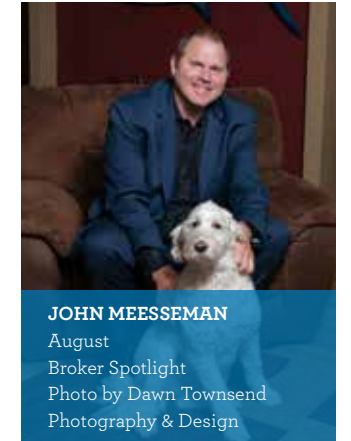
SADE' HARPER
May
Agent Spotlight
Photo by Skyview Experts



KARINA BALL
June
Legend in the Business
Photo by Skyview Experts



**SCOTT RIVARD &
ANNA AUL RIVARD**
August
Dynamic Duo
Photo by Melissa Douglas



JOHN MEESSEMAN
August
Broker Spotlight
Photo by Dawn Townsend
Photography & Design



APRIL TODD
October
Agent Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit



ALEXIS CARMONA
October
Broker Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit



DANIELLE DEGRANDE ROBERTS
September
Agent Spotlight
Photo by Skyview Experts



KEVIN KOSTA, JEREMY GALLI & MICHAEL IVKOV
November
Featured Team
Photo by Skyview Experts



RANDY GATES
December
Agent Spotlight
Photo by Stylish Detroit

making a difference

By Robbyn Moore
Photos by Melissa Douglas Co.



Ariel RADTKE JOHNS

The 'Rescue REALTOR'®

By following her heart, Ariel Radtke Johns created a fulfilling and purposeful career that blended her passion for real estate with her desire to make a positive impact on her community. Through her expertise in real estate and her experience as an animal welfare volunteer, Ariel is helping her clients — and at-risk youth and shelter animals — find their forever homes.

In addition to her career as an agent and REALTOR® at Keller Williams Platinum, Ariel is a “rescue REALTOR®” — as she likes to call herself — and volunteers at the Humane Society of Macomb (HSOM). She also sits on the board of directors for a nonprofit called Teacher’s Pet, where she is a program facilitator. Teacher’s Pet is a nonprofit organization that pairs troubled juveniles with a shelter dog for a 10-week program. Within that time frame, the kids learn empathy, positive reinforcement training skills, patience and, for the first time, love. In return, the dogs learn valuable skills that will help them get adopted.

“It is so important to support this program because it is changing the lives and future for these kids and dogs,” Ariel said.

“The kids learn valuable skills to take with them through life. Sadly, both the kids and dogs have suffered abuse, neglect and trauma, and this is a bonding experience for them. They are both ‘locked up’ and learning to navigate the world together.”

In 2013, while earning a criminal justice and communications degree from Saginaw Valley State University, Ariel became an advocate for bully breeds. She took an internship



with Leader Dogs for the Blind in their Puppy Prison program and witnessed the positive impact of dogs on inmates. She later joined Teacher’s Pet due to its connections with children in juvenile detention centers and mental health communities, because Ariel recognized the beneficial influence of dogs on both groups.

Ariel's business is centered on her passion for animals. In fact, every real estate activity and initiative ties back to shelter dogs and cats. An example of this is her sponsorship of an animal every time she closes on a home. She has currently helped 83 families to date, which means that she has also helped sponsor 83 animals directly from the closings. Ariel makes sure to showcase her support throughout the year as well. In July, she organized a toy and treat drive in her farming community, and in December, she sponsored a volunteer holiday party and a holiday stocking drive for HSOM. As a result of the donations and monetary contributions, every animal in the shelter had a Christmas morning surprise.



Photo by Tori Barterian Photography

“By tying everything back to animals, I’ve gained like-minded clients who love animals as much as me,” Ariel said enthusiastically. “I try to get other people from the community — such as title companies, lenders, inspection companies, and past and current clients — involved. We also include dog trainers, people from schools, detention centers, animal control officers, and other rescues and shelters. A huge thank-you to Tim Kelly at Charmed Mortgage, Brian Mutter at Forward Mortgage, Tammy Lauer with Transnation Title Agency and Jeff Krause with HouseMaster Home Inspections for always being there for me.”

Over the past 24 months, Ariel has donated more than 550 personal volunteer hours and over 180 hours of volunteer time from others. Financially, she has contributed more than \$10,000 in donations as needed for shelter dogs and through the sponsorship of dog adoptions. “When I began working in real estate, I couldn’t have dreamed of being where I am today,” Ariel said. “I love that I can combine my love of real estate and my passion for volunteering and giving back to the community.”

More than helping dogs get adopted and teaching kids training skills, Teacher’s Pet is changing labels that society puts on the two disadvantaged groups. “These teenage kids and abused dogs are survivors and have gone through more in their young lives than any of us ever will,” Ariel explained. “These children and canines were let down by the people who were entrusted to love and take care of them, deeming them unlovable — Teacher’s Pet is standing up and saying no to those labels.”

Ariel is a shining example to other professionals that when you are passionate about something, it is important to be authentic in your work and steadfast in your relationships. “If you love something, dive deep into it, and trust that the sales will follow,” she suggested. “This is your business, and you can get creative with it to truly show people who you are. People work with like-minded people. If you have hobbies or passions, incorporate it into your business!”

Ariel’s family is consistently supportive of her work and the first to help

her fundraise and donate their time. Her husband, Timmy, is eager to assist with events and foster various animals in the shelter. Together, they have fostered 17 kittens and cats and three puppies. At home, they have three rescue dogs, two cats and a snake.

In 2021, Ariel was honored with the George R. McCullens Jr. Community Service Award from the Grosse Pointe Board of REALTORS® and was the Humane Hero of the month at the Humane Society of Macomb for her volunteer and support in the organization. “I believe the charitable work that I am doing is unique and valuable because I truly believe in my organizations,” Ariel shared. “It’s a part of who I am as a person. My whole business as a real estate agent is surrounded within animal welfare and in changing an animal’s world, one closing at a time.”

For more information on how to become a volunteer or to support these organizations, visit teacherspetmi.org and humanesocietyofmacomb.org.

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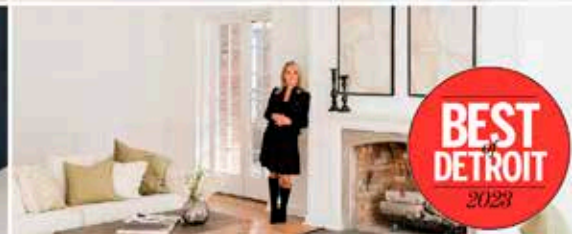
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First Team Lending Group is a residential mortgage brokerage that truly cares about its clients, partners and employees. They have a unique approach to the industry with their dedication to the purchase market and time-honored business relationships. With their low interest rates, unique financing programs and personal touch, First Team Lending Group is the ideal partner for anyone looking to buy a home.

The company was founded by Vittorio Sbrocca and Nico Gianakopoulos, who both bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the industry. Vittorio was a student athlete who played soccer at Oakland University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications. While coaching soccer, Vittorio was introduced to the mortgage industry by a parent of one of his players who was an executive at United Wholesale Mortgage (UWM). Nico spent five years as a purchase and refinance mortgage banker

at Rocket Mortgage, where he gained extensive knowledge and experience in the industry.

After being awarded for the highest conversion in purchase power banking in 2019 — along with establishing a book of business — Nico realized he could offer his clients and real estate partners much better pricing and service on the wholesale side of the industry, and that's when he partnered with Vittorio to open their own business. "We started our company as a purchase brokerage during a refi boom," Nico said. "Our motto is 'do right by our clients, partners and employees, and success will follow.' We pride ourselves on taking the best possible care of our clients and real estate partners by being available seven days a week at all hours of the day and providing programs that help offers get accepted."

When Vittorio and Nico launched their company, their goal was to create a business plan that would build something fair for other loan officers. "Through both of our experiences, we felt that we weren't fairly compensated for our work and saw that as an issue in the industry," Vittorio explained. "We wanted to develop a road map that would give loan officers the opportunity to earn a fair shake on their commissions and truly run their own business under the First Team roof."

In addition to being known for their availability and attentiveness, the company also provides the technology from the #1 lender in the country with the personal touch of a locally owned business. "Our low interest rates and free credit boost program truly maximize homebuyers' buying power in such a tough market," Vittorio said. "We are deeply committed to helping underserved communities across the country by offering unique financing programs. We are always looking to help clients who were denied by other lenders."

The mortgage industry has seen the biggest and fastest rate hike in U.S. history over the past year, and most mortgage brokerages had to close their doors. However, First Team Lending Group's plan of being a purchase shop during a refi boom set them up to weather the storm that came with the unexpected rate hikes. "We shifted our focus from training unlicensed mortgage professionals to hiring those with two or more years of purchase mortgage experience," Nico said. "Our team went from 17 to 8 employees in just four months, and we still had record months for closings and revenue. The relationships we built with real estate agents while other mortgage brokers were behind a desk calling refi leads truly helped us solidify loyal partnerships across the country." Vittorio echoed Nico's thoughts and said, "It was always a goal to plan for the storm that would come one day so we could grow in a shrinking market. I could not be more proud of the work our team has done in such a competitive mortgage market."

First Team Lending Group's team is available every weekend to help with open houses or with approving buyers. They also have content days once

a week at their office where their film director makes short film content for their loan officers and real estate partners to use on social media.

Vittorio and Nico are not only business partners but also close friends. Vittorio comes from a big Italian family, and he loves to coach soccer when he is not working. He has coached soccer for 11 years, which is a way for him to give back to the community. He also recently got engaged to Rachael Vamvas, who is one of the group's top-producing loan officers. As for Nico, he loves to travel to exotic and warm-weather destinations such as Dubai, Maui and Colombia.

First Team Lending Group specializes in helping first-time homebuyers compete and win in the housing market. The company offers a wide range of mortgage products, including conventional, FHA, VA, USDA, HELOC, reverse mortgage, bridge loans, and non-QM loans. In 2023, First Team Lending Group was named a Pinnacle partner by their top wholesale lender, Rocket Mortgage.

For more information about First Team Lending Group, visit firstteamlending.com.



▶ partner spotlight

By Robbyn Moore
Photos by Melissa Douglas Co.
Photos taken at Lombardo Homes Model
at Stillwater Crossing in Macomb Township



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▶ event recap

Backdrop photos provided by Stylish Detroit

AT PARK WEST GALLERY!

Top real estate agents and our Preferred Partners from Oakland, Wayne and Macomb County gathered at Park West Gallery in Southfield to enjoy food and drinks and to make new connections while exploring the gallery and museum. The event ended with a Park West- and Sponsor-provided raffle. Congratulations to the winners, and thank you to our sponsors who provided a raffle prize!

Christine Lynn from The Agency Hall & Hunter said, "The energy in the rooms was incredible. The connections, great conversations, and awesome art were all remarkable!"

"Another great event by Real Producers! I always love visiting with past agents I worked with, meeting new ones and, of course, meeting the vendors!" said Paula Rea-Johnston from Real Estate One.

Special thanks to our Host — Park West Gallery and Museum — for hosting us inside their stunning venue. Thank you to our Platinum Sponsors — Alliance Title of Michigan, Becky Alley with Capital Mortgage Funding, Brent Green with LMCU, Changing Places Moving, and Lombardo Homes. We would also like to thank our Gold Sponsors — Mastercraft Heating, Cooling, Plumbing & Electrical, and DFCU Financial — and our Silver Sponsors — Transnation Title Agency and Better Rate Mortgage.

Additionally, thank you to our photographers from Starloft Photography, Skyview Experts and Stylish Detroit for taking photos as well as to WayUp Media for capturing video.

We are so grateful to all of you who joined us for our End of the Year Celebration! Thank you all so much!

Be sure to check out event photos in the next issue!

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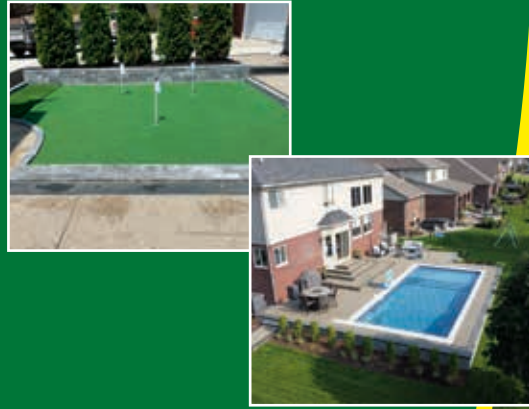
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