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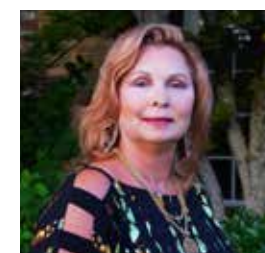
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Dees Hinton
Owner/Publisher



Dusty Hinton
Publishing Assistant /
Ad Manager



Susan Marquez
Writer



Kayland Partee
Videographer /
Photographer



Abe Draper
Photographer

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publisher's **NOTE** Dees Hinton

Let's get REAL - this movement about to catch fire.



What movement am I referring to? Real Producers started three years ago and is now in over eighty markets across the nation. Our Mississippi Real Estate professionals and industry partners will now get to enjoy some opportunities previously not available.

This magazine has been successful because of its ability to connect top producing agents with preferred partners and with each other. There are many other reasons that make it successful but at its core, that is what this is all about.

The vision is simple, we want to be the one-stop-shop for top producing agents in every market across the nation. How do we do that? In my opinion, there are three main groups of people that stand to benefit from this monthly publication: the REALTORS® featured, the Partners that advertise and the Publishers who produce the magazine.

What's in it for the REALTOR®? It is truly a badge of honor to receive the magazine. Being one of the top real estate agents is an accomplishment in itself. There are countless perks to being featured in the magazine but one of my favorites is the element of humanizing a local legend in real estate.

What's in it for our Partners? The struggle is real. How do we connect with influential, top producing agents in our market?

How do we cultivate relationships with this group? Our Partners get constant exposure through the monthly magazine and the quarterly events. The hard work is done. Partners just need to show up!

What's in it for the Publisher? Our Publishers have the unique ability to connect with a group of people that is otherwise pretty difficult to get in front of. We are all busy building our own businesses. Our Publishers are entrusted with featuring top agents, connecting our Partners and producing content on a regular basis.

Where do you fit in all of this? It's simple. Connect us with people. Who should be on the next cover? What business is catering to the top REALTORS® at a high level. What REALTOR® has a special story that needs to be told – perhaps they overcame extreme obstacles, they are an exceptional leader, have the best customer service, or they give back to the community in a big way.

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ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE

We realize that Real Producers is a new concept here in Mississippi, and some of you may be wondering what it's all about. That is why we have created a "FAQ's About This Magazine" page. Here we will answer the most commonly asked questions around the country regarding our program. My door is always open to discuss anything regarding this community – this publication is 100 percent designed to be your voice!



Q: WHO RECEIVES THIS MAGAZINE?

A: The top performing real estate producers in the local market.

WHOOPS! We stated in our July issue that we received information from the Central Mississippi MLS. We have not asked nor received any information from the Central Mississippi MLS. Sorry for the misrepresentation.

Q: WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR BEING FEATURED IN THIS MAGAZINE?

A: It's really simple – every feature you see has first been nominated. You can nominate other REALTORS®, affiliates, brokers, owners, or even yourself! Office leaders can also nominate REALTORS®. We will consider anyone brought to our attention, because we don't know everyone's story, so we need your help to learn about them. A nomination currently looks like this: you email us at dees.hinton@realproducersmag.com with the subject line, "Nomination: (Name of Nominee)," and explain why you are nominating them to be featured. It could be they have an amazing story that needs to be told – perhaps they overcame extreme obstacles, they are an exceptional leader, have the best customer service, or they give back

to the community in a big way. The next step is an interview with us to ensure it's a good fit. If it all works out, then we put the wheels in motion for our writer to conduct an interview and for our photographers to schedule a photo shoot.

Q: WHAT DOES IT COST A REALTOR®/TEAM TO BE FEATURED?

A: Zero, zilch, zippo, nada, nil. It costs nothing, my friends, so nominate away! We are not a pay-to-play model. We share real stories of real producers.

Q: WHO ARE THE PREFERRED PARTNERS?

A: Anyone listed as a "preferred partner" in the front of the magazine is a part of this community. They will have an ad in every issue of the magazine, attend our quarterly events, and be a part of our online community. We don't just find these businesses off the street, nor do we work with all businesses that approach us. One or many of you have recommended every single preferred partner you see in this publication. We won't even meet with a business that has not been vetted by one of you and "stamped for approval," in a sense. Our goal is to create a powerhouse network, not only for the best REALTORS® in the area, but the best affiliates, as well, so we can grow stronger together.

Q: HOW CAN I RECOMMEND A PREFERRED PARTNER?

A: If you have a recommendation for a local business that works with top REALTORS®, please let us know! Send an email to dees.hinton@realproducersmag.com.

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meet
LEE
GARLAND
written by Susan Marquez
photography by Abe Draper Photography



TEAM APPROACH GIVES LEE GARLAND A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Lee Garland sits in an office filled with trophies and awards, a testament to doing something right in his 23+ year career in Real Estate. As a matter of fact, Lee does a lot right, and he is having a blast doing it. “This business has truly changed our lives. I have been so fortunate to meet the people I’ve met and to do the things I’ve done.” Not bad for someone who is a self-described introvert.

Lee didn’t set out to be a successful REALTOR®, although the Canton native did have a penchant for sales early on. “My first sales job was at the age of 12, selling newspapers around the square of my hometown Canton. “*The Madison County Herald* was just a quarter then and I got to keep 12.5 cents out of every sale I made.” Lee says he was an average student at Canton Academy who hated algebra. He didn’t understand why he had to take it and certainly thought he would never use it again. “Funny how life comes back around full circle. As a REALTOR®, I use algebra every day!”

Lee was not much into sports, but he had a huge competitive streak. “I worked as a bag boy, stocker and cashier at a grocery store in Canton, throughout my teens,” he recalls. “I always want-

ed to be the fastest stocker, cashier and bag boy all while doing it right. Because of this, I earned good tips which certainly helped my motivation.” After graduating high school, Lee attended Holmes Junior College in Goodman where he started out majoring in radio-TV broadcasting. “A professor told me that to make big money in broadcasting, you had to be an anchor in a large market or go into sales. I had no desire to be in sales and honestly did not think I would ever be a big-time anchor or radio personality, so, I changed my major to accounting.” It didn’t take long for Lee to realize that accounting wasn’t his calling either, but he had a friend who worked in emergency medical services. “He worked two days on, and two days off. That really appealed to me. Plus, I could drive fast and be in the middle of all the excitement.”

Lee earned his EMT license and went to work for Mobile Medic. “I helped open their Madison County offices and became a field training officer.” The company moved Lee into downtown Jackson to work the night shift. “I loved the action!” Always wanting to be the best, he competed with a long-term Jackson Fire EMT to have the fastest response times and safest driving records so that he could have shift preference. But one day Lee took a hard look at those who had been in the business long term. “Many were



...
working multiple jobs, stressed out, and all were at high risk for serious injury. I realized it was tough to get old in that business and my only other option in EMS was management, and I just wasn't interested."

The game-changer for Lee happened by surprise. He and his wife, Amy, were "professional Sunday shoppers," spending their weekends going to open houses. "We loved looking at houses, but we were a Realtor's nightmare, never having any intention of buying. A broker at one point offered to pay for Lee to get his Real Estate license which sparked some interest, but at the time was not the right fit. "One day when I got off work, I felt as though I'd reached my limit in EMS and working for someone else, so I decided to take control over my own destiny. I took a week off,

traveled to Gulfport and attended a crash course in Real Estate. I then took a night course in Meridian as a follow up, determined to get my real estate license."

In order to sit for the exam Lee had to have a sponsoring broker. "As a 26-year old punk kid, I walked into a firm one day hoping to be hired but was told by that broker, they weren't hiring. Devastated, I called Bill, a guy I had car-pooled with to Meridian and he encouraged me to talk to his brother-in-law, the broker of Maselle Realty. Doug sponsored me and the next thing you know I was ready for the exam!

Lee was determined to succeed, he passed his exam, quit his EMS job, gave up his EMT license and went straight to work. During his first day he was placed

in an office with four desks and no knowledge on how to sell real estate. Several defining moments came shortly after. First, he found out that the company that was not hiring had hired someone else. Second, he sought help, since he had no experience "I had no real sales experience, but I understood that if I wanted to be successful, I should be around successful people. I walked across the hall in my new office and asked one of the top producers if she had time to talk. She looked at me, said she was busy, then looked back down. I panicked and asked where she was from. What relevance that had, who knows. She said Flora! Smart or not, I said, "Well I'm from Canton and if you can sell Real Estate so can I." A competition and a friendship were born, pushing both parties to more successful careers.

"I was really nervous on my first sales call. One of the owners told me it was a hot property and that if I couldn't sell it, I shouldn't come back. I believed her because everyone should do what their boss says." Not only did Lee sell it, but the buyer was willing to pay a \$1,000 over asking price!

Lee made regular sales from that point through April when Uncle Sam called. No one had told him about paying quarterly taxes. "I had to work double hard to pay that tax bill. I knew I had to sink or swim in this business, especially since I had given up my EMT license when I started this whole adventure." And swim he did. In 1998 Lee empowered his first buyer agent in an effort to produce more and free up some of his time. While ...



New Orleans where he signed up with the company. In June 2004 he held his grand opening. By the end of the year he had three offices with almost 50 agents. “The Prayer of Jabez was answered. I felt it was my duty to expand God’s territory by telling the story of what He did for me.”

As he moved forward in his business, Lee focused on a team approach to selling Real Estate. After picking up the HUD contract he was closing between 90 to 130 transactions a year as a team. “I came in early and stayed late to get the job done.” Due to the large number of transactions Lee was completing each year, he was invited to a mastermind event in Las Vegas which was filled with the top 1% of real estate producers across North America. It was there that the blinders of limiting belief came off. Lee took another leap of faith with marketing on a large scale and it has paid off huge. “Don’t be fooled by the marketing,” Lee adds. “Real Estate is about being strategic, having the right mindset, the right tools and the right people behind you. Anybody can pay for a lead, but few know what to do with it. You must believe in yourself and your product. You must trust in your systems.”

Last year Lee’s “Moving On Team” closed 532 transactions. He is rated at #78 out of 1.4 million Real Estate agents in the country. “I never thought anything like this could be done in Jackson, let alone be ranked nationwide. It’s funny how things change when you remove your limiting beliefs.” He currently has ten team members, six in sales and four admin. “We are able to do more, because each person has a specialty but are all cross-trained in all aspects of the business.” His family is involved as well, with his wife, Amy, as broker, his youngest son working as a runner and his oldest studying to be a pilot “for future expansion,” Lee adds. “I’ve learned there is only so much a person can do and still have a life. With the team model, things don’t fall through the cracks. This model has put people in a seat they excel in, their lives continue to change both mentally and financially every day. I know the only thing constant in this business is change. I was the first to bring virtual tours into this market. I believe you must be different; you must go where others will not. If you’re not changing you will die in this business.”

Outside of work, Lee has been “heavily involved” with the Realtors Associations and recognized as Instructor of the Year for the Mississippi Realtor Institute. He is an active member of Pinelake Church. Lee says he works hard and plays hard, enjoying time with his family. Both his sons (Seth, 20 and Grant, 18) are Eagle Scouts, the family has been deeply involved in Boy Scouts for 14 years now and are still going strong. Travel is a passion of Lee’s. “I have two huge Rand-McNally map books highlighted with places we’ve been.” He loves to marsh fish in south Louisiana and hunt during the winter months just to experience nature. “God gave us this life; we need to live it!”

... teams were certainly not mainstream at that time, Lee’s business began to grow.

“This is where my story gets good,” he smiles. “In 2003 I wasn’t satisfied with my situation. I felt there was something more. I completed a Crown Financial Ministries program at Colonial Heights where a verse from Hebrews 11:6 stuck with me, *But without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him.*’ I then completed a study on The Prayer of Jabez in a small group. I asked some of the participants of that group to pray that prayer for me.” The Prayer of Jabez reads *“Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would be with me...”*. “I realized that it was not about me, but about expanding God’s territory.”

Lee prayed the prayer for a year before God opened a door for him. As quickly as that door opened it seemed to close. After seeking wise counsel and with a random turn of the page in his Bible to Galatians 1:10, Lee turned down the original opportunity offered him and took a step-in blind faith.

Soon Lee’s phone began ringing with people wanting to work for him, not even knowing what his company was going to be called and or what they were going to be paid. Lee put his shingle out, a sign that didn’t even have a phone number on it. “I had no contracts, no bank account, nothing.” He was encouraged to talk with RE/MAX and went to an event in



MEET

CASEY

CARRINGTON HOLCOMB

FLYING HIGH IN THE REAL ESTATE WORLD

Casey Carrington Holcomb has proven that you can reinvent yourself and still maintain core values. “My love song is serving people. It’s what I love best about what I do. I am able to build relationships and help people every day.”

But the path to becoming a REALTOR® wasn’t a straight one. After a career in the world of academics and international marketing, Casey felt it was time to make a change. “I was in the fortunate position where I didn’t have to work, but I had things I wanted to do in life.” Finding the right place to land was important to Casey. “I needed to know that the agency I was with had the same values and integrity that I have. We needed to speak the same language. I found that at Keller Williams. I knew when I met the team at KW, it was the place I wanted to call home.”

Casey is only in her third year selling Real Estate, and already she is making her mark. She has been a capping agent each year since joining Keller Williams. She ranked in the top ten among the agents at KW her first year, and last year she was number two in listings sold and number two in total sales for non-team agents. For the past two years she has served on the Central Mississippi REALTORS® Best Practices committee and in 2018 she served on the Keller Williams Associate Leadership Committee. “I served as a trainer for new agents who were taking part of the extensive training offered by KW as a way to give back because of the mentors who invested so much in me.

Real Estate has been a passion of Casey’s for a long time. As a little girl growing up in Clinton, Casey dreamed she’d be either a flight attendant or sell Real

Estate. “I actually tried the flight attendant thing, but when they told me I’d have to live in New York City with five other girls, I said ‘no way!’” She purchased her first home before she got married, and after she married, she sold her home on her own. “I learned a lot during that process, and it gave me an appreciation for the business and the role Real Estate agents play in buying and selling.” Just recently Casey had the opportunity to sell her childhood home in Clinton. “I had listed a neighbor’s house, and as I often do, I went door-to-door in the neighborhood to introduce myself. I saved my old house for last, and the couple there told me they had prayed for a REALTOR® the previous night.” It’s stories like this which reaffirm Casey’s belief that every transaction isn’t just a transaction. “I can see my purpose in each one.”

...





he's not flying for work, Casey says she and Karl enjoy being "wheels up" together. "We love traveling. We don't go anywhere extravagant. It may be to the Mississippi Delta to the Viking Cooking School or to Texas where we love to dance! We have been ballroom dancing since we started dating in college."

The couple are active members of Flora United Methodist Church, where Karl is a lay reader. Casey has been working with the Cuban ministries, making nine trips to Cuba and she's been to Chile. She and Karl are traveling to Israel in January and maybe to Uganda during spring break next year. "I do my Real Estate work to simply support my opportunities to be a part of a ministry," she explains. The couple's two children are involved as well,

joining Casey in Cuba each summer. Bailey is a junior in pre-nursing at Mississippi State University, and Karlton is a senior at Tri-County Academy.

Casey says she'd like to be remembered by her clients as having a passion to serve, and to be a part of their personal journey. "It goes beyond the buyer and seller relationship for me." Casey provides a personal touch when working with clients. From the lady who lived in the same house for 50 years and never threw anything away to the man who wants to sell his modest home and fulfill his dream of moving to Arizona, she works with each client to help them reach their dreams. She says the handwritten thank you cards are the favorite thing she gets in return. They make it all worth her efforts. "Sometimes it's no fluff with me, though - I have to be a bit

“
**CASEY
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 LIKE TO BE
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 HAVING A
 PASSION TO
 SERVE, AND
 TO BE A PART
 OF THEIR
 PERSONAL
 JOURNEY.**
 ”



family mission trip to Cuba



hard in order to get the job done. That is the hardest thing for me. I want people to know all sides of me, though. I think agents need to be transparent, fair and honest.”

That philosophy has carried over to Casey’s relationships with other agents. Casey handles listings and works with buyers all over the tri-county area. Of course, her favorite area to market is her home, The Town of Flora. “As a member on the Central Mississippi REALTORS® Best Practices Committee, we work to put together best practices that help us work together with other agents as well as those who work with us day-in and day-out – the lenders, the attorneys, the appraisers, etc. I have enjoyed working with outside agents and vendors and learning from each of them through our constant dialogue and learning opportunities.”

Success for Casey is not the money in the bank but doing what she loves to do. “I learned in the corporate and non-profit worlds that I have to define success for myself. For me, success is being able to go into Cuba, Chile, Uganda, etc. to take care of families there. Can I do more in Real Estate? Yes. But it’s important to have a good balance in life. I must remember I have my own family here. They are my main priority. Working in Real Estate has been something that has allowed me to prioritize my passions. If I had really known about this business years ago, I would have done it way before now. But the reality is that I did it in God’s timing, which is perfect.”



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written by Susan Marquez
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ARMSTRONG RELOCATION

UNITED VAN LINES

A Family Business With a Culture of Excellence

For Keith Hopper, serving as president of Armstrong Relocation in Madison it is more than a job. It's a family affair. His grandfather, Raymond Hopper, was one of the Founders of Milan Express, a successful transportation company out of western Tennessee. Prior to his recent retirement, Keith's father, Ron Hopper, worked for Armstrong for forty years. Ron started as an over-the-road driver, later moving into sales at the Memphis corporate headquarters.

Then in 1985 under Ron's leadership, Armstrong Relocation purchased a moving company in the Alegrezza Piano building on Highway 51 and the family moved to the Jackson area.

After graduating from Northwest Rankin in 1992, Keith attended Hinds for two years before going to Mississippi State where he received his BBA in Marketing with a minor in Transportation. On summers away from college, Keith worked as a mover at Armstrong. "I spent several summers packing



and loading moving vans and working in the warehouse," he says.

During the second college summer working at Armstrong, an unforeseeable event suddenly forced Keith into the office working in local operations as a local dispatcher. "I had to mature very quickly in this business managing about 75 professional movers daily in a robust economy." After that summer, he started working at Armstrong full time in 1996. "I spent eight years in operations, then after another national tragic event went into corporate account sales. After 9/11 the market, the economy, and our sales tanked. They handed me a phone and basically said, 'make some calls, set some appointments, and create some new accounts.'"

Keith did just that, traveling around the country from coast to coast calling on corporate accounts. "Imagine a young guy in a suit trying to convince people all around the country to work with a moving company in Madison, Mississippi." But companies believed in Keith and soon he signed Barnes & Noble, Zappos, Cirque du Soleil, Pearson Education, as well as other large corporate and government accounts. Over the past ten consecutive years, Keith has been in Armstrong's President's Club and on multiple occasions, he's been Armstrong's number one top producer. He maintains the title of a Certified Relocation Professional, one of very few people in Mississippi to have the CRP designation. The certification is earned through the Employee Relocation Council, the mobility industry's premier trade organization. It takes hours of training and testing, and the certification must be kept up annually, and it's something Keith takes very seriously.



Armstrong Relocation has over 1,000 employees working from 29 offices in 18 states while dispatching about 400 over the road household goods drivers. "We are part of United Van Lines. United is the largest mover in the USA, and Armstrong is the largest agency within the United system. In Madison, MS we have 75 to 100 employees, and generate \$7 million in revenue out of this location. That's a lot of moving and storage business in Mississippi. On any given day, our corporate accounts and residential customers are moving anywhere on the globe. Although a large part of our business is account driven, we do thrive with local COD residential moves as well. Local residential moves are an area we are working to grow. Locally, we have multiple residential salespeople who go out to homes for a consultation and provide free moving estimates based on the unique needs of that customer. We also offer online virtual surveys which is easily administered through a Facetime-like app. The app even records the online survey and eliminates any guesswork."



KEITH EXPLAINS THAT MANY MOVING, AND STORAGE COMPANIES ARE FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESSES, AND AT ARMSTRONG, EMPLOYEES THINK OF EACH OTHER AS FAMILY.

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Keith even met his wife, Tanya, at Armstrong. “We worked together here for 13 years.” The couple has two children, Kayla, who is a sophomore at Mississippi State and Preston, who is in the ninth grade at Rosa Scott. “My dad retired from Armstrong three years ago, and my Uncle Mike is still working here as our operations manager. Our daughter is working here this summer.” Keith explains that many moving, and storage companies are family-owned businesses, and at Armstrong, employees think of each other as family. “I’ve been here 23 years. We have many employees here who have been here for ten, fifteen, or even twenty years. Many of our packers, movers, and drivers have been here for ten or fifteen years. We have a great work environment, and you can make a good living moving families.”

When he’s not managing moves around the state or around the globe, Keith says he enjoys playing soccer. “I play on two men’s non-competitive teams at the Madison Healthplex. I make a decent goalie.” Keith’s son just made the Madison Central soccer team for this fall. “I coached youth soccer teams until my son was ten years old. At that point, the kids needed a coach more than they needed a cheerleader on the field.”

While Keith has maps of the United States in various areas of the Armstrong offices, he stresses that the company does local moves too. “We certainly do coast-to-coast and even international moves, but we also do a lot of local moves in the Greater Jackson area. We pride ourselves on being a cut above. We are professional, quality movers who take pride and responsibility

in what we do. We have a consultative approach where we meet with the possible customer, discover their needs and provide a solution that works.”

Another service the company provides is storage, and lots of it. They have the main warehouse which is 16,000 square feet in Madison with 400 storage vaults and features solid concrete walls. Another 40,000 square foot facility is in Canton for commercial and office moving storage needs. “Armstrong partners with the Central Mississippi REALTORS® Association and the Building Owners & Managers Association,” says Keith. “We are also involved with multiple Chambers of Commerce and with leading REALTORS® in the State. Our company credo is *A Culture of Excellence: Building trust, reducing stress, delivering reliability.*”

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