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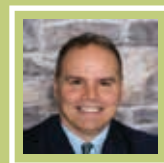


If you are interested in contributing or nominating Realtors for certain stories, please email us at [joe.dalessandro@realproducersmag.com](mailto:joe.dalessandro@realproducersmag.com)

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# Publisher's NOTE

I write this a day after my children's schools were all closed for several weeks and the President declared a national state of emergency. Store shelves are void of water and cleaning supplies, and we are all trying to determine how to confront the economic fallout.

Every American is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. I pray that you, your loved ones, and all of your relations remain healthy through this crisis. I pray by the time you read this, the pandemic curve has flattened and declined, and we are assured the worst is behind us.

It's times like these that test our resolve not only as a nation but also individually. I encourage you to read our cover story on your peer, Matt McCollum. Matt overcame a major economic setback, and currently perseveres daily through a health trial that could send the strongest among us to the brink of despair. Instead, Matt is living life to his fullest potential, a Top 50 performer who stays focused on the most important things.

In our last issue, we announced our LAUNCH PARTY. We've postponed the event and will communicate new details as soon as ethically possible. This event is free for Top 50 DuPage agents, and we're excited for a great cocktail party with your fellow premier brokers from all corners of the county. Look for a personal invitation in your email when we reschedule as well as on our social media pages. I look forward to seeing you there!



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# PATTI & CHASE MICHEL



Real Estate

Legacy Runs Deep

in Downers Grove

## ▶ all in the family

Written by **Lauren Young**

Photography by **Katherin Frankovic**



For Patti Venard Michels, you could say Downers Grove and its real estate market are “in her blood.”

Her grandfather, Mike Venard, served as Downers Grove Police Chief for 20 years. Many family members have lived in Downers and still live there. Her parents ran their own home construction business in the area. There’s even a Venard Road here, named after her family. That hometown legacy is one she shares with her son, Chase, her partner in one of the most respected REALTOR® teams in DuPage County.

Downers Grove REALTOR® was a natural career path for Patti. During her childhood, she spent untold hours visiting local homes for her parents’ construction and remodeling business. Each weekend, she

would accompany her parents to open houses and watch them demonstrate hard work to a job’s completion. Since those days, the area has changed drastically.

“There used to be a large number of farms in the immediate area,” says Patti. “In fact, my father’s family and many of his relatives owned farms in the neighborhood. Part of my father’s farm was sold to the school district. Today, Highland Elementary School is located on that property. It’s fulfilling that I now make my living and have my home in the same area where my father grew up. My parents even met at Downers North. It gives me great pride.”

...

•••

Since becoming a REALTOR® in 1997, Patti has grown her business almost entirely through referrals. “I got to the place where I was selling about 25 homes a year, which can be complicated with all the paperwork going back and forth,” says Patti. Eventually, she shifted to larger and luxury homes. That’s when her son, Chase, became more curious about real estate. They’d frequently “talk shop” together on his visits home from college.

“Chase would have all this amazing insight into the branding of my listings,” says Patti. “His ideas and experience with technology were a nice benefit to my business.” By then, Chase had caught the family real estate bug. “I was always drawn to real estate, especially the cold calling on the commercial side,” explains Chase. “And the possibility of no earnings ceiling; you could put in unlimited hours and create your own income.”

After graduating from the University of Illinois in 2011, he started his career as a broker in commercial real estate. During those four years, Chase would share tips for Patti to increase her market on the residential side using the lessons he had learned. “It was a natural progression for us to work together,” reflects Chase. “Every time we talked, there were marketing experiences and things I’d seen selling commercial real estate that I would pitch to her.”

By 2015, Patti’s business had grown beyond her limits. She had more client requests than hours to serve them all. That’s when Chase surprised Patti with a monumental decision. “One day, I went into my brokerage office and told them I was going to do something else,” remembers Chase. “Then, I drove over to mom’s and said ‘Let’s do this together.’ She was shocked.”

After overcoming reservations about working together as family, Patti and Chase had an amazing first six months. The two quickly fell into complementary roles and work schedules. Since then, they’ve achieved Top 15 Team in DuPage County 2018; #1 Sales Volume in Downers Grove 2018; and Nextdoor Favorite Winner 2019. With a total sales volume of 392 units (248 of those homes in Downers Grove), \$145 Million in Downers Grove sales, and \$195 Million career volume, it’s no wonder they’re seen as leaders in the industry. Together at Baird & Warner Hinsdale, they now have over 31 years of combined REALTOR® experience, Patti with 23 years, and Chase eight years.

And there’s no stopping them now, with the family real estate tradition set to continue. Brecken, Patti’s 2½-year-old granddaughter, regularly attends open houses and even gives tours to visitors. Patti’s Cockapoo, Cooper, also joins the team, on occasion. “I bring him on walks to area open houses,” says Patti. “I get my dog walk in and am able to tour homes with other REALTORS®. He can’t come into the homes, of course, but he loves all the attention from the in-and-out traffic outside.”



Patti Michels with Her Family at the Beach. Pictured Left to Right: Son Colin, Son Chase, Patti, Husband Shane, Daughter Callie Rummel, Granddaughter Brecken Rummel, and Son-in-law Jared Rummel.

Patti and her husband Shane moved to Downers 30 years ago and have raised all three of their children, Callie, Chase, and Colin, there. “When you live in the same place you work, you take pride in taking care of your neighbors and friends,” says Patti. “We focus on long-term relationships and having our clients become lifetime customers.”

“We want to do a good job for them,” echoes Chase. “We want to be able to sell our neighbors a house, become friends, and stay friends with them. That’s why we work so hard at what we do.”

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# PAUL GARVER

## On A Mission To Take The Stress Out Of Closings

Not even the most devoted REALTORS® build vacations around real estate. But Paul Garver's parents did. His childhood holidays in Florida were often devoid of calm oceans or sandy beaches. Instead, the Garvers followed a set agenda of open house tours and REALTOR® meetings.

The Garver parents were determined to retire in Florida and took every opportunity to scout for their future home. These vacations and his parents' constant talk of wealth building through property investment inspired an early interest in real estate and Paul's eventual, if unusual, route into real estate law as a career.

Paul is part of a military family and he was born in Germany while his family was stationed there. By the time he was five years old, they had settled outside of Columbus, Ohio, where Paul became a devoted fan of The Ohio State University. The youngest of four children with the closest being ten years older than him, Paul was always haggling with his much older siblings. His family loved to tell him at an early age that he would make a great attorney. He headed to Miami University of Ohio for his un-

dergraduate and graduate studies. At Miami, he was president of the student body, but also helped to take the school paper online for the first time in its history. After college Paul had committed to joining the Ohio Army National Guard but had about nine months until he was to leave for Basic Training. He took advantage of this time by working for Thomas Newspaper, traveling southwest Ohio and transitioning all of its newspapers to online formats.

“ I had committed to go to Army basic training and planned to go into the National Guard, but I also had the possibility to go into active duty,” explains Paul. “Coming from a military family, it’s something that I always wanted to do. I always thought about law school, but after college I wanted to experiment and try different paths to make sure it was the right fit for me.” After his training, he decided to join the Ohio Army National Guard as a military paralegal to help explore his interest in the law, and to continue on to law school at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law from which he graduated in 2000.



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Paul and Tom Settling an Argument

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After law school, a random set of circumstances led him to meet his future wife, Nancy, a fellow Miami University graduate. Paul and his roommate arrived at a military friend's bar in Columbus when fate intervened. “My roommate and I walked up to the front door and a group of girls on the patio were staring at us in disbelief and called us over,” he remembers. “Turns out a girl my roommate met at a wedding drove down from Cleveland to try and find him in Columbus, and all her girlfriends in Columbus went out with her to find him. It’s almost like a fluke meeting that we would all be at the same place at the same time. My roommate ended up marrying that girl and I ended up marrying her best friend that I met with her that night. It was meant to be!”



Hard at Work on a Project, Left to Right: Paul, Paralegal Lilibeth Cardona, Paralegal Arianna Listeck, Attorney Lynn Graham, Attorney Amanda Venditti, and Partner Tom Hawbecker



Meet the Garvers - Paul and Nancy with their children Natalie and Grant



“Buying and selling a home is one of the most stressful situations we experience in life,” he explains. “We try to give everyone involved an elevated and relaxed experience.” The firm brings their “fun-of-work” approach into every closing. Paul and his team see it as their opportunity to make every interaction into a celebration of a new start or fresh adventure for the homeowner.

“It’s our goal to turn every closing and engagement into one that benefits everyone at the table, achieves mutual gain, and relieves that pressure of strain,” he says. “Ultimately, we are a service provider. In the end, we want to take good care of our customers and do the best job for them.”

That philosophy has put Hawbecker & Garver consistently in the Top 10 for the number of transactions conducted and the Top Five in total transaction amount in the five-county area. Paul is active on many councils and groups: the Multi-board Real Estate Committee; Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS®; and the Board of Directors for the Illinois Real Estate Lawyers Association.

After law school, Paul couldn’t find any legal positions that actually felt like they fit. He ended up writing a technology training curriculum for a technology training company. “It was a perfect fit,” says Paul. “I was able to work from anywhere, as long as I had a computer. I wasn’t using my law degree, but it gave me the flexibility I was looking for.”


In the fall of 2002, Paul’s wife was offered a position at Aldi’s corporate headquarters. They got married in November and when they got back from their honeymoon, they moved into their new house in Naperville in early December. They settled in Naperville with help from a family friend and REALTOR®. During the purchase process, Paul became friends with the closing real estate attorney, Mark Irpino, bonding over their shared military experience, as Mark had been a marine for a short time. “Mark said I was wasting my law degree and that I should pick up his extra real estate contracts,” recalls Paul. “He said there was extra space at his office, and I should come by to discuss rent with the attorney who owns the building. When I walked into the office with all my files and folders

in a box, ready to move in, the attorney that owned the building just looked at me confused. Turns out, Mark had forgotten to tell him anything. We had a good laugh and agreed to a ‘pay-what-you-think-is-fair’ monthly rent.”

With ever-increasing real estate contracts, Paul reached out to his old law school roommate, Thomas Hawbecker, to share the workload. They moved two desks into a cozy 10’x10’ room and got to work. “It was really fun starting out together,” says Paul. “When things were slow, we would toss a little rubber ball against the wall back and forth. It almost felt like we weren’t even working.”


As time went on, Paul and Tom gained more and more clients. Their firm hired more people to join the team. Their office space grew, too, from that one cozy office with two desks, to two offices, and then a third. Today, Paul and Tom have developed a work family, focused on a team approach to providing an excellent customer experience.

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» cover story

Written by **Lauren Young**  
Photography by **Katherin Frankovic**

# MATT

# McCOLLUM

## Unwavering Determination In The Storms Of Life

**Growing up in Indianapolis, the heart of basketball country, Matt McCollum learned not only how to swish a crisp jump shot, but to approach most things in life with a healthy dose of competitiveness. After continuing his basketball career at DePauw University, an athletic booster recruited him to the Mercantile Exchange in Chicago. As a clerk, he was able to thrive in the intense environment of the trading floor but his love for hoops made it impossible to turn down an offer to work with the Chicago Bulls in the midst of their mid-1990s championship runs. The internship was the job of his dreams and the dream of many other sports-crazed college grads.**

“Every young kid interested in sports management wanted this job,” Matt recalls. “There were hundreds of applicants, so they knew they didn’t have to pay much. It was fun to meet the players and teams, but the job didn’t have the potential for career advancement.” Feeling limited, he reconnected with his former trading

firm and learned about Globex, an electronic trading platform. It was the leading online trading software of its kind, and his firm was putting it to use with great success. Matt jumped at the chance to join a winning team.

“Fortunately, it was one of the things that clicked quickly and it took off,” says Matt. Matt had a successful eleven-year run in an incredibly competitive marketplace. Having married and started a family, Matt and his wife Jessica moved to Glen Ellyn. They

began designing and building their dream home in Glen Ellyn, Jessica’s home town. Success was everywhere for Matt and his young family.

However, things changed when the integration of computers began to play a bigger role in the trading industry. Algorithmic trading programs were introduced and developed to trade at lightning speed, taking away any advantage from the human trader. ...



With the implementation of these new programs, the firms using quantitative software began outperforming their smaller rivals, including Matt. “On June 8, 2011, I had an extremely bad trading day and realized I was doing more harm than good,” Matt recalls. “I called my clearing firm and told them to freeze my account. I stopped trading cold turkey.”

The losses of his final trading year forced Matt and his family into bankruptcy. To add insult to injury, Matt and Jessica moved into the home they had painstakingly built, only to immediately list it for sale. “My wife and I were building a beautiful custom home in Glen Ellyn,” says Matt. “We had to sell the home right after we moved in. It was heart-breaking, to move out of the home we dreamed up and built, and into a rental property.”

On the rebound and looking for a new job, Matt heard that real estate licensing requirements would soon change from 45 hours of training to over 100 hours. Before the deadline, he quickly signed up while he continued his career search. “It was just in case I wanted to do something in the future,” Matt says. “But as the job hunt continued, it became clear that my trading experience didn’t translate to other industries. I told myself that if I was still looking for a job by a certain date, I would go ‘all in’ on building a real estate business.”

As his deadline came and went, Matt poured his competitive energy into real estate. It wasn’t long before he realized the similarities between financial trading and the real estate market. Time and effort are keys to success. “Trading experience gives me insight into how markets move and what causes markets to change,” Matt explains. “I’m able to look at economic indicators for the housing market and understand why it’s impacted.”

But the similarities didn’t mean his early days as a REALTOR® were easy. He still had many lessons to learn the hard way. “When I was just starting out, I took a rental listing in Aurora. I was so broke I couldn’t even afford a lockbox,” Matt chuckles. “When people called to see it, I would drive 25 minutes to Aurora just to show it.” After realizing his inefficient work patterns, he borrowed a lockbox from a nearby REALTOR® to reduce his trips. Working smarter would be a lesson that Matt learned often in his early years.

“I knew I had to provide for my family, so I worked nonstop,” reflects Matt. “I missed my kids’ games, activities, and family dinners. In the beginning, you feel like you have to do whatever it takes to get the business going. It’s like I ran around with my hair on fire.” Over time, Matt began working on smarter processes and earning referrals. He was in constant connection with his friends and family, and that’s when business started accelerating. His inventory of homes began scaling and expanding, allowing him to prove his credibility with closed deals and successful sales.

“I was about a year into my career as a REALTOR® when it started moving,” says Matt. “I finally got a true ‘big listing,’ which launched my reputation for selling luxury properties. Once I gained confidence that I could perform at that level, business took off.” Years of achievement followed, with Matt’s team ranking in the top ten in DuPage County.

And just like that, Matt was given another hurdle to overcome. In 2016, he was diagnosed with ocular melanoma in his left eye. Radiation treatments were effective for one year but, in 2017, they found that the tumor had grown aggressively enough to affect his vision.

“In December 2017, I had my left eye removed at my doctor’s recommendation,” recalls Matt. “The next day, I was on the phone doing work, taking care of business. A few days later, I traveled on a business trip. I just put on a pair of glasses and a bandage over my eye for meetings. I was more determined than ever not to let cancer or the lack of a left eye slow me down.”

In 2019, determination pushed Matt forward to have his best year, individually, as a REALTOR® at Keller Williams Premiere Properties in Glen Ellyn. Matt has his family and God to thank for his motivation to keep moving forward despite the obstacles life has thrown at him. “My wife, Jessica, has been my rock,” says Matt. “She is my emotional and psychological support.” Jessica manages the kids’ schedules and all of Matt’s medical appointments while also working full-time. Their three children have inherited the competitive athlete gene. Jack, 15, plays baseball. Erin, 12, is a soccer nut. Case, 11, plays multiple sports, depending on the season.

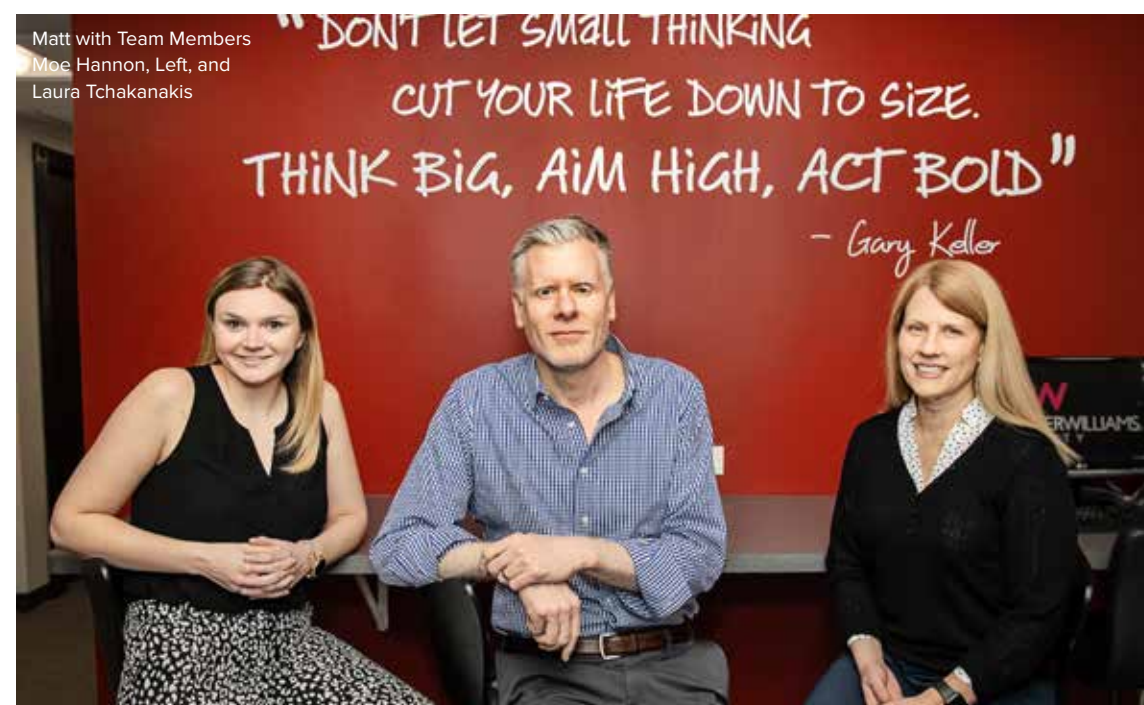
The McCollum Family at Lake Ellyn,  
Left to Right: Jessica, Jack (15), Case  
(11), Erin (12), and Matt



The cancer fight is ongoing for Matt, but it is not slowing him down. In April 2018, Matt was told the cancer had moved to his liver and was at stage four. He is receiving ongoing treatments while remaining dedicated to his clients.

“These challenges don’t define me,” Matt says. “I’m not letting cancer affect my goals. And I’m more determined than ever to make a difference in the lives I get to touch every day.”

Reflecting on his life and the challenges he’s faced time after time with his career path, finances, and health, Matt sees a greater purpose in his journey. Having endured these experiences, Matt is able to empathize with his clients as they too are often making a move in the midst of challenging circumstances. “It’s amazing when I look back at situations in my life that I couldn’t understand or find purpose in at the time,” says Matt. “Now I truly feel that God has something bigger in mind. I don’t know what that is yet, but I see that I am able to encourage and connect to people based on these life experiences. From overcoming all that’s happened; the loss of a job where I thrived, losing our dream house, bankruptcy, starting from scratch, building a real estate business. And then cancer hit. But we’ll overcome this, as well!”



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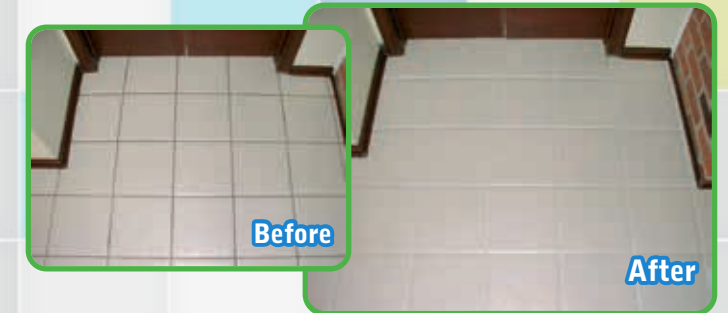
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# Carmen POPLAWSKI

*Devotion to Family, Service,  
and Puerto Rican Heritage*

Some of Carmen Poplawski's fondest memories revolve around growing up in Puerto Rico with a large extended family. Carmen comes from a long line of strong women with one sibling, 36 cousins, and innumerable aunts and uncles. Every weekend became a party celebrating someone or something.

A packed schedule of both hard work and family activities has always been a constant for Carmen. After she graduated high school, her immediate family moved back to the Chicago area, and she quickly filled her time with career pursuits. While attending college to be a medical secretary, Carmen put in hours at her aunt and uncle's grocery store. And after graduating, she worked both full-time at a hospital and part-time at a private physician's office.

As she continued to prove her high professional capacity, Carmen gained more responsibilities and medical training. Over the years, she learned patient billing, phlebotomy, delivery, and even surgery observation, all of these functions fitting well with her passion for helping others.

When Carmen met her husband, Michael, and started a family, they began rethinking their living situation. "We decided to move to Naperville because we wanted a better education for our girls," says Carmen. "We had them in public and private schools in Chicago, but decided that a move to the suburbs would be better for their learning environment."

Following the birth of her son a few years later, Carmen decided to leave her medical positions and stay home until he reached kindergarten. She was drawn to a new career through an unusual pastime shared with a friend. "A girlfriend and I had this weekend hobby where we'd travel around Naperville and visit open houses," says Carmen. "On Saturdays, I'd bring the kids with us, but on Sundays it would be just her and me. We'd observe the interaction between the REALTOR® and the clients. We'd listen to what the clients were saying about the homes. We'd look at how the signs were displayed outside. A lightbulb went on, and I just knew that this is what I wanted to do as my next job."



Making the Shot! Pictured Left to Right: Husband Michael, Daughter Heather, Son Adam, Carmen, and Daughter Nicole

Carmen got to test the waters when her cousin was in the market to buy a family home. She eagerly offered to assist him to get an inside look at the industry. Confirming her passion, she took courses at the College of DuPage and earned her real estate license in 2006. Carmen joined Cookie Hanson's Century 21 Affiliated in Naperville team just when the housing market took a hit. The downward turn left her doubting her decision to become a REALTOR®.

...

••• “Cookie was an amazing mentor,” recalls Carmen. “I asked her if this was the wrong time for me to get started in real estate because everything was moving so slowly. She told me this was actually the best time because I could go slowly, learn to avoid mistakes, and grow a credible base of referrals.” Carmen took Cookie’s advice to start part-time.

Not surprisingly, Carmen also poured herself into an additional job at School District 204. For the next nine years, she would finish her full-time job at 3:00 and shift to her real estate business on evenings and weekends. Her first hosted open house was at a home that hadn’t received many showings. To generate interest, she arranged a full-day open house. It just happened to be on one of the coldest days of the season.

“My husband thought I was crazy to be hosting on such a freezing day. He asked me why I was going to put it on since it was likely no one would visit,” she laughs. “I told him that if just one person showed up, it was more than none, and I will have done my job for that person.”

Arriving at the home, Carmen found it surrounded by mounds of snow blocking a clear view from the street. “The plows had pushed a pile in the front yard,” recalls Carmen. “I grabbed my sign, climbed to the top of that hill, and staked it in deep so everyone would be able to see it as they drove down the street.” As predicted, one couple did arrive that day. They also couldn’t believe she was still hosting under the weather conditions. Together, they had a good laugh about the cold, toured the home, and made a connection thanks to the unique situation.

“I always like to ask people if they have a REALTOR®, especially at open houses,” says Carmen. “This couple did, but I asked for their contact information so I could send a thank you for visiting on such a cold day. A few days later, they reached out and asked me to show them more listings. They enjoyed the time they had spent with me, and they weren’t completely comfortable with their current agent.” Carmen quickly compiled a list of homes and scheduled tours for the next weekend. The first one they walked into the couple said was “the one.” They bought the home and still live in it to this day.

“That story is just a reminder to myself that hard work pays off,” she says. “Rainy, snowy, hot, cold, you never know. Connecting with just one person could lead to success!” Carmen has a reputation for honesty, and she is completely devoted to her clients.

Among her achievements, Carmen has received the Quality Service Award for superior customer service scores for five straight years, and Ruby, Emerald, and Diamond awards for production. Designations and certifications include Pricing Strategy Advisor (PSA), Seller Representative Specialist (SRS), member of National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP), Best of Zillow and Century 21 Affiliated – Naperville Top Agent.

Just like during Carmen’s childhood, regular family gatherings are of utmost importance. Her husband Michael and grown children pride themselves in eating together regularly, especially for their large Sunday meal. Michael is an insurance broker. Daughter Nicole is a mother of two who teaches math and science in Chicago Public Schools. Daughter Heather works at a restoration company in Rolling Meadows. Son Adam attends Benedictine University full time while working part-time, which should sound familiar. Wrigley, her Border Collie, is also part of the family. Carmen likes to say that Wrigley is like Century 21; he doesn’t know when to stop and is very loyal.

As Carmen looks forward to what 2020 brings, she is determined to be more involved in the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate and her local community. And becoming more deeply connected with her Century 21 “family” of colleagues.



“

Rainy, snowy, hot, cold, you never know. Connecting with just one person could lead to success!

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