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CELEBRATING LEADERS:  
**Richelle Knotts**

ASK THE EXPERT:  
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## MEET THE WICHITA REAL PRODUCERS TEAM

				
<b>Samantha Lucciarini</b> Owner/Publisher 316-258-4855	<b>Lanie Schaber</b> Editor	<b>Katherine Fondren</b> Ads Strategist	<b>Jennifer Ruggles</b> Photographer	<b>Darrin Hackney</b> Photographer
				
<b>Adam Dreher</b> Videographer & Photographer	<b>Dave Danielson</b> Writer	<b>Heather Pluard</b> Writer	<b>Nicole Langley</b> Writer	<b>Ashley Labus</b> Special Events Planner

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# PUBLISHER'S note



As I write this Publisher's Note, some four weeks in advance of its publication date, our nation is in the midst of a powerful movement seeking justice. While so much can be said about these current events, I recognize that this magazine exists not for you to hear my personal views and values, but for you to hear the voices and stories of your colleagues in our Wichita real estate community. My hope is that by continuing to introduce you to influencers within the community through this magazine – revealing not only what you might have in common but what might make you different from one another – it can serve as a vehicle for positivity and even for challenging your perspective.

Hard conversations are rightfully being had all around us right now, but here in *Wichita Real Producers*, I commit to my mission of connecting, elevating, and inspiring real-estate professionals. I pledge to continue creating a community that supports and cherishes every top producer and respects your unique story. Please welcome our newest trusted business partners, Achosa Home Warranty and Old Republic Home Protection.

Your friend, publisher, and fellow REALTOR®,

**Samantha Lucciarini**

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▶▶ top producer

Written by  
Dave Danielson  
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Photography

# LESLEY HODGE *is a Positive and Unstoppable Force!*

Wichita Area Real Estate Experts, eXp Realty

Each day, you navigate the waters of the deal, helping your clients realize their dreams. It's not a job for the faint of heart. Each step of the process can turn on a dime. Getting to the closing table is a celebration for everyone involved.



Lesley Hodge feels the same way. As a REALTOR® with Wichita Area Real Estate Experts with eXp Realty, she also enjoys the journey. It's not that she has figured out how to avoid all of the pitfalls and run a detour around obstacles. It's the fact that she has made a choice.

"I choose to be positive," she says with a spark. "That's a big one for me. In fact, I have a really hard time dealing with negative people."

#### **FAMILY FOUNDATIONS**

As hurdles arise, Lesley finds a way. And she starts with hard work – the kind of work ethic instilled in her from the time she was a little girl. "I had great examples with my parents. My mom was amazing. And my dad was very hardworking," she smiles. "That's where I get it."

Lesley also seemed to get a love for real estate that started young – a passion that may originate in her DNA. In fact, her grandmother, Sue Bush, was a licensed agent in the Wichita area for 47 years. "She was a managing broker for a couple of different companies through the years," Lesley remembers. "When I was growing up, she always said she wanted us to have our own company someday."

When Lesley was 24, she started her family with the birth of her son, Austin...and she was soon ready to jump into her real estate career. She knew this was her chance to be a good provider for her son and have a flexible schedule for his school events.

While her grandmother was transitioning out of the business at that point, the memories of that time are still fresh. "She was such a great mentor to me through-





...

out my life, and that continued as I started my own career in the business,” Lesley recalls.

**IN THIS TOGETHER**

The family tradition continued with Austin, who accompanied Lesley to appointments and has even helped with her flips. Family is at the center of Lesley’s world – in life and business. Today, Austin is entering his senior year in high school, with plans to compete for his school’s wrestling team. At the same time, David, Lesley’s husband, is at her side each day. “We work together every day, side by side in the car,” she smiles. “He retired after 20 years in the Air Force. We decided to do real estate together four years ago. He drives me around, goes to all of our appointments, gives advertising ideas, and coordinates all the repair requests for our clients with contractors.”

Together, they definitely complete a positive equation.

“It is a wonderful feeling working with him,” she says. “You are with your friend. You’re taking care of business together every day and every step of the way. We celebrate the wins together, and we grumble about the pitfalls together. It’s an awesome feeling to be with someone that can relate to the crazy of real estate.”

Away from work, Lesley and David enjoy cruising in their 1963 Cadillac and traveling, trying to get away six to seven times each year. They also are big music fans. “In fact, we will even plan trips around concerts,” Lesley says. “I’ve seen artists such as The Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin, George Jones, Merle Haggard, Tony Bennett, the Black Eyed Peas, Bruno Mars, Eric Clapton, and more!”



“

We work together every day, side by side in the car.



“

We celebrate the wins together, and we grumble about the pitfalls together.

It’s an awesome feeling to be with someone that can relate to the crazy of real estate.

”

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

From the beginning of her career, Lesley demonstrated a knack for what she does and how she does it. She completed 24 deals that first year, won JP Weigand’s Rookie of the Year honors, and kept moving forward.

“When I started, I just did whatever I could to learn the business. I focused on expired listings and for sale by owner deals,” she remembers. “In the process, with a young child, I

wasn’t in the office a lot. I just put my head down and did my own thing. And that has been my stance for the entire 17 years I’ve been in the business. It was a good fit for me in that regard.”

Her ride in the business has been a rewarding one, including several years where she has completed 80 to 90 deals. Several years ago, she became the first eXp Realty agent in Kansas. “I don’t own the franchise;

I just happened to be the first agent in our market. Now I’m incentivized to help it grow. Our focus has been on coaching and mentoring other agents and helping them achieve their business goals,” Lesley says. “We have about 30 agents who tie back to us through eXp Realty that I’ve been coaching locally and several other eXp agents all over the U.S. and Canada.”

That’s just the start.

As Lesley says, “We’ve also been opening it up and inviting agents from other companies to sign up for online classes. It is a great way to connect local agents with other agents from around the country who specialize in certain aspects of the business.”

Whether she’s working with clients searching for their next home, mentoring a team member, or giving back to the industry, those who know Lesley Hodge count on her leadership and impact ... as a positive force.





*Jennifer*  
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rising star ◀◀

Written by Nicole Langley  
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# *Team Home Hero*

# Ben Meyer

is Raising the Standard of Service!

**Ben Meyer**, originally from West Wichita, is a Top Producer at Team Home Hero, a company that provides a better online search experience than any real estate company on the market. ...





**“ It is so important how much value we deliver, and trying to increase other’s quality of life during one of the most stressful times.**

**”**

••• An entrepreneur for eight years, Ben noticed a huge opportunity to serve the real estate industry, helping improve client service. “I could see a better way to go about the whole experience, and I wanted to provide that,” he says. In 2017, Ben obtained his license and started his own team. Within just five years of having his license, Ben and his team have had over 200 transactions. “I prefer to have a smaller team,” he says. “We work hard, have a great work ethic, and have the people skills for a personal touch to accompany the tech-savvy world we live in.”

Team Home Hero has a fitting theme to go along with its brand – fighting for their clients and advocating for what is best for them. “We go to battle for them,” Ben tells us. “We get the best deal, and that’s why we named our company to reflect that. Not everyone wants to fight or work for the client, but we will. It’s about cooperation, negotiation, and the work ethic that we put into everything we do. Provide more, do more, make it simple.”

If there is one thing that Ben wants others to know, it is how much work and dedication he has put into his career. “I put in work and learned development skills for myself, whether it was learning through other



businesses or life-coaching events. The industry has been long due for a service correction, and we have to earn the public’s business considering there are many options out there. We have to raise the standard of what a consumer expects – online and in person.” Team Home Hero doesn’t just help clients with the business and deals; they also help them by providing mental and emotional support during one of the most important times in many clients’ lives.

Ben tells us that the most rewarding part of his career is his impact on peoples’ lives. “It is so important how much value we deliver, and trying to increase other’s quality of life during one of the most stressful times. My personal satisfaction is being able to make that quality improvement to our industry. It also helps agents to build a better industry, and improve their success as well.”

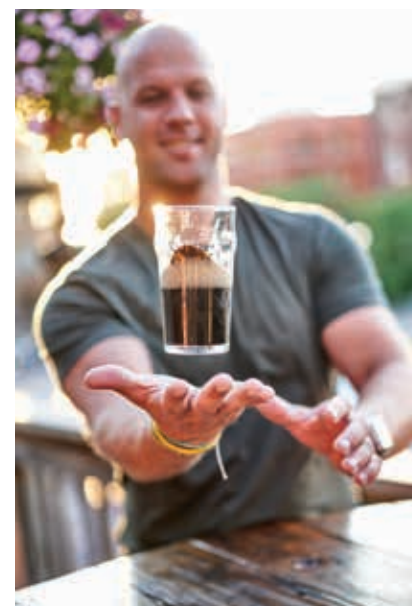
Success for his agents, and how he has impacted the community, is success to Ben. But to make an impact, he tells people what they need to hear with no sugarcoating. “That will benefit you greater than me trying to beat around it. I am more forward and direct, but out of love and care.”

One of the most significant changes Ben has seen within the real estate industry is how technology has impacted the overall experience. Team Home Hero, especially in recent times, offers video calls and meetings online, rather than having to drive to the house or office. While some people have doubts about the authenticity of over-the-internet interactions, Ben ensures that it is still a personal experience and allows him to develop meaningful relationships with his clients.

Ben comes from a large family, and his mother, who passed away when he was 14, has shaped who he is today with the lessons that she left him with. “I’m always going to do the best I can and work the hardest I can to honor my mother’s life. Her lessons are a huge foundation for why I am successful.”

When he isn’t working, Ben works out daily, and can be found spending his time outside, at a community event, or being social with friends. He is invested in the Wichita community, its future, and wants to make his city proud.

Ben is always happy to collaborate and wants to see more collaborations among agents. “We should work with each other, rather than against each other,” he says.







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▶ partner spotlight

Written by Heather Pluard | Photos by Adler Grey Collective

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Co-owner Spencer Allen agrees. “We want everyone who walks through our door to have a great experience, and we do what we say we’ll do,” he says. “The customer is always right at Keystone Solid Surfaces!”



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can help clients maximize their property value. It only takes about two weeks from template to installation, and we make sure customers get the best product for their budget. From baseball stadiums to any size home, our goal is always complete customer satisfaction.”

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Those customers include commercial construction companies, new-home builders, residential remodelers, and local real estate agents. “Countertops are an easy upgrade that can make a big difference when selling or listing a home,” Cyle says. “They

to Keystone Solid Surfaces. “We are in an explosive growth mode,” Spencer says. “Our fantastic team of professionals is a big part of the reason we are so successful. We equip our employees with the resources they need,





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giving them the freedom to do their jobs without being micro-managed. Even though we doubled our workforce this year and plan on continued growth, we always want our small business to have a family atmosphere.”

Cyle and Spencer are proud to be raising their own families here in Wichita. Spencer and his wife have two daughters. Cyle and his wife have two daughters, a son, and a baby on the way. “Both of our families love the big little-city feel of Wichita,” says Cyle. “It’s a quintessential mid-western community full of neighborly people who want to collaborate and grow. We were excited to be a part of that growth by working on the new stadium. With all the investments in downtown, the future is bright for Wichita.”

The Keystone Solid Surfaces team can’t wait to attend a Wichita Wind Surge game when the season starts. Until then, they’ll content themselves with following the youth baseball team they sponsor. “It’s important for us to be good stewards of the community,” Spencer says. “We try to give back as much as possible, whether it’s by supporting youth sports, working on the downtown YMCA Board, or giving back to local schools and universities. We want to be remembered for leaving the city a better place than it was, and for having awesome countertops!”

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# Richelle KNOTTS

is a Source of Strength & Encouragement!

Written by Dave Danielson  
Photos by Darrin Hackney Photography

*ReeceNichols South Central Kansas*

## WHAT DRIVES YOU TO ACHIEVE EACH DAY? WHAT DO YOU TAP INTO TO POWER YOUR WORK?

Richelle Knotts is a firm believer that your “why” is just as important as your “how,” and your strength comes from your purpose.

As president of ReeceNichols South Central Kansas, she also serves as a source of strength for others – supporting them on their own paths through work and life.

## A HISTORY OF HELPING

Richelle earned her real estate license in 2002 and her broker’s license in 2011. As she entered real estate, she brought her experiences and customer service strengths from her previous career. “After spending 25 years in retail and management, I pursued an opportunity in selling new homes,” Richelle remembers. “This is where I found my passion for the industry. This passion has only grown throughout the years. Real estate has never been work for me; it’s something I love to do, and now that I’m at the level where I can lead and help others, I continue to find joy in this profession every day.”

Today, as president of ReeceNichols South Central Kansas, Richelle feels a rewarding responsibility for exemplifying dedication to the team’s managers, staff, and associates. “That, in turn, creates a team that shares a dedication to the industry, clients, and one another. The collaboration and teamwork between our people is the cornerstone of our company,” Richelle says. “Facilitating this culture is an essential part of my job. I enjoy looking for new ways to motivate our team members and innovate in an ever-changing market to achieve results.”

Along the way, there have been those who have helped to support and guide Richelle’s career, including Mike Frazier, CEO of ReeceNichols Real Estate. As Richelle says, “Mike has been one of my most important mentors. He emphasizes the importance of building something great, having fun, and approaching things from a problem-solving mindset.”

As Richelle reflects on her career, one of the times that stands out for her is facing the hurdles presented by the economic downturn.

“My most significant professional challenge has been finding solutions to sell new homes during the 2008-2009 housing crisis. After the market crashed, Wichita had a number of builders with a large spec home inventory and not enough buyers, and they were under significant pressure from the banks. I coordinated bringing together all the major local developers, along with the Wichita Area Builders Association, and we developed several solutions to sell new homes during the crisis,” Richelle remembers. “Measures implemented included consolidation, reducing the number of homes being built from 2,200 per year to 550, and finding new and inventive ways to market and sell new homes. Having weathered that storm and being proactive about adapting to the changing market has changed my perspective, and I choose to see professional challenges as opportunities for innovation and growth.”

## A FULFILLING WORLD

Through her experiences as a leader, Richelle feels the joy of contribution. With a team of 85 agents at ReeceNichols South Central Kansas, there are plenty of opportunities. “What resonates with me is that I feel achievement or success when I help others succeed. If I have agents who are setting goals or trying to reach a certain level of production, I want to be a real help to them by providing them with the resources, encouragement, and motivation to succeed,” she smiles. “When they succeed, I feel really good.”

Family is at the heart of Richelle’s world away from work. That starts with her two children, including her daughter, Mariah, her husband, Derek, and their 2-year-old son, who live in Kansas City, as well as Richelle’s son, Richie, and his wife, Valerie, who live in California. As Richelle says, “My children mean the world to me.” It’s no surprise, then, that her favorite free-time pursuits begin with traveling to see her family. She also loves spending time outdoors.

...



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Giving back is a big part of her. With her team, Richelle enjoys supporting a wide range of organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, Victory in the Valley, and local food-bank efforts. She also is a member of Women of Wichita.

There may be only a set number of hours each day, but Richelle makes the most of them in service to others.

“It’s rewarding to help other people, whether it’s problem-solving and celebrating gratitudes with agents or motivating them to find their best self,” Richelle explains. “Agents’ schedules are so hectic, so helping them find a good work/life balance is important, so they can figure out a way to take part in the simple things in life that are so important to them.”

#### SIDE-BY-SIDE SUCCESS

As Richelle reflects on her life and career, she offers advice for those just getting started with their own careers. “Real estate is a relationship business, so cherish the relationships you have. Set your goals. And don’t be afraid to work hard.”

And as those around her make their way forward, they know they can count on Richelle to be their source of strength. As she says with a smile, “I like being there with them, walking with them side by side.”

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There is room to add a home theatre, gym or additional bedroom in the unfinished space in the basement. The 1.66 acre exterior will also not disappoint, which includes a beautiful circle approach, side load 5+ car oversized garage, professional landscaping, fenced-in yard, covered, heated and screened-in 612 square foot Lanai with access to the pool bath, Travertine pavers, Pool Cabana including and outdoor kitchen which seamlessly accesses (no steps) the custom, in-ground Gunite pool with infinity edge and raised baja sun deck. The garage is finished, insulated, painted and has Epoxy floors; with 1,421 square feet has plenty of extra space for storage or room for a small 5th vehicle.



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# How Can Your Banker Help You During These Uncertain Times?

▶ ask the expert



Written by  
**Kevin H. Sweatland,**  
Sr. Vice President

## ANDOVER STATE BANK

Over the last few months, small-business owners have suffered due to the effects of the COVID-19 virus and the government shutdowns that followed. Many REALTORS® operate as sole proprietors and have had to navigate these tough times like any other business owner.

As small-business owners sought guidance, community bankers in Kansas and the Wichita MSA doubled their efforts to help their customers through these tough times. Below are some steps that both small business owners and sole proprietors can continue to take should they still struggle during these uncertain times.

**Talk to your banker** – The better relationship you have with your banker, the more opportunity they have to help you. Communication is the key to a successful relationship. If

your banker doesn't know you are struggling, they can't help. As a business partner, Andover State Bank offered three to six months of interest-only payments with reduced rates for some clients. We are here to help our business owners be successful. Seek out your banker to determine if they can help.

**PPP Loan Program** – The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) was initially scheduled to close at the end of June; however, it has been extended until August 8, and there are plenty of funds available. If you are self-employed, your bank will need a copy of your 2019 1040 schedule C. The amount of loan available to you will be based on your reported net income, line 31. Funds from a PPP loan can be utilized for payroll, rent, utilities, and mortgage interest payments if you own your own building.

**EIDL Loans – Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)** – Emergency advances were suspended for some time, but the SBA is now accepting new applications again. These loans come directly from the SBA and not your local bank. Visit the SBA website, and review the funding options area. While these loans must be paid back, the rate is fixed at 3.75 percent for 30 years. This is an excellent, low-interest loan for those business owners that still need additional assistance.

**Main Street Lending Program** – The Federal Reserve established the Main Street Lending Program to work in conjunction with local community banks. Loans are originated through your bank and backed by the Federal Government, thus reducing the lending risk to your banker. While these loans must also be paid back, the terms are very favorable.

As stated above, the best advice I can give any business owner is to communicate with your banker. We are here to listen, understand your immediate needs and future goals, and offer guidance. We are here to be your partner in good times and bad. Build that relationship with your banker through more frequent discussions and meetings. The more your banker knows about you, the more they will be able to help when things take a downward turn, or when you have needs for future growth and expansion.

**Kevin H. Sweatland**  
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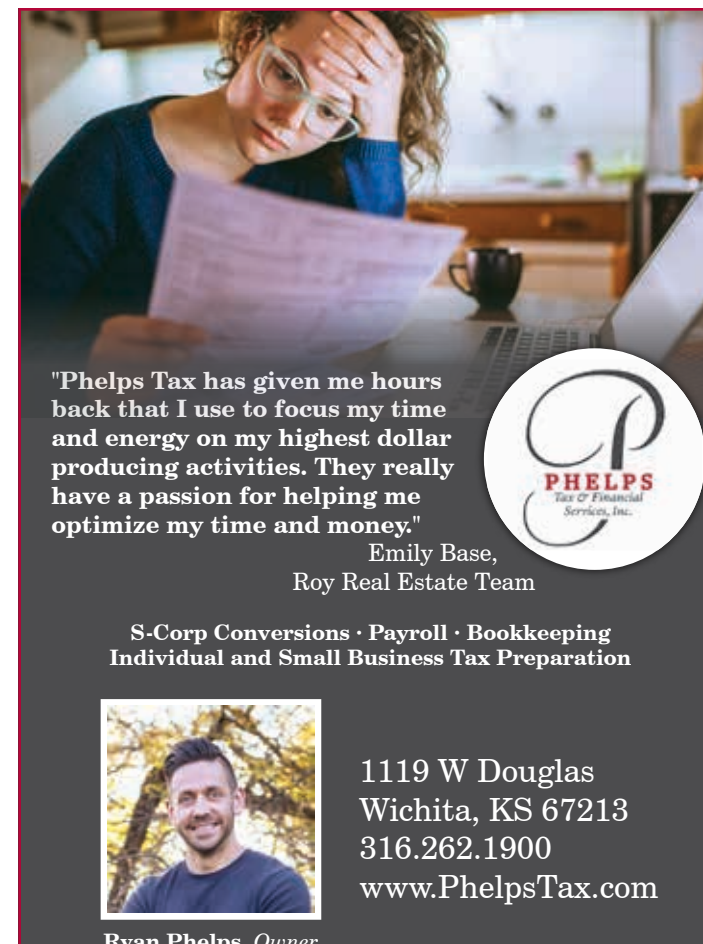
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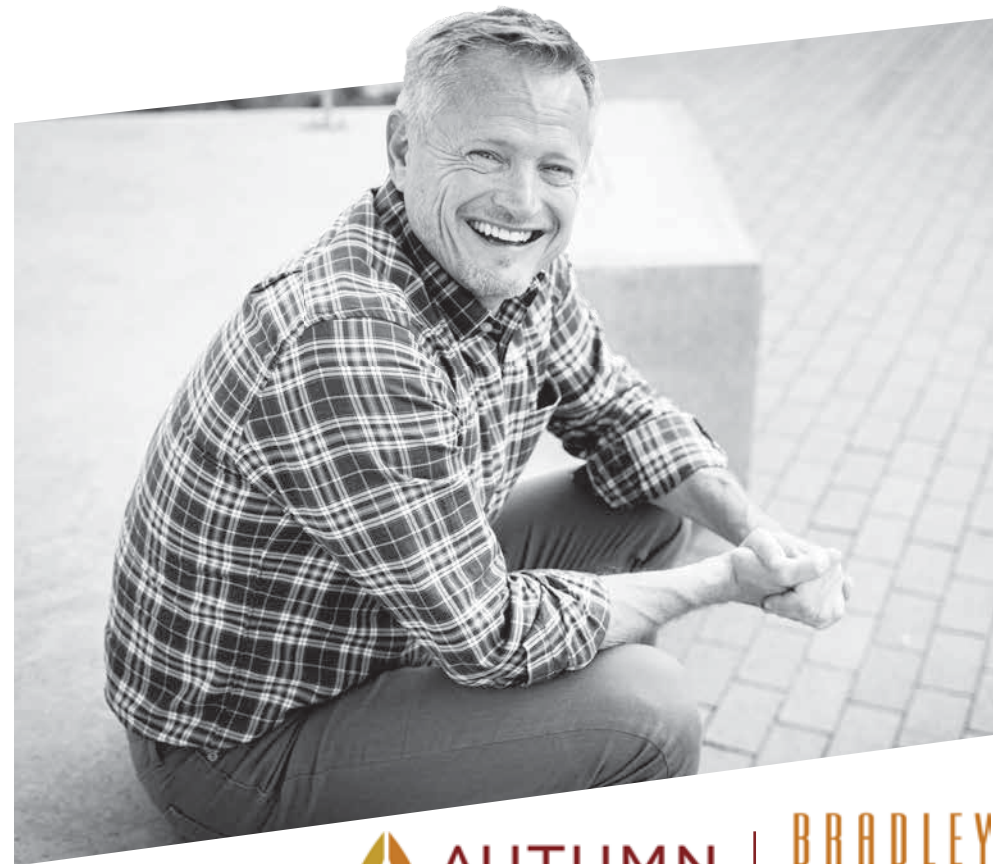
Ty TABING

Written by Heather Pluard  
Photos by Jennifer Ruggles Photography

Wichita, are you ready to celebrate? COVID-19 may have canceled the first half of 2020, but thanks to careful planning by Wichita Festivals, two citywide celebrations are coming your way this year. Autumn and Art and Wonderfall will both take place as planned – with a few adjustments to make them safe and enjoyable for everyone.

“We are working closely with public health officials to give people a fun and safe visitor experience,” says Ty Tabing, President and CEO of Wichita Festivals. “Out of respect for social-distancing guidelines, we will space tents further apart, frequently clean all touch points, and increase sanitization throughout both events.”

Autumn and Art is a three-day festival that kicks off on September 18 with a swanky Patron Party on the green at Bradley Fair. The party’s “Who’s Who” list of attendees typically includes the city’s top civic and business leaders, along with other community-minded individuals who enjoy supporting the growth and development of downtown Wichita. They also enjoy the Bloody Mary bar, gourmet treats from local restaurants, and VIP access to the festival for all three days – including a parking pass.



“The 11th Autumn and Art Festival will include different artists from all over the country, representing 14 different mediums including painting, sculpture, jewelry, and more,” Ty says. “We’ll also have a variety of entertainment and food vendors. Our mission is to represent all segments of our community in a fun and engaging way.”

Established in 1972, Wichita Festivals is a not-for-profit corporation whose purpose is to create diverse and inclusive community celebrations in the Wichita area. They’ve built a volunteer base of more than 9,000 people who take pride in Wichita and want to help the city advance.

“The river is the front yard of our city and our most important natural asset,” Ty says. “Wichita Festivals’ first event was Riverfest, a celebration of Wichita’s 100th birthday. We love animating the river and attracting visitors downtown, and we are proud

to organize an event most residents have enjoyed since their childhoods. The great thing about this organization is that we love to celebrate our history while bringing something new and fresh every year.”

New for 2020 is Wonderfall, a four-day celebration of Wichita’s 150th birthday. This exciting street festival will be held November 5-8 on Saint Francis Street. “It’s a fun way to showcase a great downtown street that offers entertainment venues, a brewery, and a park, among other offerings,” Ty says. “We believe events like Wonderfall will continue to push forward downtown development. That’s where visitors come, it’s the core of Wichita, and we’re excited about the possibilities of new, mixed-use spaces. I grew up in Wichita, and my mom is a REALTOR® here, so I’m personally invested in our city’s advancement, too!”

For more information about Autumn and Art, or to purchase your Patron Party ticket, please visit: <http://autumnandart.com>.







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