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publisher's note ◀◀

FIVE YEARS AGO...



July marks five years since I traded Texas for Louisiana. I never imagined myself anywhere but Texas. I imagined traveling and seeing as much of the world as possible in my lifetime, but I always thought my roots would be secure in Lone Star soil, near my children, parents, siblings and familiar faces.

God saw otherwise.

My reason for moving here is far too long a tale, and one I'm happy to share with you another time, but I will tell you this... I moved here in 2015 in a 2010 Kia Forte with what would fit inside ... and nothing else.

I like a good plan ... a good vision board... I like dreams.

I remember thinking on the drive from Andrews, TX, to Baton Rouge, LA, that what I was doing was not part of a plan or vision or dream. It was more chance-taking, and hoping and praying this would be the beginning of the end of a difficult season.

Perhaps back in January you created a vision board and wrote out some plans and dreams ... then March happened. Life was different. Things were uncertain.

It was a little scary.

I hope your business is thriving, and you've adjusted, and social-distancing and mask-wearing is just a minor hiccup in your life.

But maybe you've been hit hard, and vacations are cancelled, and relationships are rocky, and it's difficult to see if or how things can get better.

I want to offer some encouragement...

Things will get better.

Take a deep breath.

I'm not telling you to load up your car with what remains and drive off to another state and start over ... but I am telling you that if you did ... you'd be okay.

It's just not that scary.

And life is more of an adventure than a predictable, comfortable set of plans that look pretty on paper but bore you and everyone else to tears.

For everything that didn't go the way I'd planned ... thank you.

I'm still driving the same car and don't know if I can get rid of her.

Kia Girl has carried me carefully through many miles of trying to get somewhere, and never judged my singing or talking myself in and out of situations. She's just been there. Through the good, the bad and the ugly.

It's pretty easy to get attached to those that stick around when it's ugly.

And if for some reason you see a move in your future, and all your things do not fit in your vehicle ... our preferred partner, Skinny Wimp Moving Company, can help.

Love,
Gina



►► niche agent

Sara Gummow

By Breanna Smith
Photos by Aaron Cox

I would not
be where I am
today if it were
not for them
laying out a
foundation.

False River: A Love for Generations

For many South Louisiana natives, False River has long served as an easy vacation destination. For Real Producer Sara Gummow, it's where four generations of her family have called home.

Close to Home

The 11-mile long oxbow lake covers 3,200 acres in New Roads, a small town nestled in Pointe Coupee Parish, one of the oldest communities in the Mississippi Valley. Its central yet tucked away location just 30 miles outside of the hustle and bustle of Baton Rouge makes it a popular destination for weekend camps and summer homes.

"If you're from Baton Rouge or Lafayette, it's an easy drive," Gummow said.

She often uses the 40-minute drive into the city for reflection and "me time." When she's on her way to her office at Keller Williams Red Stick Partners on Bluebonnet, she's making lists and thinking about clients. On the way home, she thinks about her family.

Several establishments provide launch facilities, boat rentals and supplies, making False River an effortless escape into the center of Sportsman's Paradise. Sara and her husband, Kevin, reminisced on the days when they had a party barge, the preferred method of transportation in the area.

"We could walk across the street, hit the river and just relax," Kevin said.

Sara Gummow specializes in selling the homes on False River, not just for first-time homebuyers, but permanent home buyers and those looking for a luxurious respite with access to fishing, water skiing and boating right out of the backdoor.

"It's a pretty town off the beaten path," she said. The path is one her family has helped forge over generations.

Expertise from the Heart

Gummow brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to all things False River. It all comes naturally from her genuine love of her hometown. The community

...



I hated to see it go out of my family because, if it had, it would have been the end of the Bouanchauds in this house.



...

Lou Bertha is the queen of the castle and Sara's best friend.

along the river is where she and her husband returned after college and where they raised their two children, Katie and David. She's a lifelong member of St. Mary's Catholic Church down the road. And in 2002, the Gummows moved into the home built by her great-grandfather in the late 1800s, just next door to the property her great-great-grandfather purchased as a French immigrant.

The classic New Orleans-style home arrived from Missouri at the Bayou Sara port in St. Francisville in the late 1800s. Pieces of the Cyprus floors still have *L. Bouanchaud* written on them in black ink.

Bouanchaud served as the Sheriff, or Mayor under the Police Jury system, of Pointe Coupee for more than 50 years. He opened the town's first bank and began an insurance company. He was a beloved man in the parish, known for treating people equally and bringing the town together, Gummow said. An article published in the *Pointe Coupée Banner* on April 10, 1909, read:

"As fast as Mayor Bouanchaud discovers a need, it is promptly supplied by the town at its own expense. Mayor Bouanchaud takes great pride and interest in the Department, and it is due to his efforts that New Roads is well protected as it is today."

The Gummows proudly call the home he built theirs and have carefully restored it to be "as original as it can be." Its picturesque landscape and curb appeal attract visitors and photographers all the time. The house still utilizes the same duct system Bouanchaud

installed at the turn of the century – a state-of-the-art concept at the time called "forced air," which used a coal-burning furnace in the basement and a series of ducts to heat the home throughout.

In 2002, when her cousin who lived in the home for decades was ready to sell it and downsize, the Gummows jumped at the opportunity.

"I hated to see it go out of my family because, if it had, it would have been the end of the Bouanchauds in this house."

They have called it home ever since.

Family Traditions

Sara Gummow walks about 6 miles down Main Street every day to enjoy the River Walk, something she's done for most of her life. Her walking path is sprinkled with her own for sale signs, which drum up a lot of calls and interest.

In August, Gummow will celebrate 20 years as a real estate agent. And in that time, property values along False River have increased fivefold.

"All of a sudden, we had million-dollar properties," she said.

The love of her hometown paired with an unstoppable work ethic and zeal for building relationships has made her one of the region's top-producing agents.

Her parents instilled a strong work ethic in her and taught her how to handle the responsibilities that come with being a REALTOR® with grace and confidence. Her father followed in the footsteps of his father as a car-dealership owner. His business expanded to four dealerships during the span of his career, and when it came time to retire, he sold all but one – New Roads Motor Company.

"I would not be where I am today if it were not for them laying out a foundation," Gummow said of her parents, Sarita and Kootchie. "I hope that I've taken it."

Her parents instilled her work ethic, but her love of False River came naturally. Now, she's watching as her son falls in love with a life on the river, too. Last year, David claimed first place in his age division of the Junior Southwest

Bassmasters tournament with five bass weighing in at 12.27 pounds.

"He's gained a lot of experience growing up and fishing here," Kevin Gummow said.

Life slows down a bit on the river.

"There's this small-town camaraderie," Kevin Gummow said. "Your kids can go play in the neighborhood, and you don't have to worry about them."

It's one of the state's oldest settlements, yet it has managed to hold tight to its quaint, lullaby-like charm with soft breezes and swampy green waves rippling along the banks.

Sara Gummow's career in real estate has helped her combine her local expertise and adoration for life on False River with "not having to punch a time clock, meeting so many interesting people and making new relationships" – and she loves that.

» rising star

By Breanna Smith
Photos by Aaron Cox

KATHERINE COGHLAN

A Sweet Start

Katherine Coghlan doesn't like sales – it's not in her personality to sell someone something. Sure, as a real estate agent, she sells homes and earns a commission, but she looks at it as earning money by being an advocate representing her clients' best interests.

"When I first started, I wanted to make sure that I put the client first and not my need for a paycheck. That was really, really important to me," Coghlan said. Even in those tough, early years, she saved up, putting away a cushion to ensure she "never had to be a salesperson to the client." And it worked.

That mindset is what has set her apart in her success at Burns & Co. It's why she has been among the top three agents in her company for nearly a decade and why she's now in the top 25 producers in the MLS.

What A Girl Wants

After Coghlan graduated from LSU in business and marketing, she jumped into a job in the industry. Growing up, she watched her mom work as a real estate agent in between teaching positions and admired her work, but like many recent college grads, she was encouraged to pursue jobs that were anything but commission-based and without employer benefits.

It only took two weeks for her to realize this was **not** what she wanted.

Recognizing her discontent, her dad stepped in and said, "Just go to real estate school," and the rest was history.

She earned her license as a 22-year-old in a down market in 2009 and persisted despite the doubt.

...



“For most people, a house is their biggest investment, and they don’t necessarily want to give it to a 22-year-old to handle,” she said. “That was a hard challenge to overcome.”

Coghlan dropped Mr., Ms., and Mrs. from her vocabulary – not as a sign of disrespect, but as a way to level the playing field. In South Louisiana, it wasn’t always easy to address clients and associates by their first name, but “every year that got easier and easier.”

Her favorite part of real estate is “being a trusted advisor and having repeat clients – nothing is more rewarding than loyalty in this business.”

It Takes Two

Coghlan and her husband are both Shreveport natives who came to Baton Rouge in pursuit of degrees from LSU. When they graduated, she asked where he wanted to go, whether that be back home, Texas or further down in the boot. They wanted to stay in the Capital City, so she began building her network from the ground up.

She hit her stride in her third year. Her fourth year was “when it finally started to come around. I wasn’t having to go out and find the business. It was coming to me.”

As her referral and return business continued to boom in 2016, Coghlan was looking to hire another agent to help keep it all going. It turns out, she didn’t have to look far.

At the same time she saw the need, her husband, Corey, began to phase out of the kayak manufacturing company he began. They sold the company, and “the timing just fell into place.”

“I know not everyone can do that, but for us, we can spend every day together all the time, and it’s fine,” Coghlan said laughing.



No Limits

Not many 30-somethings have over a decade of experience in real estate. But that tough, early start is what shaped Coghlan into a Real Producer, she said, and she can’t imagine doing it any other way.

She wasn’t afraid to dedicate herself to the hard work required to build long-term success. That, paired with her passion for educating people on the home-buying and selling process, paved the road for her to build this career and work alongside her husband. She’s learned a lot of lessons early on that have stuck with her throughout her career. One of her favorite stories is of one client she acquired while off-duty who said they had an “unlimited budget.” She scoured the Capital Region for the best home, and they ended up writing a contract on the old Nick Saban house ... a \$4 million property.

“After months of going through the process, the gold from Africa didn’t show up on the plane like it was supposed to,” she said. “The best lesson I learned - don’t spend that money in your head before you get it!”

Community

Coghlan knows the value of giving back to her community. As a member of Alpha Strategic Partners, she has helped build a wheelchair ramp at the home of a veteran and finish a playhouse for the family of a man killed in the BP Oil Spill. He started the project, and ASP wanted to see it finished for his family.

ASP is “a networking group, but it’s more than that,” she said. The group picks at least one service project each year to make a positive impact on the city and community.

Coghlan was also a 2015 nominee for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation’s Capital City’s Finest and has nominated someone every year since. She and Corey also love donating to the Coastal Conservation Association to preserve areas like Grand Isle, their “happy place.”

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Darren James

» cover story

By Breanna Smith | Photos by Aaron Cox

In The Business of Growing Others

Two decades ago, Darren James fell to his knees after finishing a shift at his third job. In a candid conversation with God, he said he wasn't scared to work but desperately needed direction. As he stood up, the cover of *Success* magazine caught his eye. He saw a teaser for an article about real estate changing someone's life.

Out of curiosity, he called a small, local real estate firm and asked how to get started.

"I just wanted to sell two houses my first year," said James. "I sold 10, and things have grown from there."

MAKIN' IT HAPPEN

He's risen to the top of the ranks as a local Real Producer, earning the titles of Top Producer for Keller Williams, Listing Agent of the Year and Selling Agent of the Year three years in a row: 2008, 2009 and 2010. He also earned Overall REALTOR® of the Year for Keller Williams in 2008 and 2009.

He found his success managing and growing two Coldwell Banker Offices before moving to Keller Williams in 2008. Then, he started his own company, Darren James Real Estate Experts, which ranked 51st on *The Wall Street Journal's* 2015 Real Trends list of the top 1,000 REALTORS® in the nation. The enterprise was also included in the 2016 Inc. 5,000 list of fastest-growing companies.

He hit his stride and hasn't let up since.

Entering his second decade as a multi-million-dollar producer and 15th year in business as a broker, he now owns and operates Darren James & Associates brokered by eXp Realty.

He has a staff of 11 real estate agents and three administrative professionals who together did 80 million in production in 2019. This was the second highest in the state according to Real Trends report.

His father, Douglas James, has been a member of his real estate team since 2006 as the courier, auditor and filing clerk. Douglas earned his license in 1978, "but never really pursued working actively with buyers or sellers."

Darren says his father has supported him every step of the way.

"He's the number-one dad in the world," Darren said. "If I can be half the man my dad is, I'll be proud."

...



...

“Everyone on my team is a real estate expert with a passion for people,” he said. “They are unbelievable.”

Even during the coronavirus pandemic, while touring homes and meetings were suspended, the business continued to flourish.

“We are freaking rolling,” he said with a laugh.

James is an entrepreneur through and through. His REALTOR® profile is headlined “Makin’ it Happen!” and there’s nothing to encapsulate his success better.

EFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Redemptorist High alumnus attended LSU where he obtained a degree in sociology and criminology. He forged a career in law enforcement to pursue his passion of helping others, but it left him wanting more – more stability, comfort, creativity and financial freedom.



He began working for the Department of Public Safety with Louisiana State Police but was reassigned to investigations, which severely limited the overtime work he depended on to provide for his wife and new baby, who is now 21 years old.

He picked up night shifts at a local office supply store giving seminars about Palm Pilots. Then, picked up another job for the weekends as a sales associate at a local sporting goods store to make ends meet.

Each of the positions equipped him for his journey in real estate. His time in law enforcement helped him develop a unique and rigorous discipline, while as a sales associate he learned the value of client-based service, and the Palm Pilot seminars showed him the value of teaching technology. But James knew his work schedule was unsustainable and took a chance on real estate.

Now it’s hard to imagine James as anything but an entrepreneur because his excitement around business ownership and building leverage through marketing is so infectious.

He talks about real estate and all of its fine inner workings with an unmatched zeal. He loves every aspect of the business from meeting clients to home photography to marketing previously deemed hard-to-sell properties.

His team’s success lies in the details of every transaction – and they do them all. Whether you’re looking for a rental in Port Allen or vacant land in Livingston, they’ve got you covered.

TECH JUNKIE WITH A HELPING HAND

Darren James isn’t just worried about the success of his team, his ultimate goal is to help as many entrepreneurs as possible attain their own success. After all, his favorite pursuit is helping people.

Since he graduated from high school, James has sat down on Christmas Eve with a pen and notepad, and records 10 goals for the upcoming year.

“My goal for this year is to grow people and help people get to their next level in life,” he said.



“Everyone on my team is a real estate expert with a passion for people...”

...

...

“

My goal for this year is to **grow people** and **help people** get to their next level in life.

”

To meet his goal, he started a weekly business planning clinic at Don’s Seafood in Denham Springs with Sondra Richard to help budding and experienced entrepreneurs find solutions to problems and make their efforts more efficient.

“We’re trying to offer value to our people here – whether it’s real estate or not – to have a better life and be a little more efficient in what they do.”

James has loved technology for as long as he can remember and earned valuable experience working in the technology sector of the Department of Education as a college intern. Since then, he’s made a point to study and stay on top of technology trends.

Before Facebook offered 3D photo-sharing capabilities, James had already purchased and was putting to use a 3D camera for property tours. He regularly posts 360-degree tours of entire homes and cranks up a Facebook Live to connect with his followers.

His company has a state-of-the-art website and has developed a pro-

prietary software system to manage the client experience all the way from listing to closing. Along with this, he’s helping others stay current with emerging tech trends and connecting them with resources to make their businesses better.

“I love the teaching end of helping people,” James said. “That’s what I love. It’s what makes me tick and go every day.”

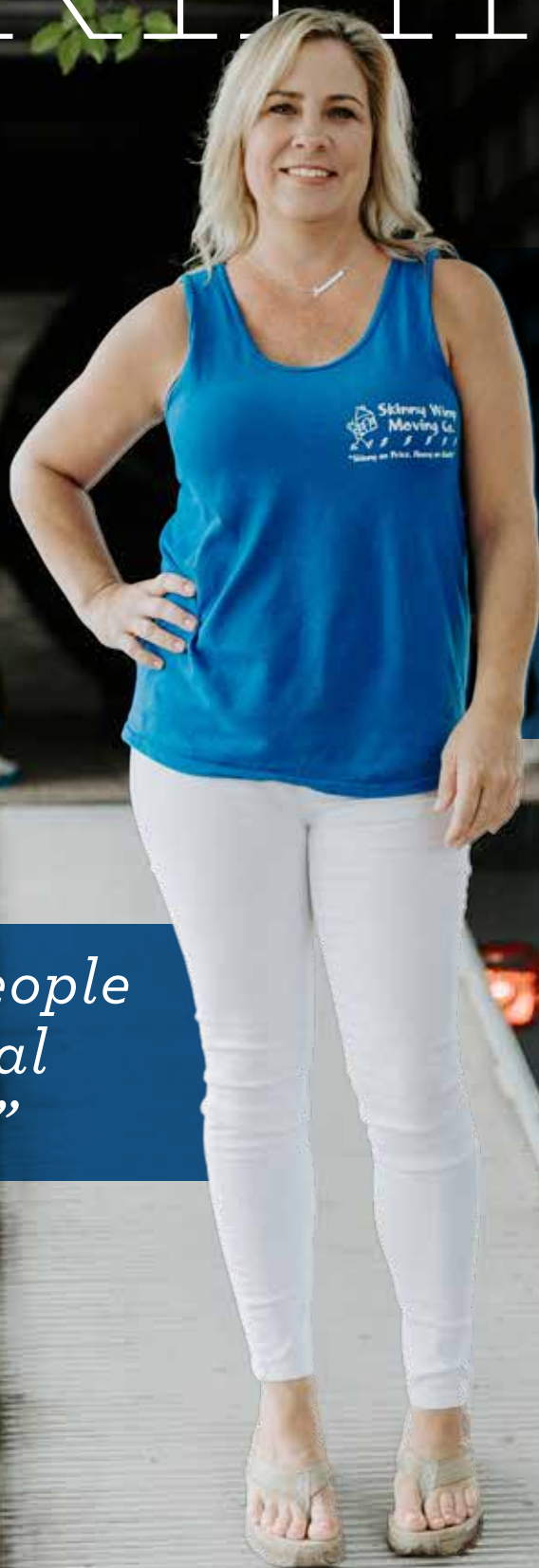
The business planning clinic he offers covers topics like iPhone photography, lead generation, using Facebook Live to bolster business and even “app-a-palooza,” an overview of the apps James uses that help a business run smoothly and make life a little easier. They also feature special guests, including insurance agents, Certified Public Accountants and other entrepreneurs.

In the two decades he’s been in the business, the biggest lesson he’s learned is that the difference between success and failure is implementation. It’s why he works tirelessly to put the right tools and people to work.

Darren James knows the success these unselfish efforts can bring. He doesn’t build walls to keep secrets in, he builds a longer table so that everyone gets a bite.



Skinny



“We’re local people supporting local organizations.”

Wimp

Moving Company

Silly Name, Serious Hustle

The South Louisiana franchise of Skinny Wimp Moving Company started with a conversation between two strangers at a noisy restaurant in San Antonio. Kristy Hobbs happened to sit next to company owner Lance Claussen, who happened to be exploring options for expanding the Skinny Wimp company into the Southeast states.

Hobbs immediately felt like it was “an opportunity God was giving me.” Hobbs, a full-time medical sales representative, got her brother, Dwaine Anderson, a full-time AT&T service technician and restaurant owner, on board, and they opened for business in April of 2019. The two have been busy moving ever since.

A Mom and Pop Franchise

Don’t let the word franchise fool you – Hobbs and Anderson run the South Louisiana Skinny Wimp franchise like a local mom-and-pop shop. They split the duties 50/50.

Hobbs handles the “back-of-house” operations, like accounting, time sheets and payroll. She has degrees in micro-biology and cardio-pulmonary science, but admits “in the beginning, it was kind of a struggle, but now I have the hang of it.”

Hobbs also serves as the official packer for the company, individually wrapping items for customers during each move. She prides herself on the fact that nothing moved by Skinny Wimp has ever been broken along the way.

Anderson is the crew lead – he’s in charge of managing the team and checking in with customers, his favorite part of the job. To others, moving may seem monotonous, but he sees every move as a unique experience.

“We really do get involved in the moves,” Hobbs said. “We both show up on Saturdays, especially when it’s a big move. When



Hiring well, hustling, and being actively present and involved in day-to-day operations is so important to owners Kristy Hobbs, pictured here, and her brother, Dwaine Anderson.

...



a customer pays for four people and gets six – they get excited about that.”

Neither Hobbs nor Anderson mind putting elbow grease into the business because their concentrated work ethic comes naturally, and they expect the same from their team.

“Even though we’re a franchise, we’re a mom-and-pop shop,” Hobbs said. “We’re local people supporting local organizations.”

You Gotta Hustle

Skinny Wimp Moving Co. was founded on the principle that moving should be a quick and painless experience. And the best way to speed up the moving process is to hustle.

Per corporate policy, Skinny Wimp movers have to hustle in and out of every move.

“Whenever our hands are empty, we jog in place,” Hobbs said laughing.

The crew is also prohibited from having cellphones out during moves – when customers pay by the hour, it’s important to them to provide what they pay for.

“The thing that sets us apart is that we have pretty high expectations about who we hire,” Hobbs said. “Our guys are extremely polite and very respectful to the people we’re taking care of.”

The company believes the best type of advertisement is a happy customer, but the name and truck definitely help get clients in the door.

“Whenever our hands are empty we jog in place.”

“The truck gets a lot of attention,” Hobbs said. “People call just to say they saw the truck and wanted to know our prices.”

In the past year, the fleet has grown from one to two trucks and the crew from two – just Hobbs and Anderson – to a dozen movers. But they aren’t interested in fast growth; they’re focused on smart, sustainable expansion, Hobbs said. Their goals are to develop more partnerships with real estate agents, apartment complexes and local organizations, and add one truck to their fleet each year.

“Every year we want to extend our reach a little further,” Hobbs said.

For now, that reach stretches down I-12 through Baton Rouge all the way to LaPlace – the perfect territory for Hobbs, a Madisonville resident, and Anderson, a Baton Rouge resident. It allows them to be hands-on and laser-focused on making the moving process as stress-free as possible for their clients.

“We’re so involved in the business,” Hobbs said. “That’s the thing that has made us as successful as we... We are both accountable and so involved in the day-to-day operation of the business.”

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Growth Mindset

Phil Debin makes a decision and sticks with it. His decision to enter real estate in 2007 is no exception.

Prior to this career, he worked as a staffer for merchandising projects around the U.S. If he looks familiar, he waited tables in Baton Rouge at J. Alexander's, Gino's, and Ruth's Chris. For the first year, he juggled working as a waiter with getting in the real estate game.

Now, he operates one of Baton Rouge's fastest-growing brokerages.

The going has gotten tough – Great Recession followed by three “mostly unsuccessful” years as an agent in his hometown of Long Island, NY – kind of tough. But his love of “being a champion for his clients” is why he picked the business back up in The Boot in 2013. That's just part of the reason he never left – another good reason to stay was meeting his “dream girl,” Amberly. The two have been married for six years and have an 8-month-old son, Avishalom “Avi” Cyrano. “There's nothing I love more than spending time with my wife and my son laughing and playing together.”

Ideas Are Planted

Debin and Tammy Phillips began Goodwood Realty three years ago and have faced more than their fair share of struggles. Phillips has been diagnosed with cancer twice since their opening.

“It really forced me to become much better, much more quickly, because if not we were going to go out of business,” he said.

Though she hasn't been able to come into the office, Debin says her spirit is a part of the business in every way. Her desk is waiting for her at their new location.

Rooted

Goodwood Realty is more than the firm's street name – it's a commitment to planting 22 trees for every home sold – that's about the same number of full-grown Douglas Fir trees needed to build every 1,000 square feet of structure, according to The Home Preservation Manual.

“We're not opposed to chopping trees down, you have to clear land to build homes,” Debin said. “But we want to make sure they get planted again.”

The firm makes financial contributions to the National Forest with every home sale and the team volunteers their time with Baton Roots and Baton Rouge Green, local nonprofit organizations dedicated to creating green spaces in urban and underserved areas.

The Battle

Debin looks at real estate like a battlefield

with room for plenty of champions. “There is no summit in real estate, so you can always reach higher, push harder, or discover new terrain. There is so much information to take in, and it's a living, breathing industry that forces you to stay engaged. At the same time, the heart of real estate is comprised of the individuals involved, and you become a champion for your clients, real people with real, unique lives who become a part of your own tapestry and never leave you. This may be romanticizing it a bit, but to be able to fight a good and meaningful fight with integrity and honor leaves you with your head held high at the end of every day, and you have a measure of fulfillment with what you do. So yeah, I kind of love what I do.”

There isn't one thing that makes Debin a Real Producer, there are five: grit, realism, ambition, service and positivity. He calls it the GRASP mentality, and it means taking the good with the bad and always putting your best effort into it.

“You've got to take your lumps, put in work, be your best, give your best, and most of all – have fun!”

The Harvest

Goodwood Realty has grown their brokerage by adding 14 new agents in the last year.

Several real-estate connections happen through the free mentoring and classes Debin offers anyone interested in pursuing real estate. To date, he's mentored more than 100 people, many of whom have become successful real estate agents. He makes a great teacher because he is dedicated to continuously learning.

“I am addicted to Risk (the iPhone version of the original board game.) Basically any strategy game is going to whet my appetite for entertainment, and I play it under the guise of keeping



my mind sharp.” He continued, “I’m really just having fun, but I do like to study the way other players think and try to understand their motivations. Couple with this a love of strategy based literature, like Sun Tzu’s Art of War, and a love of history, and you can understand what it is that so deeply attracts me to the business world.”

To offer the classes as a volunteer service is in his nature. He enjoys mentoring new and potential real estate agents but has also served as a volunteer chaplain at Louisiana State Penitentiary, known to locals as “Angola.” He called this experience “one of the greatest of his life.”

“I used to spend every Thursday working with inmates, many of whom were imprisoned for life, to help them draw closer to God.”



With customary high standards and respect for their clients, Phil and his agents continued listing and showing houses during these times of COVID-19 and social distancing by wearing masks.

“If I had to tell anyone anything, ultimately, it’s don’t give up.”

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“I’m always trying to pick up a useful skill, a cherished nugget of information, or a new viewpoint,” he said. “I also come from a family of musicians, and I sang in a few a capella groups in college. While I don’t perform anymore, I always tell my clients that it’s going to take me a minute to lock up the home after each showing, when really I’m in there testing out the acoustics of a vacant house.”

Debin attributes a lot of the success and ability to expand the brokerage to the office administrator, Jessica Tran, a sweet, hard-working 20-year-old who is “the perfect example of someone who is responsible.”

“She’s never been late and never missed a day,” Debin said.

Debin, Phillips and Tran have focused on keeping the ball moving forward and developing a “dream brokerage for who I was as a new agent.”

Business and interested agents have flocked simply from word-of-mouth – a testament to Debin’s reputation and love for real estate.

“You meet amazing people, go on adventures almost daily, solve puzzles, and write your own story,” he said. “When I compare it to other things I could be doing with my time, I’m simply grateful!”

“If I had to tell anyone anything, ultimately, it’s don’t give up.”

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