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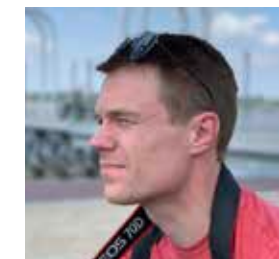
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▶ publisher's note

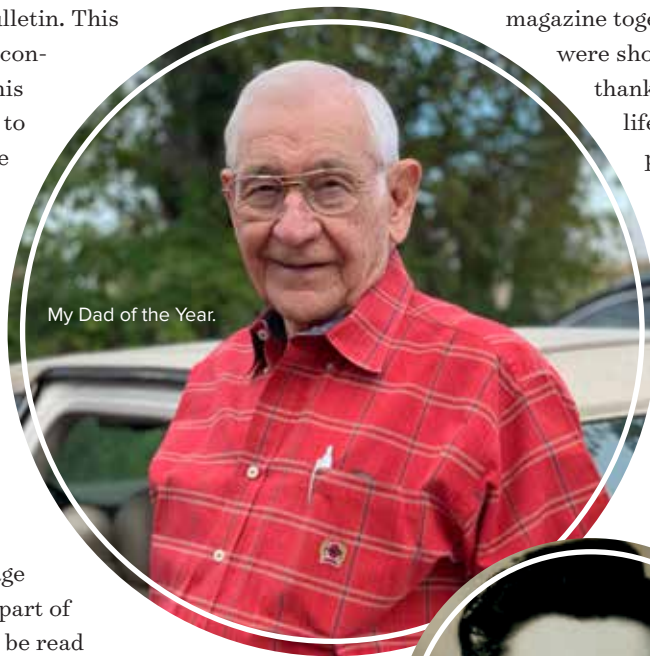
June is Summer. June is Vacations. June is Father's Day. And because of that, I'm going to use this white space to love on my father.

My daddy was a preacher. Okay...he still **is** a preacher. At 86, if a church calls him to preach, he's there. You can't stop him. Don't even try.

When he was in full-time ministry, he put together a weekly church bulletin. This folded, four-page document contained a short collection of his thoughts, perhaps a prelude to the upcoming sermon for the week, a list of new members, prayer requests and sometimes he snuck in a comic ...*always on brand with a respectable blend of religion and humor.*

Part of being Jim Slo-cumb's daughter was helping with this bulletin. He taught me how to peck on a typewriter at a very young age and I loved it! I loved being part of something that was going to be read and enjoyed by an audience. I still do.

So, here's to you Daddy for letting me help with a church bulletin! I loved every minute of it...the typing, going to the print shop, folding and addressing and eventually getting them to the post office! I have to think this somehow led to my love of story and journalism. And thank you for your love of music and laughter...for teaching me to love others unconditionally and choosing to see the good in ALL people. For being a true example of humble and kind. I'm so thankful you are mine. If no one else reads this part of the magazine...or any other part...I know you will. You will read Every. Last. Word. I see you. Thank you for seeing me, too.



My Dad of the Year.

I'm a wide-eyed believer that things really do happen for a reason and I've chosen to trust that all things really do work together for good. My dad probably taught me this, too! This is a strange time in history. Like nothing we've ever seen before, but you can see from the stories and photos shared in our "How We Quarantine" article, that we are adjusting, caring for others, and finding ways to stay connected even when connecting is limited. We've had to switch some things up and do business differently, but we've kept moving forward. We had to rethink the way we would put this magazine together. Leigh's cover photo and story images were shot by her husband, Richie, and we are so thankful! They look fantastic! I love the real life moment of a new mom in the backyard playing with her kids, combined with the fact she is rocking her real estate career in 2020. I mean it when I say, Leigh is unstoppable. And she and I both agree it comes down to communication. We have some new obstacles in our way, but we live in a time when communication is readily available and accessible and when utilized properly can strengthen relationships and increase business.

Our Partner Spotlight this month is Kiel Harton and HDMK. I am blessed to spend my days getting to know the people behind the businesses in our community and hear how they began and how they plan to continue. Every person I meet inspires me and it is my desire to share them with you in hopes you are inspired, too.

I cannot wait to meet each of you,

Gina



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Deanté Thomas

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Deanté Thomas with Keller Williams Red Stick Partners shed two careers in sales before landing on real estate — and quickly fell in love. First, with the unique opportunity to help people improve their lives with investments in their long-term wealth. Then, with the ability to use the knowledge base he’s built to bolster his own financial security and net worth.

Deante’ likes to let clients in on what he considers the best-kept secret of real estate: “letting them know that purchasing your first home, even if it’s the one you’re living in, is still an investment.”

First-time buyers are the most exciting to him because they are often surprised by what they can buy and how it can change their lives. “Teaching people about the power of equity empowers them to make better real estate decisions, which has the power to change lives,” Thomas said. “I’m able to add value by educating them and also encouraging them, because most buyers don’t think they can buy.”

Deante’ loves helping them see past just buying a home and explains the benefits of being a homeowner and how it can better their life long term.

“ Going above and beyond for the client is always worth it. ”

“Informing a client that when they buy a house and make their payments on time, they are positioning themselves so that when they are interested in selling or upgrading down the road, they can likely do that without spending any of their own money on the spot, makes much of the hard work worth it!” he said.

Setting the Bar Above and Beyond

After four years in the business, the biggest lesson Deante’ has learned is “going above and beyond for the client is always worth it.” He learned this lesson when a few decisions to put in some extra hours of work to sell **one** home, turned into the opportunity to be the agent on **four** transactions.

In 2018, Thomas saw a For Sale By Owner sign pop up on his street. He called the owner to ask about the home and explained how he could be of service. She called back the next day and he had a client. That Sunday, he held an open house, but the owner had to work, so her mom cleaned and prepped the house to show. When Thomas arrived with finger sandwiches, brownies, drinks and brochures, what he calls “the works,” his client’s mom was blown away by the presentation of the open house. His time and effort paid off because the house went under contract in just six days.

It Gets Greater

Fast forward about a year – Thomas gets the opportunity to list a house on the other side of town that had been on the market for a year with another agent. He immediately saw some potential reasons as to why it wouldn’t sell during his first visit. Each room was a different, vibrant color. A pink room here, a yellow room there, with two green bathrooms all accented by brown and blue hallways. When his client explained that they didn’t have the funds to paint it he took it in stride. He knew the house was a great property being hidden by a color

...



“Favor will follow you.”



...

scheme, so he got to work. The next day he bought paint rollers, brushes and a few jars of paint. He spent his evenings there for a few days ... often arriving after 10 pm and working into the early morning hours.

“I was putting in three to four hours a day until I got it done,” he said.

Not long after, he got a call. The voice on the other end of the line said, “Hey, I want to buy this house.”

“That stood out,” Thomas said. “Because most people say they want to see a house.”

They met at the property 15 minutes later, and the man explained that he wanted to buy the property for his younger sister. When she arrived shortly after, everything came full circle. The woman who got out of the car was the original For Sale By Owner client’s mother!

He instantly became the dual agent for them on that house and listed her house, which he sold in three days to someone who was not represented by an agent at the time.

He holds that lesson dear – one good gesture of painting a house earned him four sales.

“Going above and beyond for your clients is always worth it,” he said. “Favor will follow you.”

Working Hard and Smart

Thomas doesn’t just go above and beyond for clients, he works hard for his family and himself. As an entrepreneur, husband and father of two young children – Dallas, 2, and Zari, 8 months – diversifying his income streams is the best thing to do for his family and future self.

“As a self-employed independent contractor, you never know what your month is going to look like, so it’s always good to have something else I can count on,” he said. “Real estate is one of the most promising investments you can make.”

He owns several rental properties and last year ventured into flipping houses. “Being in the [real estate] business, you come into contact with different types of buyers and investors, I thought, if I’m helping them build their portfolios, why not build my own?”

He consumes a variety of media to improve upon his real estate education, with some of his favorites including: *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* by Gary W. Keller, Dave Jenks, Jay Papasan, *Think Like a CEO* podcast by Gary Keller, and HGTV’s “Flip or Flop” and “Flipping 101.”

In addition to managing rental properties and house-flipping projects, he does at least one thing to help generate leads every day.

“Real estate is a contact sport,” he said. “The agent that makes the most contacts – calls or connections – wins!”

Thomas’ work ethic and willingness to do whatever needs to be done to make a deal happen is what makes him stand out.

“I think that is what separates the good agents from the great agents,” Thomas said. “Being able to be disciplined enough to always be intentional about finding your next deal.”

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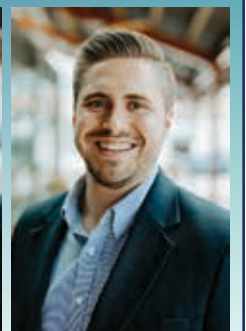
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HDMK is Born.

During a conversation with a friend in engineering, the idea for HDMK was planted. Once again, Kiel courageously branched out with characteristic enthusiasm.

Kiel goes after what he wants, and knows how to pivot and embrace growth. HDMK Home Inspections is an experience-driven company that values and caters to clientele and the real estate agents that represent them. Kiel doesn't just look for the next big thing, he looks for sustainable growth and opportunities, and has built his entire brand around delivering an exceptional customer experience.

"We understand that your clients base their entire view of your business on the experience they have with the vendors you recommend," said Harton. "If we mess up, or there is a perception of a mess up, that comes back on the REALTOR®, and that affects their business. In their eyes, if I do a poor job, **you** did a poor job. If the lender messes up, they blame you. If the title company messes up, they blame you. If the other agent messes up, they blame you."



Before establishing a successful home inspection franchise, Kiel Harton had a military career, pursued an engineering degree, and a real estate license. Add to this, a contractor's license, building residential construction and doing a few renovations to make sure things stayed busy. Each step of the way gave him the skill, wisdom and determination to create a wonderful life for not only him and his family, but others.

Kiel fine-tuned his desire to consistently strive for bigger and better with remarkable discipline during his career in the Army. He paired that dedication with his life experience to create a scalable brand in HDMK, a company that prides itself on the customer experience, client satisfaction, and consistency.

▶▶ partner spotlight

HDMK

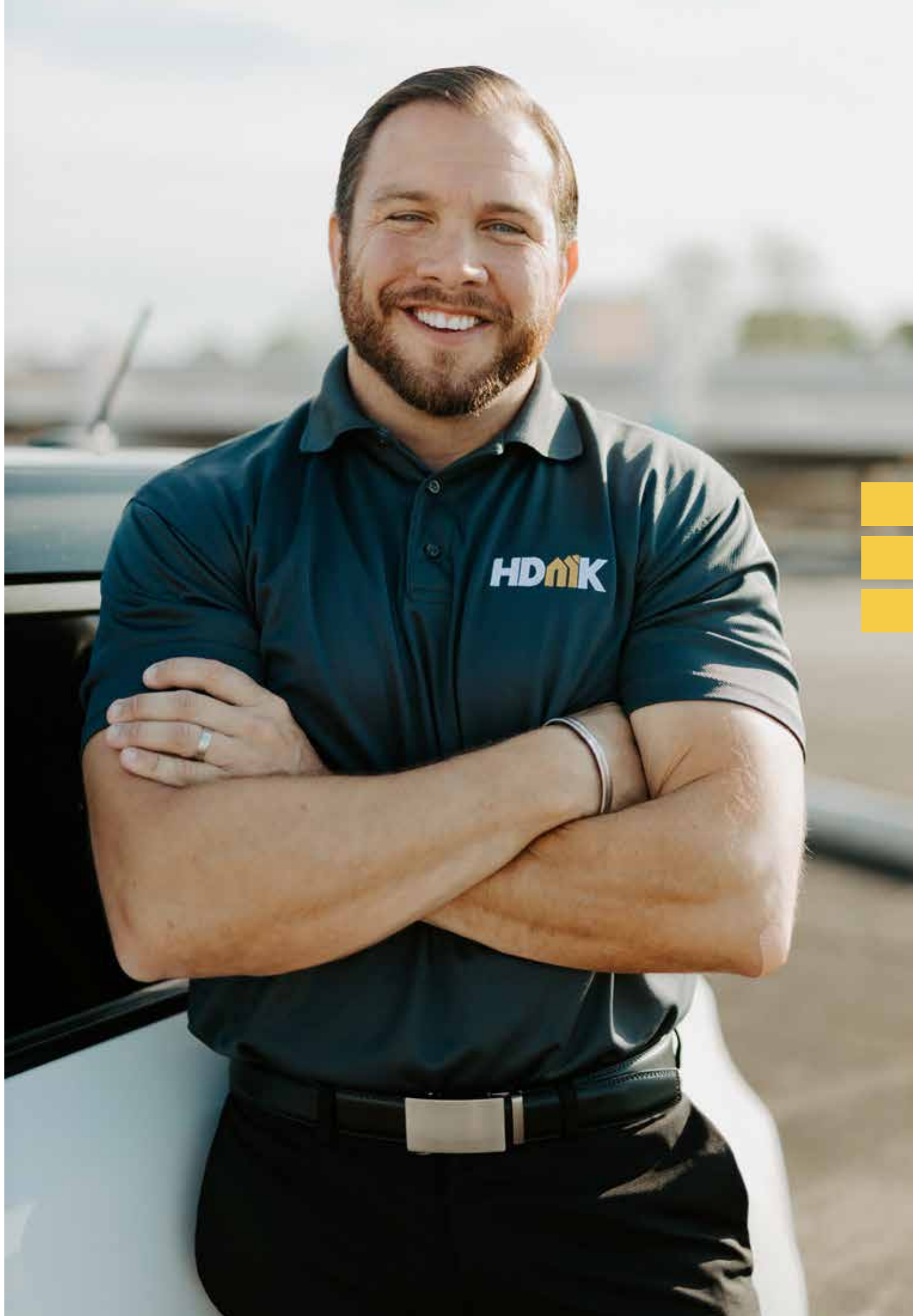
HOME INSPECTION

By Michael T. Abadie
 Photos: Aaron Cox
 Editor: Breanna Smith

Exceptional Customer Experience



Justin Martin, Hayden Bell, Kiel Harton, Josh Wall, Aldo Russo, Joseph Bell



“Everyone wants to be motivated or gung-ho all the time ... but you have to have the discipline for the mundane.”

...

HDMK is skilled at knowing how to talk about repairs and concerns, and how to guide your buyers through the inspection process. Kiel says they spend a considerable amount of time coaching their employees on not being alarmists when they go over reports. “We have seen it all, and we are not shocked.” Once again, it is all about the customer experience.

Never Stop Growing

Kiel saw a need within the industry and had a proprietary app developed exclusively for HDMK: easy-access, real-time scheduling allowing agents to generate appointments on the spot with their clients. And with his goals precisely mapped, we can look for franchisees expanding across the Gulf Coast.

A believer in consistency, systems and procedures, Kiel wakes at 5 am, works out, listens to Audible for 30 minutes, wakes the kids at 6 to get some good one-on-one time with them before heading out the door by 8. “Everyone wants to be motivated or gung-ho all the time ... but you have to have the discipline for the mundane.”

His passion and positive attitude toward growth are genuine and infectious, but they don’t stop at the office door. Even at home, expansion is always a possibility. He and his wife, Alex, have three beautiful children together, Zoe (10), Sophia (2) and Bennett (6 months) ... but he admits, “We’re planning for five!”

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By Remy Curry

How We Quarantine

I walk into the family room and hear my daughter playing a familiar tune on the guitar. I was trying to remember the name of the song when I realized I had never heard her play before. That morning, Lena taught herself to play a new instrument all by herself.

It's been just over three weeks that our governor issued a statewide stay-at-home order to combat the spread of a deadly virus that has affected our world. It is a novel experience for us all, and everyone is adjusting to the new normal. Schools are closed. Restaurants empty. Churches are online only. With these restrictions, we have been forced to find routine at home in a world of chaos.



Remy's children:
Baus Fin, Lena Fin,
Robert (Robbie)
Lee Curry VI

Just eight weeks ago, thankfully prior to COVID-19, our family welcomed a baby boy, Robbie, into the world. As I began maternity leave and the more I held him, I began to dread sending Robbie to daycare. I kept thinking, "It's too soon." I wished out loud I wouldn't have to send him. Little did I know, forces beyond my control would grant that wish.

So here we are, at home with no where to go. The thing is, I couldn't be happier that I have extra time with my baby boy and my two other children, because I have realized how fleeting time is when you have children. One minute you are holding them in your arms, rocking them to sleep, and the

next you are running all over the place trying to get them to their next sporting event. You wonder how in one moment you are the center of their universe, and then when they are in double digits, you become an after thought when they are around their friends. Successful, independent children is the goal, but if I can hold onto this extra time together, I will with gratitude.

This experience has become an opportunity of self discovery and reflection. Prior to having Robbie, and for the last four years, I have been in a constant hustle. At one point in time, I was missing my kids' events more often than I would like, or I would sit at the dinner table and not fully engage with my family, because I was in the middle of a real estate deal. COVID-19 has forced me to slow down and make my loved ones a priority.

As for my business, I have gone back to the basics: making calls, sending texts, and writing letters to friends and contacts to genuinely see how they are doing. I am finding that people feel isolated, depressed, and lonely, and conversations are cherished gifts. Many of my colleagues are testing technology and using social media like never before. While I think those things are useful, I believe the personal touch is more important now than ever before.

In spite of the COVID-19 challenges, I have found somewhat of a new rhythm, just as Lena did on her guitar. Note after note, I am learning a new way to play.



By Mark Akchin

REALTORS® are not known for being introverted people; we tend to be the party starters, the fun friend, the one who brings energy and smiles and positive vibes. So, how can that extroverted soul let out the energy and still feel vital in this strange time? The answer is simple: Use the simplest of technology to love on your family, friends, as well as past and present customers.

Personally, I am no longer able to qualify to enter *REALTOR*® magazine's 30 under 30 or even the local magazine's 40 under 40. That gives me a database of peers that are a bit more ... seasoned. So, under the order of shelter in place, I took to my telephone and started calling my single clients ... checking in and making sure they each had their basic needs covered ... canned goods, toiletries, prescriptions, etc. Being told by some of my clients that I was the only person who had reached out to check on them made me sad, yet did my heart good. As a single person myself, I appreciated when family and friends called to check on me.

I then focused my calls on older clientele to again ensure they had the needed supplies to weather this storm. Most of them had children taking care of their needs, yet some needed a few things. Being able to assist these friends and clients was a small thing I could do to make a difference. Maintaining social distancing by leaving supplies on their doorstep and calling them to say it was there was simple and greatly appreciated.

Love on your database, and let them know you are here. There may be nothing you can physically do to help, yet the voice on the other line is comforting, not only for them but also for me. Be kind to each other. We are all experiencing something that none of us have seen before. Anxiety abounds, yet love and friendship will conquer all.

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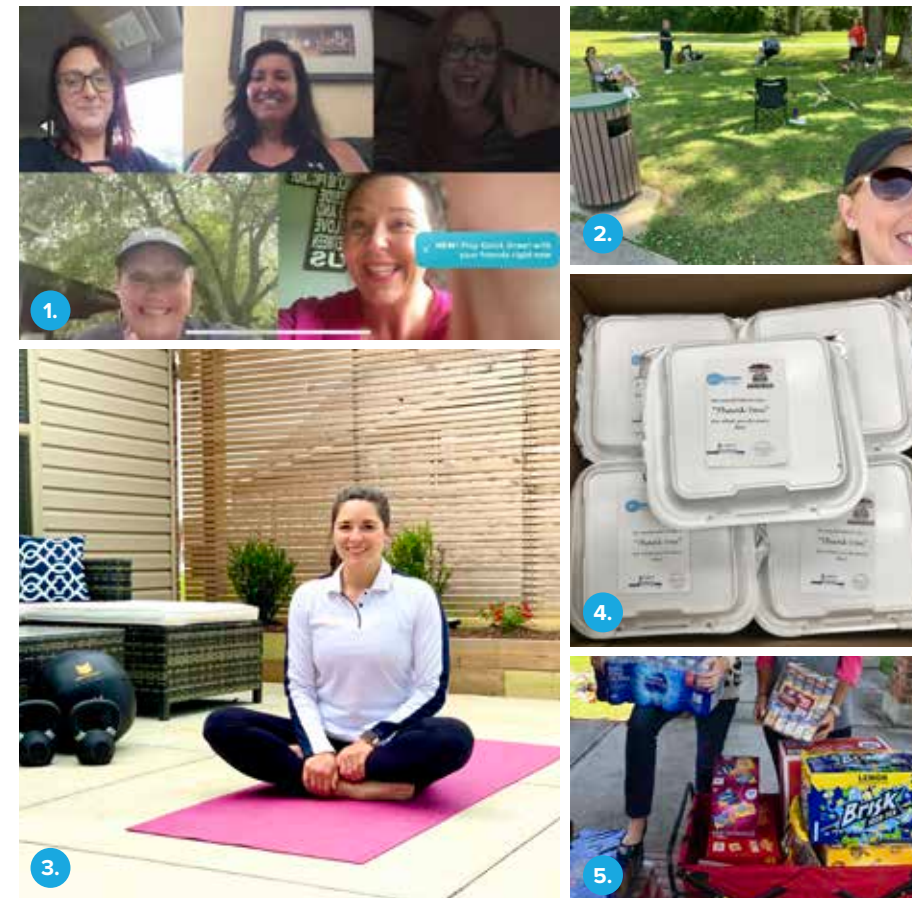
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People Helping People



1. The Journey Home Realty Team having a weekly team meeting using online conference calling like so many of us had to do during mandated social distancing.
2. Some 6-feet-apart togetherness for Missy Jackson, Leslie Sweet, Julie Didier, Charnel Smith and Kaylan Ward of Journey Home Realty.
3. "Staying active and productive during quarantine in which I find myself: working out each day, working on home projects, focusing on more technology, taking a French class with LSU, and having lots of virtual happy hours with family and friends." – Charly Genco with Keller Williams Realty Red Stick Partners
4. "We do a good bit of business with new doctors at the Lake. We asked our Lead Buyer Specialist, Susan Talbert, for a contact to help with some meals for the Covid Unit. We really didn't grasp the magnitude of what that meant at the time. When I made contact, the Covid unit had "only" 175 people on it. That was a little more than we had budgeted for, so we reached out to some of our vendors to help. We also reached out to our contact at TJ Ribs and agreed on a price. They delivered the first lunch on Sunday, April 19. When we talked about this with our team, they started sharing, and it became bigger. We have now raised enough for four Covid lunches, and the size of the unit is now at 225 staff members. Jason's Deli delivered the second lunch on Monday, April 20. We have another scheduled for Saturday, May 9, and one more for the following week. People are good, and when they know how to help, they always will." – Ashley Greer, The Capital Home Team
5. Kim Day and Ashley Greer of The Capital Home Team reached out to some local nursing homes and found out they were in need of simple snacks and drinks, then made a delivery to a very grateful nursing home staff.

Leigh ADAMS

SHE'S A NATURAL

For Baton Rouge native Leigh Adams, cultivating genuine, long-lasting relationships is a skill that comes naturally, and the ability to help the people in her life make sound financial decisions is what she considers “a true blessing.”

As a former pre-k, kindergarten and first-grade teacher, Leigh took the skills required to be a great educator and transferred those into her career as a REALTOR®. In both occupations, making connections is essential for success, whether with young children seeking all the knowledge they can possibly gather, or adults in search of a new nest.

“Just like teaching, real estate is all about managing expectations and building trust,” Adams said.

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

When she stepped back from teaching, she followed the advice and encouragement of her friend and now co-worker, Melissa Landers, and dipped her toes into real estate. Adams started as a part-time agent, but it wasn't long before she realized real estate is the career for her and dove in headfirst.

“The best part is problem-solving and being able to help friends and family with their real estate needs – whether it be their dream home, larger home because they had a new baby, new home because of a new job, or a need to downsize.”

Many of her first clients were families of students she previously taught. “If someone trusts you with their kid, they'll trust you with their biggest financial decision, too!”

The ball started rolling pretty fast, as friends and family began reaching out to her for real estate help and advice...“Then it snowballed into this beautiful career I'm obsessed with,” Adams said.

Now, just six years in, Leigh is a top producing agent with RE/MAX Professional “I'm very blessed to work at the office under our broker's leadership,” she said. “And I can learn something from EVERY agent in the office.”

Leigh is grateful for the relationships found at her office, especially during the past couple of months. “Not only did I have a newborn, but COVID-19 presented a new level of difficulty and business was NOT as usual. We resorted to virtual showings and I had to depend on other agents to be feet on the ground for me.”

...



Leigh with husband, Richie, and children, George and Barlow

Leigh appreciates working with a group of agents that pick up when others must leave off. “You better have back up,” she said. “And I would do the same for them, and they know that...It’s lovely!”

Leigh had an amazing 2019 with well over \$12 million in residential sales volume. This year, amid some hurdles, she has already closed on \$3.5 million, has over a million set to close this month, has some wonderful listings on the market and some commercial rentals, as well. She’s unstoppable.

Adams prioritizes the process of building trust relationships with the people around her, whether it’s a happy hour with friends, an afternoon stroll around the park with her family, or a chat with a client about the requirements for their dream home.



“Before being a REALTOR®, I’m just a lover of people ... so each client or family I get to know allows me to access that part of my soul.”

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

The wife and mother of two – Georgie, 4, and Barlow, 3 months – is fully embracing a new chapter in her life, “the season of motherhood,” with overwhelming support from her husband and family.

With the new chapter comes new challenges, and Adams finds that remaining accessible at all times is one of the biggest.

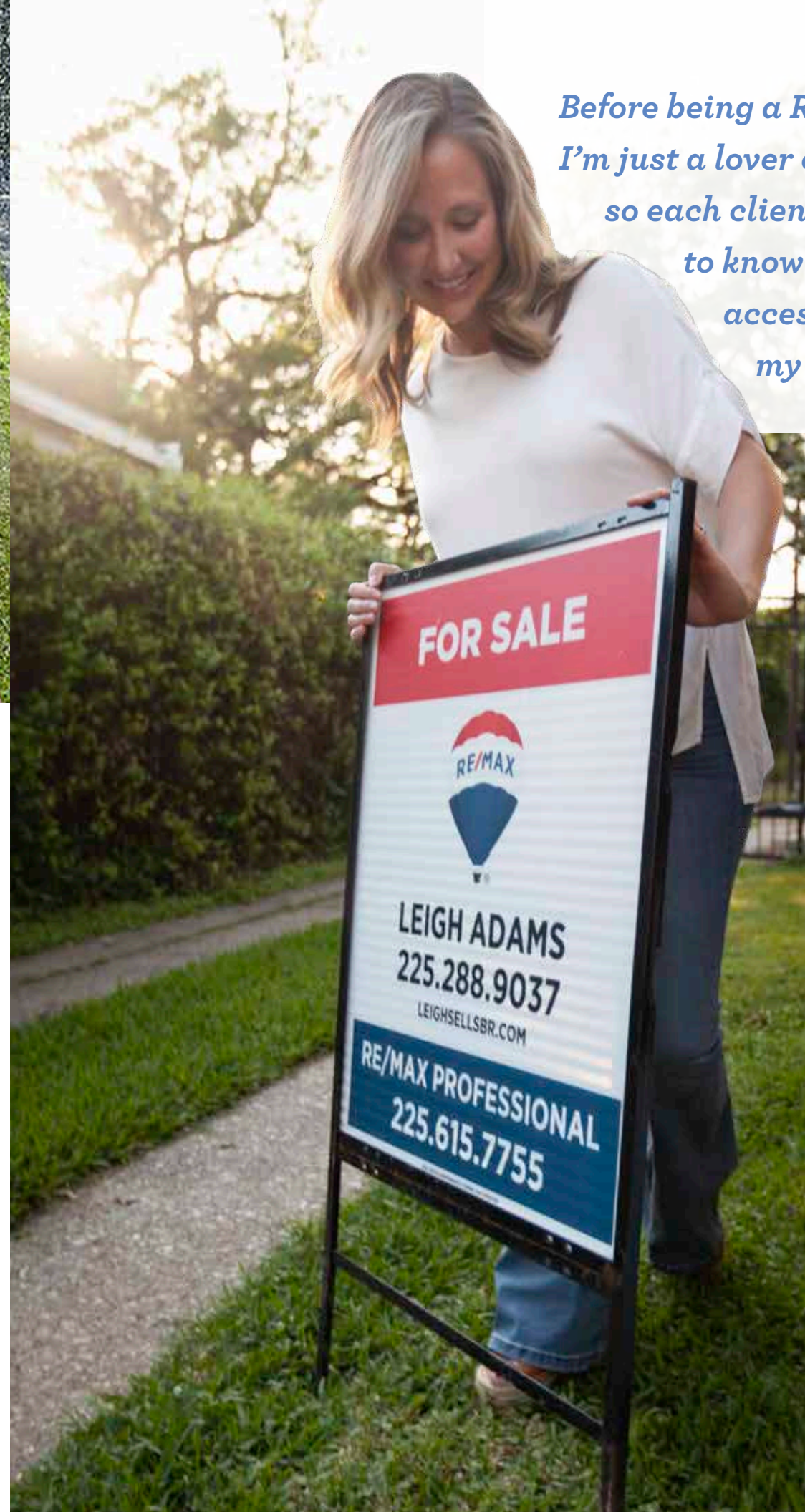
She says the most challenging part of being a REALTOR® is “being available for your clients, no matter what time of day or day of the week, as most folks have to do their primary home searching outside of their own workweek. That said, I’m a worker, I love to stay busy, so I embrace that particular challenge.”

She said the best tool for combating it is clear communication.

If she has to deliver news – whether good, bad or a lack thereof – it’s always best to keep it honest, simple and straightforward.

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*Before being a REALTOR®,
I’m just a lover of people ...
so each client or family I get
to know allows me to
access that part of
my soul.*



“I think communication is key,” she said. “And keeping my clients informed gives them the best chance to make effective decisions when it comes to buying or selling a home. Sometimes it’s a call just to say, there is no update, but know that I’m on the case and will let you know the second I hear anything.”

She seamlessly merges her priority to be available with her commitment to putting family first, something she says is thanks to “wonderful and understanding clients,” a “super supportive family” and the strength she draws from her faith. Adams is a member of the First United Methodist Church.

Leigh loves problem-solving and being able to help friends and family with their real estate needs, and right now she’s loving full-blown nesting with her little family and their new addition. “I am looking forward to our first annual family beach trip!”

*“When you work
with one of us
... you work with
all of us.”*

celebrating leaders ◀◀

lizzie **BENZER** &
robin **DESHOTELS**
RED DOOR GROUP

By Breanna Smith
Photos by Terri Lynn Photography

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Across many cultures, a red door symbolizes wealth and welcoming. For Associate Broker Robin Deshotels and REALTOR® Lizzie Benzer's partnership, it isn't just a great name. Like them, it's the perfect fit.

Robin and Lizzie, with Keller Williams Realty of Greater Baton Rouge, were both high-achieving solo agents responsible for closing on millions of dollars in real estate every year before they decided to join forces.

They don't do real estate the same way, or even think on the same wavelength most of the time. The pair have a different sphere of influence and different strengths – which has proven to be their greatest resource.

A SUCCESSFUL START

Robin, an Austin, Texas, native, emerged as the queen of the first-time-buyer market in Zachary. She discovered a neighborhood, learned everything there was to know about the area, and closed on five homes within her first year, even convincing some For Sale By Owner sellers that she was the real estate agent for them. That first year, she closed on more than \$5 million, earning her the 2012 Rising Star Award from the Greater Baton Rouge Association of REALTORS®.

“It became an obsession,” Robin said. “Wanting to help people with this specific decision is my obsession.”

She's remained in the top 3 percent of agents in the Greater Baton Rouge market ever since. Like many new real estate agents, she prepared herself to struggle. Her goal was to close on two properties a month. The Red Door Group averages 10.

Lizzie, who is about a decade Robin's junior, is a master of networking and technology. Within five years, she received several awards commending her ability to connect with people.

Lizzie's Business Network International (BNI) chapter named her Networker of the Year, and the Zachary Chamber of Commerce recognized her in 2018 as the Young Professional of the Year.

“Everyone loves Lizzie,” Robin said, putting heavy emphasis on **everyone**.

BETTER TOGETHER

Despite being told by several peers that partnerships “just don't work,” the two had faith that combining their strengths would lead to broader horizons. It only works because they are both passionate about real estate and don't shy away from hard work, Lizzie said. The differences in their personalities and business techniques do not equate to an imbalance in their drive and passion for real estate.

“There's not one person doing all of the work,” Lizzie said.

By combining Robin's analytical mind and leadership abilities with Lizzie's lovable demeanor and connectivity, the group quickly became a powerhouse. The Red Door Group is a full-service

...



“a family affair.”

Red Door Group:
Pictured left to right:
Mikela Stuzman, Karen Chapman, Kevin Hotard, Lizzie Benzer, Jenny Blair, Robin Deshotels, Becca Babin, Brydie Manuel, Lori Russell

... real estate team that covers the Greater Baton Rouge Area. Since its start in 2015, the team has been a consistent member of the Keller Williams President's Club as a platinum award-winning team closing more than \$20 million in volume annually.

Robin affectionately calls the Red Door Group “a family affair.” It includes seven other agents – Karen Chapman, Jenny Blair, Brydie Manuel, Becca Babin, Kevin Hotard, Rachel Vince and Mikela Stutzman – two of whom are full-time teachers and part-time agents. Robin is particularly proud of the diversity among the Red Door Group team members.

“A diverse team can understand diverse clients,” she said. “There is so much value in the brain power that comes from such diversity.”

The majority of that brain power is hyper-focused on client service and marketing. After all, they have to live up to their slogan – “We Sell Your Home Fast.”

MARKETING MAVENS

The Red Door Group is laser-focused on their marketing strategy. It's progressive, systematic and aggressive. They believe in marketing every property “fully.” And not only are the systems in place, they are adhered to.

Each week, a new property or home is featured on their social media channels as the “Home of the Week,” regardless of price range, property type or location.

“That gives everyone in all price ranges a time to shine,” Robin said.

They are also regular hosts of “Sips and Tips,” a Facebook Live series posted bi-weekly where they share tips for home-buyers and give away CC's gift cards.

The digital marketing arena is Robin's area of expertise – the Red Door Group garners hundreds of thousands of impressions on each property from people around the globe. Every property isn't marketed the same way, but they are all equally marketed, Robin said.

There's no such thing as a typical day at the Red Door Group, Lizzie said with a laugh. But every day, every agent makes consistent efforts to improve

their techniques, strategies and client service. Robin enjoys the process of becoming an expert in her craft and only sees her competition when she looks in the mirror.

Robin has risen through the ranks of real estate, beginning her career as an assistant in the title industry to her current position as associate broker and only plans to continue the journey. But she has no plans of giving up the client-based part of it.

She insists that it is never an individual agent assisting clients and beams with pride when she hears, “the Red Door Group sold my property.”

“Everybody has their thing, and this is mine,” Robin said. “There is no backup plan.”



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Lydia Hodges, Sales Representative

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