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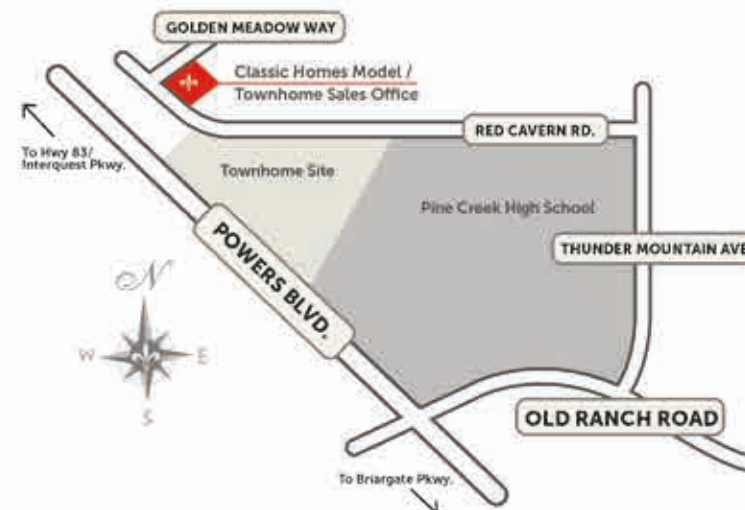
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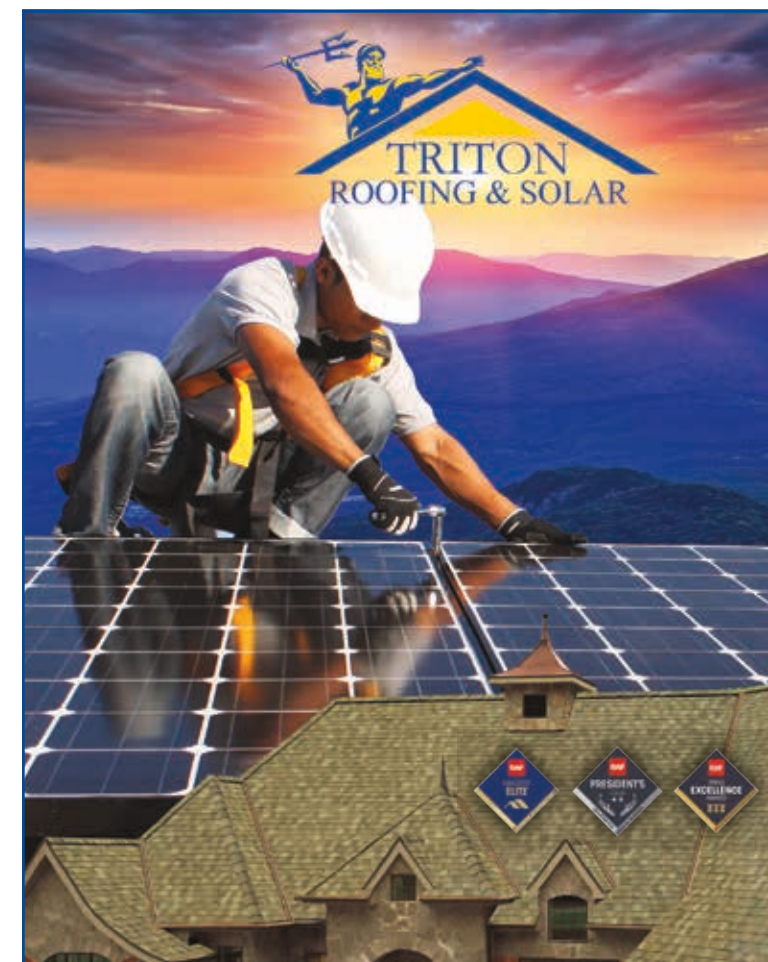
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Written by **Lauren Schneider**
Photography by **Heidi Mossman**
of **Capture Life Photography**

LAUREN SCHNEIDER

I grew up in Bloomingdale, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, and truly had a picture-perfect childhood. My dad, Dan, was VP of sales and marketing for Schlage Lock, and my mom, Kim, had given up her successful career in human resources to become a stay-at-home mom for me and my special needs brother, Danny. Danny has very high-functioning autism, and he has the kindest soul of anyone I have ever met.

Dad, Mom, Danny, and I spent our weekdays chasing my competitive figure skating dreams, and on the weekends we often traveled to competitions around the Midwestern United States. We had, and still have, the tightest family unit, which is a huge influence in how I raise my little family now. We worked hard and played hard! My parents are amazing role models; they sacrificed so much for Danny and me, and I know if they could go back in time, they wouldn't have had it any other way. In fact, their home now resembles a cross between a large toy store and a preschool, as their lives presently revolve around their three grandchildren, my three children, who are the absolute love of their lives.

When I was 10 years old, my Dad's job transferred to Colorado Springs, which I viewed as a huge break for my figure skating dreams. Colorado Springs is known for producing figure skating champions, and for the next ten years, I had the opportunity to train with the best coaches and best athletes, while achieving personal milestones such as winning Regional Championships, placing at Sectionals, and qualifying for Nationals several years in a row. I also was invited to an invitation-only North American Challenge competition which featured athletes from Canada, the United States, and Mexico. To this day, my best friends in life come from my skating days, and I am so grateful for all of the life lessons I garnered from those years. I truly learned more from skating than I did in any classroom growing up.

I believe that we all identify ourselves by what our passions are in life, and in every aspect, I identified as a figure skater. I ate, slept, and breathed skating; it oozed from my fingertips in everything I did. One of the most devastating days for an athlete is when "the dream" comes to an end. For me, it was sophomore year of college, when I tore my right labrum in my hip and was forced to have reconstructive surgery, ending my competitive skating career, and throwing me into a personal identity crisis. Frankly, it was time to grow up and pick a college major, and I was not happy about it. After much debate, I settled on a business major, figuring that whatever I did in life, I would need some sort of business acumen. While in college, I also threw myself into coaching young figure skaters, as I found it very therapeutic. I have always loved children, and I have always loved figure skating, so it was such a natural fit for me. Notably, I was also able to test my entrepreneurial skills and launch a successful coaching business while attending college full time, which helped greatly with those pesky college expenses.

In 2009, I graduated top of my class from the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs with a Bachelor of Science in business. On a more humble note, I also graduated with exactly zero job prospects. Thank God for my figure skating days that taught me you lose way more than you win, and you fall on your butt 1,000 times before you master a new skill, because that was exactly what I was about to experience in the real world. After seven

...

...

months of applying for jobs, interviewing, and participating in unpaid internships, I finally landed a job making \$36,000/year at CoBank, an agricultural bank in Denver. It wasn't exactly enough to pay my bills, which included an apartment in Denver, but I was on cloud nine! I supplemented my new corporate job with coaching figure skating during the evenings and weekends, so I was able to make ends meet. I firmly believe that you just need one person in life to believe in you, and for me, that person was

“

I learned long ago during my figure skating days that it doesn't always matter who is the best, or who trained the hardest, but it is truly a matter of who believes in themselves the most. ”

Sam Erickson. He was the CEO of a small company that I interned at in college, and he helped me land my first job post-college, by reaching out to me through LinkedIn. Sam took me under his wing and taught me the ropes of corporate America, and I will forever be grateful for his mentorship and belief in me. And as a side note, life truly comes full circle, as Sam is now a REALTOR® with Keller Williams in Denver.

After putting in a grueling and humbling first year at CoBank in the operations division, I was fortunate enough to land a highly competitive spot in the company's rotational Credit Advancement Program.

...



••• Over the next year and a half, I traveled throughout the U.S., and honed my skills as a credit analyst. I loved my job, and I was 150% committed to CoBank, until I became distracted on a blind date, by a man who I now happen to call my husband.

This was a huge curveball, as I was never focused on dating, or finding my future husband. I truly believed I would climb the corporate career ladder and if I happened to meet a man and have children, then that was fine, but that was far from a priority. I was laser-focused on my career, and nothing was going to get in my way. Well, until I met Grant, who oddly enough I was set up with by two other REALTORS®. I volunteered for the Better Business Bureau's Excellence in Customer Service (EiCS) Program, as did another REALTOR®, Miranda Price. After a few too many drinks at the annual EiCS Gala, I agreed to get set up on a blind date, and found myself in downtown Colorado Springs on a Monday night with Grant, Miranda Price, and Scott Ignacious, another REALTOR®. Grant and I hit it off immediately, and before I knew it, I was transferring jobs to Colorado Springs. I was very fortunate to land a job as a Capital Markets analyst at Farm Credit of Southern Colorado, which is affiliated with CoBank, the company I worked for in Denver. I was quickly promoted to vice president of Capital Markets, where I managed a \$300MM investment portfolio, which was essentially 1/3 of the company's loan volume. Much like my skating days, I was now dripping in the identity of my job. I was in the company's succession plan to become their next Chief Credit Officer, and I had more than tripled my initial salary at CoBank, now comfortably making six figures as a 28-year-old.

Now came life's next curveball. I found myself married and pregnant,

about to have my first daughter. As her due date drew nearer, I couldn't shake the feeling that I had no desire to go back to work after she was born. On August 4, 2015, we had our beautiful daughter, Brooke, and I remember telling Grant in the hospital, "Brooke is now my world. I am never going back to work." Thankfully, I have the world's most supportive husband, and he was on board 100%. Grant advised me to take advantage of my maternity leave as long as I could, and then schedule a meeting with HR. I did just that, and I have to say that one of the most freeing moments in my life thus far, was walking into my employer and saying, "I quit."

For the first three months of Brooke's life, I was a complete rockstar mom and wife, and I was absolutely loving life. That is until one day when I woke up and realized that I was about to lose my mind. I told Grant that I needed to get back my identity, and I needed to start a job outside of the home as soon as possible. Grant has been in the mortgage business for the past 13 years, and my idea was that I could work directly with him as his loan officer assistant. He immediately shot the idea down, but came to me with a different idea. He said that he always had this crazy idea of launching a real estate website that was catered to the military buyer, as there wasn't a great resource out there that answered consumers' questions regarding the VA loan. He said that I could head up the project, and work part-time from home while raising Brooke. Sold! I was in.

Looking back, there were a few key naïve points that we were missing. Initially, our idea was to build this amazing website, now known as MilitaryHomeSearch.com, and refer leads to other agents. However, we failed to realize that I was an unproven entity, and MilitaryHomeSearch.com

was an unproven system. In order to launch this real estate website, I needed an IDX feed, and in order to get an IDX feed, I needed a real estate license. So, I got to work on studying for my real estate license, which isn't the easiest thing in the world to do when you have a newborn that doesn't sleep. Four weeks later, I was a REALTOR®, and ready to tackle the world part-time. However, I soon realized that this part-time project would turn into 60 to 80 hours a week of work!

There are several key individuals who deserve a lot of credit in helping launch MilitaryHomeSearch.com. My husband, Grant, was the visionary. He has dreamed up website projects that have often seemed impossible, such as creating a BAH calculator, a VA loan calculator, a drive-time-to-base tracker, and even programming the website so it inscribes the user's military insignia when they log in. The team at Real Estate Webmasters, my website company, deserves so much credit as well. Scott Lissa, Morgan Carey, and Jeff Whitby have been instrumental in my website's success. Whenever I start to doubt myself, or my website, they are the most incredible problem solvers, cheerleaders and supporters. Also, my employing brokers, Bryan Vail and Dave Kaercher, have been so good to me, and I am so grateful they took a chance on an agent that had absolutely zero experience at the time. I am very proud to say that I have only hung my license at one brokerage, as I value their loyalty.

On February 2, 2016, we launched MilitaryHomeSearch.com, and by the end of March, I had closed my first four transactions. Each month, my website traffic, conversions, referrals, and closings grew, and by the end of 2016, I had closed 98 transactions in my first year of real estate. I soon learned that this hadn't been done



before, but I truly had no idea at the time. I was simply of the mindset that failure wasn't an option. I had to make this work, and I did.

Year two, I built a small team, and we closed over 200 transactions. We became a top 10 team in the city. I also gave birth to our second child, Braeden, during my second year in real estate. I tell this story often, but I had Braeden at 9am on a Tuesday, and I was back to work on Thursday morning, showing homes. I took lead calls in the hospital and even scheduled a listing appointment. Year three, my team once again closed over 200

transactions, and year four, 2019, I gave birth to our beautiful third child, Brynn, in November. Year four also marked our team's record year of 224 closed transactions, and for the second year in a row, I finished as RE/MAX Real Estate Group's top agent in the brokerage.

I would be remiss if I didn't give a huge shout out to my team, and my amazing buyer's agents, Renee Young and Erica Archambault. Erica and I have known each other for over two decades, as we grew up figure skating together. Erica holds a National Figure Skating Title and was extremely

“ I am often asked how I juggle it all – how I balance being a wife and a mom while running a real estate business. And the answer is so simple. I don't juggle it well at all, and my balance is completely shot. However, I love my family more than anything, and I love my business more than anything, and I have found the two can coexist pretty seamlessly. ”

successful competing internationally as well. She was the good one, between the two of us! Erica approached me during my first year of real estate and told me she would love to get involved. After many attempts to discourage her and preserve our friendship, I agreed to pay her \$100/file to basically do all of my paperwork. She excelled, quickly became licensed, and the rest is history. Erica is a top agent in town, as loyal as anyone could be, and she is such an incredible asset to our team.

I am often asked how I juggle it all – how I balance being a wife and a mom •••

••• while running a real estate business. And the answer is so simple. I don't juggle it well at all, and my balance is completely shot. However, I love my family more than anything, and I love my business more than anything, and I have found the two can coexist pretty seamlessly. In fact, I affectionately refer to my website as my fourth child. It is not unusual to see me at a closing with one of my kids, and my kids love tagging along to showings on the weekends. My husband is often my clients' lender, and it truly is a family affair. At our Military Home Search Christmas party this past December, my clients were just as excited to meet little baby Brynn as I was to see them. We truly become family when we work together, and that is the beauty of the real estate business.

My team, the Military Home Search Team, presently ranks as a top 100 RE/MAX team in the country. I could not be prouder of that accolade, but at the same time, it is just an accolade. The true meaning of our work comes in the form of the clients we get to serve, and there are simply too many clients who have impacted my life to

begin to name. Most recently, I had the honor of working with a Gold Star spouse, helping her find her forever home in Colorado Springs, even though she had envisioned buying her home with her husband. I had the privilege of helping a family who will be split for the next 12 months while the wife finishes her residency in San Antonio, and the husband lays roots in Colorado Springs with their two pre-school-aged sons. I have helped clients through deaths, divorces, and illnesses. I have been at the center of clients' feelings of joy, anger, and fear. Too many times to count, I have helped clients who tell me, "Thank you for helping me achieve the American dream. I am the first generation in my family to own a home and you have no idea what this means." Oftentimes I go home after a 12-hour workday feeling exhausted and energized at the same time, which is truly a feeling that only real estate can produce.

I learned long ago during my figure skating days that it doesn't always matter who is the best, or who trained the hardest, but it is truly a matter of who believes in them-

“ The true meaning of our work comes in the form of the clients we get to serve, and there are simply too many clients who have impacted my life to begin to name. ”

selves the most. I believe in Military-HomeSearch.com more than anyone, and I have built a team of individuals who believe in our website as much as I do. Our clients believe in us too, and that is the ultimate compliment. When I think of what the next five to 10 years hold, I have a very simple wish. I hope it brings more friendships, more relationships, and more good to people's lives. I hope Military-HomeSearch.com continues to be bigger than my face or name, and truly represents the brand that individuals trust to help buy and sell their homes with the highest level of care and service. Most of all, I hope my children continue to watch my husband and I work hard and make sacrifices, just as my parents did for me. And hopefully one day they will be featured in a magazine article for doing something so much bigger than what their mom did back in the day.

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Sellstate Alliance

Written by Carrie Lukins
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Rather than a bullet-point biography, or a dry list of accomplishments, I thought it would be more interesting to the reader to start with a bit of perspective. Wouldn't you rather know what everyone else thinks of me rather than what I think of myself? To that end, I asked my friends, family, and clients what they would write about if they could share only one thing about me with the world. The responses flooded in, some sweet, some hilarious, and some just plain silly. I would like to share a few of those responses with you as we go to try and keep things crisp and give other perspectives.

"A beautiful human inside and out with the heart of a lioness and the soul of an angel that would do anything to help just about anyone, anytime, anywhere!" –Erin S.

I live my life and plot my course with simple goals in mind: "Remember who you are and what you stand for, be good to others, and help out." Simple, sweet, and timeless advice that is the foundation of my personal life, as well as the core values of my business. My mother spoke these words to me and my 10 siblings. I chose to continue that with my three children and they share it with their friends and colleagues. I believe that actions speak louder than words. Saying "I love to help people" is an empty sentiment unless you act on that love. Part of our work here at Sellstate Alliance is to make giving back to the community a pillar of our business, not just an afterthought. We run a non-profit organization out of our office called The COS Network. Through The COS Network and the generosity of our agents, we were honored to give back over \$466,000 to the community in 2019, with a goal of doubling that number in 2020.

I consider myself an "American Gypsy." I was born in Flagstaff, Arizona, but grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska, less than 200 miles south of the Arctic Circle. After that, as if Fairbanks was not "Alaska" enough, we moved to Wainwright, a full 300 miles North of the Arctic Circle, where the average temperature is -20 degrees between December and March. We lived in Wainwright for two years among the Inupiat people, a hunter-gatherer culture native to Northwest Alaska. I wore an animal skin parka straight out of history, left for and returned from school for months without seeing the sun, and even briefly had a pet polar bear. We did not, however, live in an igloo. We learned the local dialect and had Eskimo names, of which I had two: "Keezik," which means "Nice Lady," and "Sissamf," which is "fourth," as I am the fourth child out of the 11 of us.

After my family left Alaska, we lived in Howell and Manalapan, New Jersey, and then in Grand Junction, Colorado, where I met and married my husband Carl, who enlisted as an Army medic (with my blessing, of course) shortly thereafter. Carl

received his orders and our young family moved to Butzbach, Germany, where we lived until he was transferred to Fort Carson in 1999. I fell in love with the Pikes Peak region and the amazing community here in Colorado Springs just in time for Carl to be selected to train to become a Green Beret in Fayetteville, North Carolina. After two years there we were ecstatic to be sent back to Germany, this time to Stuttgart, where we lived until 2007. I still consider our family's time in Germany some of my most prized memories.

"One evening in Germany a neighbor calls and asks, 'Do you have any eggs? I'm making brownies and forgot to buy eggs.' They have been friends for over 20 years now!" –Allison T.

When it came time for us to choose a new destination, returning to Colorado Springs was an easy choice. I have always had tremendous respect for our service members – not surprising for the daughter of a Vietnam Veteran and wife of a Green Beret – and both my husband and I appreciated the Pikes Peak community's commitment to national pride and family values.



Photography courtesy of Katie Marie Seniors

••• After returning to Colorado Springs, I found my first job in Real Estate as an unlicensed assistant at a family-owned boutique. I was tasked with overseeing the property management portion of the business, which I grew from 28 homes to 387 homes over the course of the next three years, to the delight of my employer. It was about this time when life threw me a curveball, as it so loves to do. Rather unceremoniously, my doctor informed me that, unless I corrected my course and practiced some “self-care,” I was a shoo-in to be dead because of morbid obesity and co-morbidities by the age of 40. At that moment, I made the decision to take my life back.

Shortly thereafter, I achieved my Real Estate license and found a new job that allowed me to practice both property management and sales. In the first year in my new position, I doubled the number of homes in the company’s portfolio in addition to selling 13 houses. I also dedicated myself fully to my choice to take my

life back: in 2015 alone I completed 11 Spartans, 10 half-marathons, 2 Ultra Ragnars, a Tough Mudder, a 24-hour CrossFit AMRAP, a 12-hour endurance event, a 15k run, and who knows how many 5k and 10k practice runs. I lost 160 pounds, and never looked back. Since 2012 I have completed a total of 28 Spartans, 12 Tough Mudders, one World’s Toughest Mudder, 32 half-marathons, one full marathon, a 75-kilometer race and so much more! I am a member of an international group called “I Run 4,” which partners able-bodied runners with individuals who cannot run. I run for a little girl name Lili from Ohio; I dedicate my races to her and send her all of my medals.

“I met Carrie at a Spartan race...was the first time for me to do a race like that. She was magnetic...a leader. Carrie volunteered to lead our line exercises, and she killed it. Inspired me instantly...now I’ve run many more.”
–Dionne D.

Taking back control of my life enabled me to focus my energy on providing the high-quality services that my clients deserved – and people began to take notice. Consistent attempts by headhunters to recruit me helped me see that my potential was far outpacing the possibilities available to me at my current brokerage, so I wrote down three whole pages of questions and began interviewing companies I might like to work for. After much consideration, I chose to hang my license at Sellstate Alliance because of their professional culture, emphasis on continuing education and agent support. I continued to grow my personal brand at an alarming rate until life saw fit to throw me yet another curveball.

In 2016, I earned a coveted invite to the National Industry Leaders Conference in Ft. Meyers, Florida. This is where things get a bit weird, so hold

on to your seats. At the conference, while watching International best-seller and motivational speaker Dave Ferguson talk about leadership, the universe spoke to me as audibly as if it was coming from the adjacent seat and told me that I was going to own a brokerage. You may find this amusing unless you’ve had a similar experience, in which case you know exactly what I’m talking about. Either way, my path was clear.

I returned to Colorado Springs and informed my employing broker that I was leaving to start my own company. To my surprise, he informed me that he too was changing course to meet his life goals and that we might be able to come to a mutual agreement. We negotiated for six months until we finally announced that I would be taking over as owner of Sellstate Alliance Realty.

The winter of 2017 was one of the busiest of my life. Within six weeks I bought Sellstate Alliance, my husband went into lending as a mortgage loan officer, and we were blessed to take guardianship of our then 2-year-old grandson. Additionally, to mark the 25th anniversary of my youngest sister’s leukemia diagnosis as well as the first anniversary of the passing of a dear friend’s daughter from neuroblastoma; after 30 years of having long hair, I shaved my head (21 inches of hair) as part of a St. Baldrick’s event to raise funds for childhood cancer research. We were able to raise over \$14,000 that evening.

“We met Carrie riding motorcycles, but then she started showing us houses all over town. It didn’t take long until we found the one for us. Her business is growing daily as she helps other veterans!” –Susan J.

On January 1, 2018, I officially took ownership of Sellstate Alliance

Realty. In my first year as captain of the ship we doubled the number of agents, doubled our business, and was awarded Best Workplace 2018 by the Colorado Springs Gazette. I also made the executive decision to put the unsung heroes in our community, our police officers, firefighters, active military and veterans, healthcare professionals and educators, at the forefront of our thoughts and charitable efforts by giving 25% of our earned commission back when one of our heroes purchase or sell a home through Sellstate Alliance as a way of showing that we recognize and appreciate the selfless services they provide to our community.

This year we are hosting the third annual 719 Heroes Community Cares K-9 Event on May 2 at Switchbacks Stadium to raise money for our K-9 and equine officers. In the last two years, we’ve been able to raise \$55,000 for the El Paso County Sheriff’s office, Colorado Springs, Fountain and Woodland Park Police Departments and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. We also hold monthly networking for A COS events to raise money for local charities through our non-profit, The COS Network. We

are constantly blown away by the incredible hearts and generosity of the people of Colorado Springs, who join us in donating tens of thousands of dollars to local organizations such as the Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center, The Fire Foundation of Colorado Springs, The American Legion, and so many more deserving charities right here in El Paso County.

Sellstate Alliance is more than just a brokerage, it is a lifestyle. We place tremendous value on office culture, teamwork, education, and, above all, agent empowerment. Our goal is to enable our agents to take control of their business and their life, just as I took control of mine by offering the tools and training necessary to turn their dreams into reality. Our mission is to provide a higher quality of life to real estate professionals through a culture of personal growth, caring, profitability, and fun, without ever losing sight of our duty to support and give back as much as possible to the community that nourishes us all.

As employing and managing broker, I live to assist my agents in being successful. If they aren’t successful, I’m not successful. Mentoring and guiding



Photography courtesy of Katie Marie Seniors

them, celebrating their successes, and helping them overcome obstacles fuels my drive to be a more effective leader, a more successful businesswoman, and to be the best person I can be.

Email brian.gowdy@realproducersmag.com to nominate your Broker



Photography courtesy of Katie Marie Seniors



Carrie and her siblings at her parents’ 50th Anniversary.



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▶ rising star

Cassidy

Written by Cassidy Jones
Photography by Heidi Mossman
of Capture Life Photography

J O N E S

What is my favorite part about being a REALTOR®? It's the relationships, by far. As I think back about myself I have always been driven by relationships. If I think about the different places my family moved or vacations we went on my first memories are always the relationships that were created in those experiences. If you were to ask my mother to give an insight on me she would tell you that I do not like being alone. All of my life I have been drawn to human interaction and being surrounded by good people.

My relationships are the most important asset I have. First and foremost, I am a wife and mother. My best friend is my husband Kevin and my biggest love is my stepson Gabriel. Kevin and Gabriel have had my back through my career changes and uncertainty. Without their endless support, I would have never made it to the point I have in my career.

I have had the opportunity to help friends, family and complete strangers with their homeownership goals. In the end, this is what brings me the most reward. The relationships I get to develop with new clients seem to be some of the most rewarding. I really love the fact that I can meet a total stranger at an open house I am hosting (or receive a recommendation from a friend or past client) and we are able to hit it off so quickly. I love helping people achieve a goal of homeownership or even just getting to the home-owning situation they need to be at in the time they are at in their life. This is what makes me feel accomplished.

Not only has this career gifted me friendships with clients, but it has also brought me some of my most rewarding professional relationships. I now call a handful of local real estate professionals some of my greatest friends. What I love about this profession is the camaraderie that comes within my team and brokerage and

even in a single transaction. Very few transactions in my career have seemed like a battle. What is great about the Colorado Springs area market is how willing I find the professionals in a transaction to band together to get all parties involved what they need and want all while making the experience enjoyable. Of course there are always situations where things get combative, but those occurrences happen a small fraction of the time.

I grew up in what I consider the second half of my childhood in Monument, Colorado. I am the oldest of four daughters and our family grew very close as we moved around the country through my young ages. My dad is a chef and to "make it" in that profession, you had to relocate often and be willing to take on new challenges in the culinary world. These moves brought along many destinations to include Missouri (both Columbia and St. Louis), Tennessee (Memphis), Florida (where my father worked at Walt Disney World), and Iowa (Cedar Rapids). Our moves finally ended in Monument, Colorado.

While moving throughout my adolescence I think this is where I developed my value of family and sense of adventure. My mother is, and always has been, the rock that held our family together, especially through all of our young moves. She never seemed to mind moving away from her large family in Missouri. Now that I look back at it, I realize she has always been up for an adventure.

Some of my best young memories are taking our Sunday drives. My parents would call this "going crazy." We would hop in the car with no plan on where we were going. One of my sisters or myself would eventually ask my





parents where we were going, their response was always “going crazy.” To this day this is still one of my favorite things to do with my own family.

As a kid, I never really knew what I was going to be when I “grew up.” In my younger years, I waffled between endless ideas of being a lawyer, a nun, a flight attendant, a chef... the list was much longer and just as diverse as these examples. I always knew I would be in a position where I worked with people but I wasn’t like many people who seemed to just know where they would end up.

As a teen (and through college), I worked as a waitress at the Woodmoor Country Club in Monument, CO. That job taught me some of the best lessons of my life and later also supplied me with my most cherished relationship (with my husband). Working in a restaurant is one of the best places to learn hard work and also learn a lot about people. I have vivid memories of working weddings and private events where people show their true colors. Those situations range from seeing grouchy members throwing a cooler full of oysters at the bartender (my now husband) to kind-hearted families that made sure I had a generous extra tip each time they sat at one of my tables because they knew I was paying my way through college. Along with teaching me hard work and how to properly tip, that

job equipped me with great local friendships that I still hold to this day.

It wasn’t until late in high school that I realized I had pinpointed a career. I would be a teacher! I loved my high school art classes and knew that I would love the relationships I would build with my students. I admired my high school art teacher and thought it would be so cool to be just like her (little did I know then that she would go on to become one of my best friends).

So, I graduated high school and I went through college at the University of Northern Colorado where I received my bachelor’s degree in visual art education. Like most, I absolutely loved college! I loved living with different roommates each year, I loved making art, I loved working as a waitress (where I met my husband Kevin), and I loved the freedom that college brought. But more than anything I loved that I was working towards a career that would allow me to develop lasting relationships all while getting to create art. I loved problem-solving to come to a solution to make a piece work but I also thrived on the discussion that art created.



Through college, I worked at a bronze foundry where I helped artists from around the region (and some internationally) bring their works of art to life in bronze form. I promise not to go into the full process of bronze casting as that would take as long as this article and no one wants to read that! But, what I will tell you is that this position was very isolated and I spent many long hours working alone. This was my first professional job and it taught me that I was not meant to work in a confined space. I loved that job and I was fortunate to get a shot at a position that many post-grad students do not receive, but it showed me that I am best working with people and that I cannot function without the company of others.

After college, I moved back to the Colorado Springs area and started my full-time career as a high school art teacher at Doherty High School in Colorado Springs. I had teaching offers in a few places around Colorado but I was eager to get back to the Colorado Springs area where my then-fiance (Kevin) and his son (Gabri-

el) lived. I missed getting to go to Kevin’s hockey games each week as that is where some of our best friendships were housed at the time. So, when I was offered a job at Doherty High School to work with my mentor (and former art teacher Sarah Stevens) I was elated to take the part-time position they offered me.

My first year of teaching was a total whirlwind with not only adapting to a new career but also getting married and becoming a stepmother. At Doherty, I taught a variety of art subjects to include photography, drawing, sculpture, ceramics and graphic design. Teaching a wide variety of subjects was tough as teachers are already very overworked in our public school system but those who have many subjects to teach are spread even more thin. I really loved getting to work with high school age students and supplying them with a safe place to make art and be comfortable at school but I found myself falling into a negative space that I could not shake.



My focus had changed over the years that I was a teacher. I had once been engulfed with a desire to be the best teacher and that desire changed to wanting to be the best mother and wife. My time was most enjoyed spent with my family, even if it meant endless hours at an ice rink.

For years, Kevin coached hockey locally with the Colorado Ram-page. He has coached a variety of teams over the years and because we spent so much time at the ice rink we developed many strong friendships with families there. Our close relationship with the hockey club eventually led us to one of the most rewarding experiences we've had...billeting hockey players. Most people have never heard the term "billeting" before so for those of you who are not familiar, billeting is very similar to hosting a foreign exchange student, but instead, you are hosting a hockey player that has come for the season to play for a local hockey organization. Our billeting experience started in 2014 with a 14-year-old player named Aleksey who had come from Russia and lived with our family for four hockey seasons. To this day I still speak with Aleksey a few times a week and call him my "other son."

After seven years of working as a teacher, I decided to change things up. I was frustrated with the way I was treated and paid as a teacher. In my nearly seven years as a teacher, I had never seen a pay raise - the only raise I saw was my class sizes getting bigger and bigger (all while my budget got smaller). I was tired of going home each night and complaining about education to my husband and son. A complaining and negative mom is not a good mom and being a good stepmom and wife is what is most important to me.

I figured that when I told my husband Kevin that I was ready to make a big change to real estate he would think that I was crazy. After all, we had moved to a specific neighborhood so that I could live by the school I taught at and I taught with my best friend. I was wrong; Kevin stood by my side and supported me as he always has. I promised our son Gabriel that this change would allow me more time to spend with him...Boy, was I wrong!

I took the encouragement of a long-time friend and REALTOR® and studied for my real estate exam over a summer between my sixth and seventh year of teaching. Leaving public education was not easy. Most who get into education do it for the right reasons and I believe I did as well. Educators want to change things and fix the broken system and unfortunately, it's not possible to fix it on your own. In the fall of 2015, I took the plunge and started on a new path. Do I still at times feel guilty for leaving my students and colleagues at Doherty? You bet I do, but I know that I am now in a career that I am better at and that I can make a different kind of difference in!

I have also been lucky that my friends in education stuck by my side after I left teaching. My first transaction in real estate was with a couple that I taught with at Doherty. Glen and Vickie, thank you for giving me a shot and believing in me!

To this day Kevin, Gabriel and I still take in hockey players from around the country. We have hosted a total of six billet players over the past seven years. What I love most about bringing these young men into our home is the chance to build a stronger hockey family with each player and their families. I love a house full of Ga-

“I love helping people achieve a goal of homeownership or even just getting to the home-owning situation they need to be at in the time they are at in their life. This is what makes me feel accomplished.”



briel's friends and hockey players. I may spend an obscene amount on groceries and know the staff at Costco a little too well but I wouldn't trade my busy home and those relationships for anything. Aleksey, Cam, Clayton, Roope, Stanford and Zach...thank you for being part of our family and for keeping my free time filled with hockey games to watch or Instagram stories to laugh at!

When I became a REALTOR®, I was extremely fortunate to be brought in to the profession by a dedicated mentor that put in the work to truly teach me the ins and outs of the business. That team leader made sure that I stuck to my follow up and did things for the right reasons and the right way. I spent three years on that team and I am so fortunate to have ended up with the kind of support and guidance it provided.

In 2018, I made a team switch to The Wheaton Team with RE/MAX Properties, Inc. This switch has to this day been one of the best professional decisions of my career. Since 2018 I have been honored to join in on a team with John and Jean Wheaton and Kristin Dionne as licensed agents as well as the best staff in the business. Our staff is comprised of our listing coordinator (Tricia Stack), licensed transaction coordinator (Tanya Bingham) and marketing director (Lori Pitcher).

Joining The Wheaton Team has been a complete game-changer for my business and especially for my clients. The entire Wheaton Team always stands by their true values and have fully com-

mitted to always doing what is right for the profession and their clients. I would say that most real estate professionals operate with these same values but this team brings it to a new level.

What I value most about the mentoring I have received with The Wheaton Team is the reminder to get back to basics. My team is filled with professionals with great reputations and those reputations have been built because we make sure to stick to our instincts and always do what is right. Over my time in real estate, I have finally come to realize that if I do the right things and treat people the right way the business will come. I have had the opportunity to build my referral business and the hockey community I so cherish has grown to cherish their relationships with me, as well. I will forever be grateful for this advice and my friends and family that entrust me to help their own loved ones.

This career has taught me many things in the (just over four) years I have been a REALTOR®. I have so far learned that 1.) Business is not ever promised, but earned by hard work, that 2.) I should never take for granted a day off, because they don't last long (usually not even until the end of the day) and that 3.) with the right people around you and the support of my dear friends and family, I can do whatever I set my mind to.

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Your Transaction Involves A Downsizing Senior Move...

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According to the “Things Forgotten” website, “Moving to a new home is stressful, and is even more so when you are deciding which precious possessions to keep and which ones to sell, donate, or give to family and friends. We create a plan with you, and then take care of the details for you.”

Things Forgotten is a full-service senior move service that, like the old Greyhound Bus slogan that said, “Leave the driving to us,” allows you to “Leave the moving and downsizing to us.” These guys do it all.

With the vast experience and infrastructure offered by its corporate parent, Goodwill, Things Forgotten, a specialty division of its well-known parent, has the capacity and know-how to compassionately work with seniors facing the often difficult and emotionally and sometimes physically stressful task of moving from a beloved family home to a smaller and more manageable living situation. As a REALTOR® handling a transaction such as this, you can make one phone call and put your client in the hands of a team of experienced and compassionate professionals who can handle everything.

Heidi Lane, Certified Senior Move Manager for Things Forgotten, heads up a highly experienced team of senior move and downsizing experts, offering the following services:



Heidi Lane (left), Certified Senior Move Manager and Jennifer Brink, Team Lead for Things Forgotten

- Downsizing and de-stressing
- Clean out clutter
- Senior relocation
- House clearing
- Estate Sales
- Donation pick-up

All of the above is customized and coordinated by “Heidi and the gang.” Each service is integrated into a customized package based on the needs of your client.

First things first. A Things Forgotten staff person will meet with your client to assess their needs. Each move is different. Your client may be moving to a senior community, an assisted living facility, an apartment or just a smaller home. Things Forgotten will help your client decide which services are most appropriate for their move.

Downsizing and de-stressing. It will come as no surprise that moving to a new home is can be one life’s more stressful occasion, and even more so when someone is deciding which possessions to keep and which ones to sell, donate or store. Things Forgotten creates a plan for your client and then takes care of the details for that client.

Things Forgotten creates a to-scale floor plan of your clients’ new home, measuring furniture and treasured belongings, and then, working with your client, lays out a new plan for where everything will go. Things Forgotten will pack, unpack, set up and organize all of your clients’ belongings, including hanging pictures and making the bed so they can relax and enjoy you’re their new home from day one.

House Clearing. Things Forgotten can take care of items your client no longer wishes to keep by selling, donating, preparing them to give away, or disposing of them for them. Heidi and her team will coordinate your client’s donation pick-up, offer sales options including outright purchase, consignment and estate sales and will also pack up items for family and friends. Things Forgotten offers assistance with mattress disposal, recycling televisions and disposing of hazardous materials such as paint.

Things Forgotten Estate Sales & Consignment. Things Forgotten can plan and manage all aspects of an estate sale offering two pricing options: a flat fee or a combination of a percentage of sales and hourly rates. Estate Sale Services are 100-percent customizable to meet your client’s needs.

Things Forgotten even offers a White-Glove Concierge Service for seniors not yet moving by providing premier, individualized assistance with organizing or de-cluttering. The company also can help when someone has items to donate but needs assistance packing them with care and preparing them for pick-up.

Things Forgotten has the stellar reputation, staffing and infrastructure to uniquely offer this fully-integrated Senior moving and downsizing service. The company has served the Colorado Springs community since 2005. In 2016, Discover Goodwill purchased this business as an exciting and important addition to its established programs and services for seniors – including facility-based day programs and in-home care services.

What do Things Forgotten clients say about the service?
“Moving aged parents from their large home into a care facility is an incredibly difficult and emotional journey. Things Forgotten handled what would have been an impossible task for my sister and me and were kind, thorough and sensitive. This team honestly made our parents feel like they were home.” –Paula L. and Susan T.

“Things Forgotten provided support for me and recognition of my father’s life. They met me at the new place and reassembled his now-fewer possessions in familiar patterns. I made several visits to Dad and saw his mood gradually improve. [He] said contentedly, ‘This is a really nice place.’ Thanks for helping me make a success out of a painful day.” –Mary T.

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The people behind the name:
Heidi Lane, Senior Move Manager: “I grew up in Widefield, graduated from Widefield High School and am a Colorado Native. I am married to my husband, Josh, with two great step-kids, Aya, 9, and Nick, 13, and a four-legged furry daughter named Ellie. I’m currently working to obtain my master’s in business and I run a very successful side business in the crafting world. In my spare time (what’s that?), I enjoy camping, fishing and spending time with friends and family. I’ve had exposure to many different areas while figuring out what I’d like to be ‘when I grow up’ including real estate, office manage-

ment, family law working for a judge, property management with military base housing and now the non-profit world. I’ve been with Goodwill for eight years and have worked in nearly every facet of the organization, always being shifted to somewhere I was needed, which I’ve really enjoyed; while change and challenge stress some people out, it is where I thrive. I’ve enjoyed working with Goodwill’s temporary staffing program, running health and safety, workers compensation and FMLA, writing safety memorandums and SOPs, being a community liaison where I built relationships with business in our community, creating and launching our new good’s program in our retail stores, and finally Things Forgotten, which without a doubt, has been my greatest challenge yet.”

Jennifer Brink, Team Lead: Jennifer was an Army brat traveling all over the United States and Germany with her family and finally landing in Colorado, where she calls home. Jennifer has a twin brother, is married to her husband, Colin, and has two great kids, Rachel, 14 and Joey, 12. Jennifer enjoys spending time with her family, camping, crafting, attending the kid’s sporting and concert events as well as spending time with friends and family. Jennifer is a hairdresser by trait (before Heidi stole her away) and still keeps her loyal clients beautiful on the weekends. She joined Things Forgotten on the day that Goodwill purchased it and has been along for the ride ever since; Jennifer is the team lead and a vital part of Things Forgotten.

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Vantage Homes Reports Record Number for Co-Op Agent Deals in 2019



ask the expert

By Theresa Hurt



For the greater Colorado Springs area, 2019 proved to be a healthy year in terms of real estate transactions. Vantage Homes, a local builder of single-family homes, experienced the same growth and success as the rest of the homebuilding market. There is, however, one major difference that sets them apart from other builders – the volume at which they were doing transactions that involved a Co-Op Agent. In 2019 Vantage Homes reported that nearly 85% of their new home sales involved an Agent representing the buyer, and this wasn't by mistake but rather a concerted effort by the Vantage Team. When we asked them about this, Sales and Marketing Manager Theresa Hurt stated, "I grew up in the resale real estate world, so when I came to Vantage Homes a couple of years ago, I felt strongly that REALTOR® cooperation was critical for our continued success."

Executive Vice President Mike Hess agreed, "We are in a unique position because we are not necessarily a big builder, nor are we a small builder. We land somewhere right in the middle and we feel that gives us a competitive advantage. We have the ability to create a first-class experience for our buyers and their agents while still having a more personal relationship. We also believe heavily in the value that an agent brings to the table as a repre-

sentation for our customers, and that's why we choose to market towards agents more than we do the general public. We know that when an Agent goes through the Vantage Homes Experience and understands how smooth and easy it is, they will continue to show and sell our homes in the future."

In addition to their focus on REALTOR® marketing, Vantage also takes great pride in the communities they currently build in. Hurt adds, "We build in some of the most desirable neighborhoods in El Paso County and each community is different from the other. When I talk to clients and find out what they want in a neighborhood, I'm always confident that we will have a fit for their needs." Vantage is currently building in Sanctuary Pointe, Flying Horse, The Farm, North Fork, Cordera, Sterling Ranch and University Park. "That's right! University Park!" Hurt stated. Vantage Homes opened a small parcel in the established and highly desired community in late 2019. "There are only about 25 lots left and then they're gone, so we expect this to sell out quickly. We will also start building in Forest Lakes later this year, an opportunity and community we are excited for." For more information about Vantage Homes, visit www.VantageHomesColorado.com or visit any of their model homes.



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► financial fitness
By Shauna Osborne



women AND FINANCES

March brings about the observation of a very special month: **Women’s History Month**. 2020 marks the 100-year anniversary of women gaining the right to vote in the United States, after decades of the fight for suffrage. Indeed, the last century has brought many significant social changes for women, including in the financial arena, which places women in a singular position in fiscal decision-making.

Taking a look back over time, we see that although women started out with relatively few autonomous rights in our country – in fact, they were considered the “property” of their husbands as of 1769 – they soon slowly began gaining more control over their lives and finances. The 1800s brought the rights for women to retain property after marriage, bank under their own names, and work as stockbrokers; the 20th century saw laws passed that governed fair and equal opportunities in credit, pay, and labor for women. Flash forward to now, when women make up 60% of the workforce, including in corporate America and global business. And we’re not only participating in the economy by spending money – we’re actively contributing by *making* money as well.

Additionally, women tend to live longer than men do – on average, about five years longer – which impacts retirement savings as well as money set aside for health care costs as we age. Add to this the fact that women’s peak earning age falls significantly earlier on salaries that already started out lower than men’s, and that women, almost exclusively, spend time away from their careers to raise children, and it becomes much harder to save throughout our wage-earning lifetime. *What can women, specifically, do to address these gender-based financial challenges?*

Set goals and plan ahead. Set necessary yet attainable short- and long-term goals for your money. Focus on paying off debt first, then turn your attention to saving. Studies suggest women should save approximately 1.5% more yearly than men to reach the same savings target by retirement.

Discuss finances in relationships early and often. Finances are one of the top stressors in relationships, so stay on top of it by being as transparent as possible from the beginning. Keep educated on and be involved in the day-to-day management of your family’s goal setting, budgeting, saving, and investing.

Yet female wage-earners still face considerable and unique financial challenges. The first is, overall, women still make less money than men, even in positions for which they are equally qualified. As of 2017, women earned approximately 80 cents for every dollar their male counterparts earned across every age group. The gender pay gap – while improving as millennial women continue to dominate in higher education and secure higher-paying positions – is still very real.

Address health care now. If you haven’t already, explore your options for long-term health care. Women live longer, have higher rates of chronic health conditions and disability, and are often the caregivers for others with health concerns. Take care of you; the time to plan for your future health care needs is now.

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RE/MAX

“Launches 2020!”

agents from the different participating markets. The panel was professionally moderated by Amy Somerville who oversees Professional Development, Technology Engagement, and Production for RE/MAX, LLC.

“Launch 2020 was a unique opportunity to partner with other great RE/MAX Offices around the region to bring Leigh, an iconic industry leader and speaker, to our Associates,” said Tony Clement, co-broker owner RE/MAX Properties, Inc. Colorado Springs. “The agents within these brokerages will also have a valuable networking opportunity to get to know RE/MAX Associates in attendance from neighboring markets. Much of what we do in the real estate business is relationship-based and the opportunity to gather for a day of inspiration, education, and networking is exciting.”

Launch 2020 offered Colorado area RE/MAX Associates the opportunity to hear from Leigh and RE/MAX, LLC’s top ranks, learn tips from top agents, as well as network with RE/MAX Associates from markets ranging from Pueblo to Fort Collins.

Participating RE/MAX franchises include RE/MAX Properties, Inc., and RE/MAX Advantage of Colorado Springs, RE/MAX Alliance of Denver, Boulder and Fort Collins, RE/MAX Professionals and RE/MAX Masters Millennium of Denver and RE/MAX of Pueblo. For more information or if you are in the real estate industry and would like information about how to attend, please contact one of the participating franchises.

Keller Homes builds a full range of home styles in the best neighborhoods of Northern Colorado Springs. You’ll find family-friendly homes in Wolf Ranch. In Cordera, we’re building historically-inspired homes as well as the low-maintenance mid-century styles of élan. And there’s plenty of comfort and craftsmanship in Cumbre Vista. Prices range from the high \$300s to the low \$600s. Follow your heart north, and let your new home be your favorite destination.



Leigh Brown, RE/MAX Executive; Courtney Wilson, RE/MAX Masters Millennium; Amanda DiVito Parie, RE/MAX Alliance; Vicki Westapher RE/MAX Properties, Inc.

Nick Bailey, Chief Customer Officer, RE/MAX, LLC.



RE/MAX Properties, Inc., in conjunction with five participating RE/MAX franchises operating along the Colorado Front Range, collaboratively hosted a day of education, inspiration and networking for their Associates. These participating franchises partnered for an event titled “Launch 2020” held on January 14, 2020, at the Colorado Springs ENT Center for Performing Arts.

Launch 2020 featured special guest and keynote speaker, Leigh Brown, as well as an overview of the value of the RE/MAX brand, presented by RE/MAX, LLC, Chief Customer Officer Nick Bailey.

Leigh is a successful REALTOR® and leader of one of the top real estate teams in the country, a forward-thinking CEO, number one best-selling author, and a highly sought-after national speaker. Leigh is known for her no-holds-barred approach to motivation and is one of the sales industry’s most sought-after speakers. Her inspirational speeches have provided her the opportunity to travel all over the United States and the globe from Miami to Dubai. Leigh was in Colorado Springs presenting the importance of “Finding Your REALTOR® WHY.” In addition, Leigh participated on a panel among a number of Colorado’s Top Producing RE/MAX

Email article nominations to brian.gowdy@realproducersmag.com.

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