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If you are interested in contributing or nominating Realtors for certain stories, please email us at mark@realproducersmag.com

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► publisher's note

A year ago we decided to move back to California from North Carolina to launch the magazine we had poured ourselves into for four years in a new location. This time it would be in the place Marissa and I grew up, met and first fell in love...home. These pages tell the personal stories of top local REALTORS® who live and work in the Inland Empire and the vendors they trust. Our VLOG tells the personal story of us as we do that each week. You can find it on Youtube by searching markandmarissa create or on my Facebook page. Let us know you are following; we would love to know.



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JAMES MONKS



Written by **Chris Menezes** Photos by **Marissa Menezes**

James Monks has two passions in life—family and Riverside real estate. Both of which are not mutually exclusive. He got his start in real estate at the age of 19, having a built-in network of 114 cousins, and an aunt in the business that gave him the start he needed.

"She was a great influence. The best thing she did for me as her buyer's agent was fire me for taking too long of a lunch, just two months after hiring me. It was a good kick in the butt," he says.

James comes from a long line of hard-working business owners, on both sides of his family. His grandfather came to Riverside in the 1930s from Oklahoma and opened a little grocery store in the 1940s called La Granada on the corner of Tyler and Wells. He eventually acquired the entire Ty-Wells Shopping Center there, added a barbershop, coffee shop, laundromat and liquor store across the street. One of James' first jobs was picking up trash and painting over graffiti in the shopping center each weekend.

His mother comes from a big Portuguese family who owned a large dairy in Chino, where his uncles still run a smaller one called Bautista Brothers Dairy. She was one of 17 siblings (10 girls and seven boys). "They had so many kids because they were Catholic and needed more help on the dairy," James quips.

James obtained his real estate license with a group of friends while at Cal Poly Pomona, where he graduated with a degree in Management and Human Resources. After being fired by his aunt, he began to take his career more seriously. He went from selling homes in Claremont to Riverside, his hometown in 2001. After selling for a few years, he became a sales manager for a 100+ agent branch, then regional manager for a 600+ agent company with offices in San Bernardino County, Orange County, and Riverside County. When that franchise dissolved, he then partnered with a longtime friend and colleague, Brent Lee, at Windermere Tower Properties. Over the next 30 days, 50+ agents followed him to Windermere.

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Today, James manages over 60 agents in Riverside at Windermere Tower Properties. While he still sells, he is passionate about helping his agents grow their business the same way he has done—through referrals and repeat business. His passion for teaching doesn't stop there, as he recently started a podcast called Minutes with Monks (available on Audible, Spotify, etc.), where he talks with special guests about all things Riverside and real estate.

"We learn a lot from each other," says James. "After losing several family members and friends in the industry, I found myself wishing that I had recorded some kind of audio or video of them over the years.

Many people are not comfortable with themselves on camera so rather than doing videos, a podcast was the next best option. I started with my father, who is 85 years old, and has so much to share regarding Riverside history."

Outside of real estate and podcasting, James spends as much time as he can with his kids—Carter (13) and Carson (11). For the past eight years, he has coached their baseball and basketball teams and continues to instill the same family values of hard work, dedication, and loyalty that his family instilled in him long ago.

SECURE CHOICE LENDING

► preferred partner

Written by **Chris Menezes**
Photos by **Marissa Menezes**



Mark Hossler and Joey Roquet are running a different kind of business. In a time when capitalistic greed seems to be at an all-time high, they created Secure Choice Lending to help homebuyers afford the homes they want with mortgages they deserve.

"Our interest rates and costs cannot be beaten and it's simply because we aren't greedy," says Joey. "We keep company overhead low, everything is streamlined, and as producing owners, we don't need to profit on company overrides. Rather, we can pass those savings onto our borrowers."

Mark and Joey have spent their entire professional careers in the mortgage industry and have seen how other companies operate from within. They have been friends since the 6th-grade and went to Notre Dame High School in Riverside together. At Notre Dame, the two played on the school's basketball and golf teams, furthering their friendship and collaborative personalities.

After graduating from Notre Dame in 2008, Joey began his career at Provident Bank as a bank teller. Within a year, he was asked by one of Provident's highest producing loan officers to join the mortgage division as a junior assistant. Upon leaving in 2017, he had worked his way up to one of the company's largest producing loan officers.

Mark attended Cal State Fullerton until 2012, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in business finance. After graduation, he went on to work for Sun West Mortgage as a Client Relations Manager until early 2017. With the experience he had garnered, Mark founded Secure Choice Lending in June 2017. In 2018,

Mark and Joey joined forces knowing the change they could have on the mortgage industry.

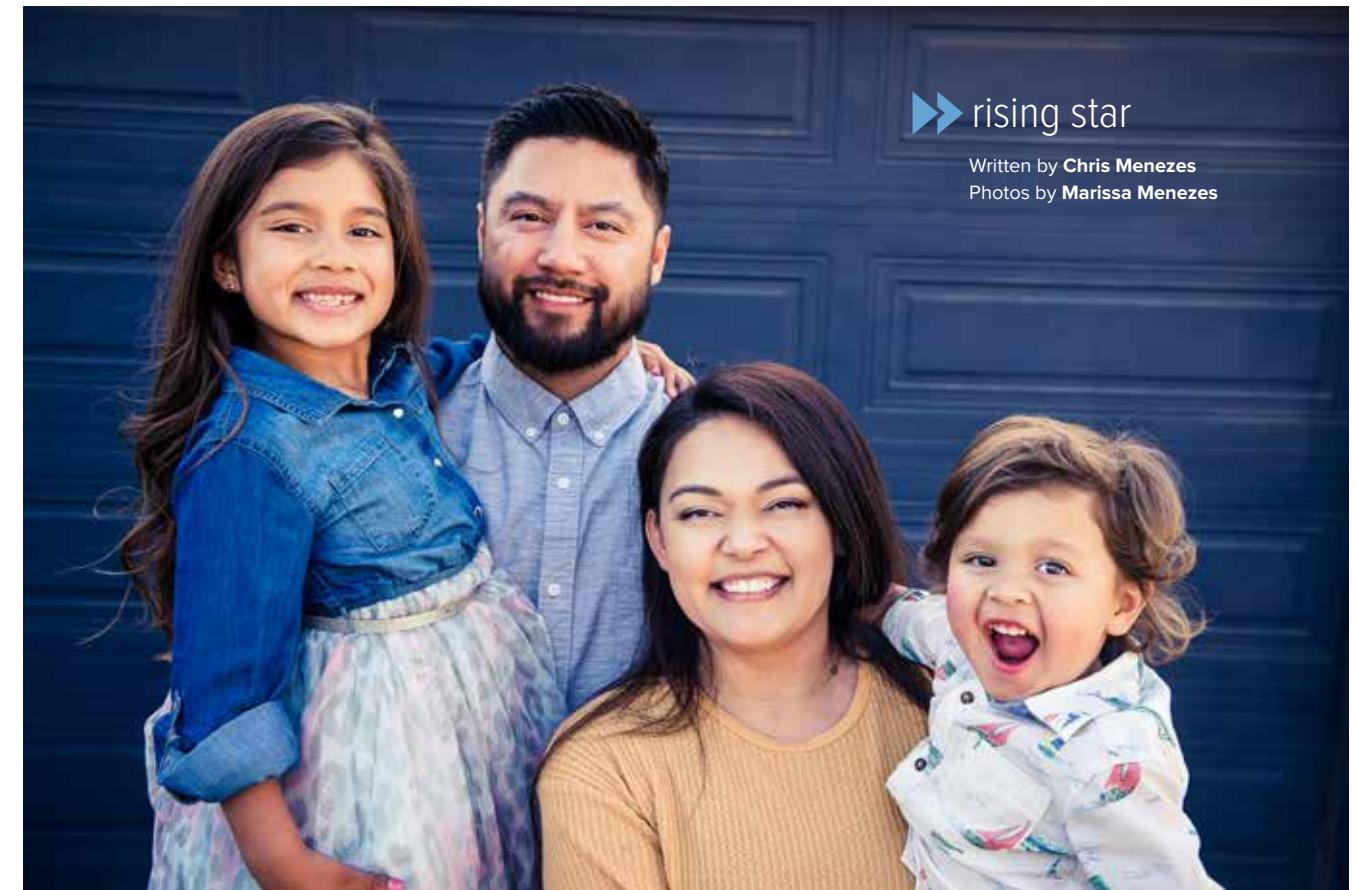
Mark and Joey used their mortgage knowledge and skillsets to establish Secure Choice Lending, Mark as President and Joey as Vice President. Starting with a team of four, they have grown their business to include 15 team members, who each play a role in continuing the growth of Secure Choice Lending.

"We have an amazing team here at Secure Choice Lending. Friendly, hard-working, customer-service driven individuals who come together as a family to provide the best mortgage experience out there," says Mark. "Our REALTOR® partners complete our team. In a competitive industry where certain companies are trying to profit on all sides of the transaction by doing both real estate and mortgages, we refuse to adopt this business model. Our REALTORS® are our partners and will forever remain that way. Without them, we would not be able to do what we do, or work towards our common goal to grow together."

Joey and his wife, Tiffany, have been married for five years and have two boys—Joey III (3) and Jordan (1). They are members at the Canyon Crest Country Club, where they love to golf, and spend time as a family. Mark and his wife, Nayeli, have been married for under two years. They love to travel, be active and spend time with their friends and family.

"As young professionals, we are going to be here for a long time, building this company, keeping our overhead low, and giving back to our clients," says Joey. "We are here for the long haul."

ERIN ROBERTS



►rising star

Written by Chris Menezes
Photos by Marissa Menezes

“Sometimes I like to do things outside of my personality, to push myself, face fear, and broaden my capabilities,” says Erin Roberts.

Erin has always balanced her personality in this way, extending and pushing herself when she felt growth was needed. As a borderline introvert with an aversion to sales, she steered away from real estate for a long time. Instead, she worked in property management for nearly 10 years.

Before that, Erin meandered the professional landscape, teetering between the exciting and mundane. She was working part-time at Bank of America when she decided to attend culinary school for baking. However, she ultimately decided the long, crazy hours of a baker weren’t a good fit. So, she began looking for a desk job and “fell into” property management.

While slowly working her way up in the industry, Erin balanced her corporate lifestyle with fitness and got into bodybuilding, which was very much outside of her personality. Nonetheless, she competed in the bikini division and cultivated great confidence within herself.

Erin eventually got to a point in her career, where she could either keep trying to move up the ladder or try something

new. Tired of the corporate lifestyle, and wanting to be her own boss, she decided to give real estate a shot, despite it being associated with sales. She joined NextHome Citrus City in July 2018, and came to a realization that would change everything:

Most of all, Erin loves having the freedom to be more of a mom now, to pick her kids up from school, to go on field trips with them, or take them to the playground. Her daughter, Sadie (7) is in jujitsu and has dance three nights a week, while her son, Bennett, is only 3-years-old and loves acting like a superhero. Erin and her husband, Joseph, have been together since she was 18, and have been married for six years now.

As Erin continues to grow both personally and professionally, she will continue to push the boundaries of her personality and business. She plans to double her number of transactions this year; yet, she also plans to balance her ambition with a mindset of contentedness. “I try not to feed into the mindset of needing more and more,” she says. “I have a great family, a great home, and a great career.”

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“

I realized I didn't have to be a sales person in real estate to still help people. It's more about building relationships. I call myself an introvert, but I love working with people and talking with people,” Erin says.





BEN LAGUNA-HERRERA

Written by **Chris Menezes**
Photos by **Marissa Menezes**



Benjamin Laguna-Herrera has just been installed as the newly elected President of East Valley Association of REALTORS® (EVAR). A natural leader and activist, Ben has been involved with social and political initiatives his entire professional life, starting with the county of San Bernardino Service Department.

While working for the County of San Bernardino, Ben worked for the Registrar of Voters during President Obama's reelection in 2012 and was the Vice President of Pre-School Services. He left that job to go back to school to become a firefighter. While in the EMT program, he obtained a position at Keller Williams as a receptionist. When a management position opened up at the office just three months later, Ben's boss saw his natural passion for leadership and gave him the opportunity.

"He took a chance on me and I went for it," says Ben.

Ben first became involved with the association through the Young Professionals Network (YPN) in 2015, where he received the opportunity to join the Amaya Group. At the Amaya Group, Ben was able to move from managing 200-plus agents with Keller Williams to only eight, while becoming their first operations

manager, where he created all of the operations and flow of the business. Today, they have grown to from eight to 22 agents, and have gone from doing 150 transactions to 348.

Ben was tapped on the shoulder to be an event chair for the association, which got him involved on the state level, where he was able to attend state committee meetings. Just a year later, he became the state director and director at the same time. After the second year as director, he went for president.

As president, Ben's plan is to develop young leaders who can spark innovation and progress with technology. He also plans to put forth a mental health initiative, which is something he was been passionate about since a REALTOR® friend of his committed suicide last year.

"Mental health is a huge concern. We need to be checking in people, making sure they are okay, that they are spending time with family and not getting swamped with the business. There are a lot of people who just need that, to not feel like they are alone. Depression is a huge issue and it can be sparked by something as simple as an appraisal not coming in, or a commission falling through and not being able to pay the bills," says Ben.

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This year, Ben is bringing in mental health professionals to bring awareness to the issue and has created the hashtag [#getoutofyourmind](#).

"When you think you can't do something, when you're feeling down and out, take a step back, take an outside perspective, get out of your mind, and help build upon yourself," he says.

Ben knows firsthand how hard life can be, and the issues that people can be dealing with at any given moment. Growing up in Redlands, Ben was raised by a single mother on welfare with five kids living paycheck to paycheck. While his mother went to prison in 2009 for drug use, and he lost his brother to alcoholism just five years ago, he knew that he needed to go down a different path, to be an example for the rest of his siblings.

"I never thought I'd enter real estate. No one in my family had careers, just jobs. So, to get my feet wet in real estate and find this passion, my siblings and mom look up to me now. I can't let them down," he says.

When Ben isn't fighting the good the good fight, he balances his life with time spent with his husband, Jonathan, and their two fur-babies, Louie and Chanel, singing in his car, and unplugging from life with friends on a boat on the water.



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KRISTI MUNOZ

Kristi is well-versed, talented, and extremely knowledgeable in what she does. She has over 30 years of experience in the industry, including 4 years of escrow officer experience, 25 years of title experience, and time spent honing her skills in other roles such as sales, management, the payoff department, and title unit assistance.

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