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If you are interested in contributing or nominating Realtors for certain stories, please email us at [jason.acres@RealProducersMag.com](mailto:jason.acres@RealProducersMag.com)

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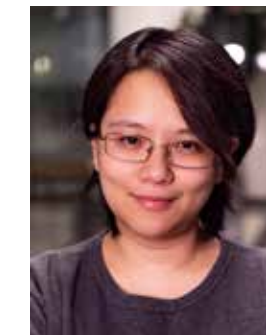
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## ► publisher's note

### *The Challenge*

Growing up, I remember how difficult it was trying to accomplish hard things. Certainly, some trials came easier than others. But those things I found most difficult to overcome came with the most satisfaction.

I preferred dirt bikes and motorcycles over traditional bicycles. Although I had fun racing around on those too, it was the thrill of a two-wheeled motorized vehicle that I really enjoyed. I was close to the age of eight years old when my parents entered me in my first motorcycle motocross competition. I still remember the bike I had. It was a little red Honda 50. There wasn't a clutch to maneuver, so it was simply "turn and burn" on the throttle.

I lined up with a bunch of other kids my age at the start of the track. My heart was beating out of my chest. My helmet was securely tightened and of course I felt like a pro in my racing gear. As my hands gripped the handlebars, I had one foot on the dirt. Then suddenly, the green flag waved, the tire-bar lowered and we were off!

I turned over the throttle and surged forward. There was something exhilarating about the quick start off the line and the sound of those little engines revving high RPMs. This was my first race. I had never competed in anything like this before. The mini-bikes were frighteningly close to one another as we neared the first corner. At least, that's the way it felt to me at that age. We were almost touching each other. No doubt, I was scared. Nevertheless, something inside happened to me that I'll never forget. I was so afraid, yet at the same time, absolutely overcome with the challenge to succeed. I needed to win! Now, perhaps I had this drive to win in me from a young age, but this is the first instance I can recall so vividly. At my age, just finishing the race would've been an accomplishment, but I didn't just want to finish, I wanted success.

As you look back over the years, I'll bet you've faced many challenges as a top REALTOR® on the North Shore. Fear is either faced head-on or it becomes paralyzing. How do you face your fears? What's your secret to overcoming the challenges that stand in your way?

The answers you provide to questions like these have no doubt shaped who you are today. The agents who are successful still have fears, but they've found a way to overcome the road-blocks in their way. Perhaps there's something standing in your way that, when conquered, will make you even more successful than you are today. What is your plan? How are you going to face your fears?

The desire to persevere through the challenges you face today will pay off when you tackle them head-on and embrace each situation with resolve. I hope you find it in you to continue to "turn and burn" your way through your fears and have great victories in your future endeavors. It's one of the things I've grown to admire about you - the top producing REALTORS® on the North Shore.



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top producer

Article written by **Nora Wall**  
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KATI SPANIAK  
eXp Realty

...

## WITH VISION, A PLAN, AND RIGHT ACTION, **ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE**

From recently divorced, stay-at-home mom to top real estate professional in Chicagoland, Kati Spaniak is a master at setting goals and achieving them. She continues to be a pioneer in the industry and a proven accomplished entrepreneur and industry leader. With a career volume of \$240 million in sales and over 400 transactions, Kati is a significant powerhouse in Chicago real estate.



With a degree in photography, Kati launched a marketing and design firm several years out of college in Chicago in 1997. For five years, the company was successful and then 9/11 hit. Suddenly, the market for design work dried up in the city. Forced to close her business, she was not sure what direction she would go next. When her mother, a prominent real estate agent, was diagnosed with cancer, Kati joined her in real estate. They became a successful real estate team.

She says, "I was successful the first year I was in real estate. I was named Rookie of the Year. I worked and had three babies in three years. I was

working and paying for full-time childcare and not making much more than that. So I left the industry to stay home with my kids. I volunteered during that time and ended up a trustee for the Village of Northbrook."

Fast forward to 2011, and Kati was in the middle of a divorce. Broken-hearted and not even wanting to get out of bed, she knew she had to pull herself together. She had to go back to work full-time. Now a single mother, failure was not an option for her. She renewed her license and joined @Properties in 2011.

Kati says, "When I was first in the business, I didn't understand how to run my real estate career." Her plan was throwing darts up on the board and seeing what stuck. After her divorce and having

been out of the workforce for a while, she felt doubtful about her viability jumping back into work. She continues, "At first, I didn't think I could succeed and support myself financially. But the more I thought about it, the more I began to get excited about the possibility of building my real estate career back up."

For the first time, Kati sat down and wrote a business plan. She researched the local market and decided that if she could get 5% of all transactions in North-



“

AT FIRST, I DIDN'T THINK I COULD SUCCEED AND SUPPORT MYSELF FINANCIALLY. BUT THE MORE I THOUGHT ABOUT IT, THE MORE I BEGAN TO GET EXCITED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF BUILDING MY REAL ESTATE CAREER BACK UP.

...





brook, that would make her a top-selling agent. It translated into about 75 deals a year. First, she googled how to write a business plan, and then she sat down and wrote one. She proceeded to follow it step by step. With an idea in action, things started happening. Kati got unstuck, and her business took off.

She says, "I started with an email list of 300 people I knew. At first, I was scared of what they would think of me as I was now divorced. But I knew I had to sell. That's what I had to do because there was no other choice., There was no choice to fail. There was no choice to get back in bed. I just had to pick myself up every day and do what I needed to do."

When she moved to Keller Williams in 2015, her sense of what was possible exploded. The light bulb went off that agents could earn more than a million a year. She says, "Keller Williams leveled up the education that I received. I took every class offered. I hired a coach, and then I hired another one. I learned how to run a real estate business as a business owner rather than as a real estate agent. I hired employees and agents. I increased my expenses by a whole lot." Keller Williams marked a significant career breakthrough for Kati, where she was able to take her career to the next level. Her success demonstrates the vital role mentorship and coaching play in becoming successful.

In 2018, Kati moved to eXp. The company is a virtual brokerage that allows the agent to pay less in fees and splits, and the agent can earn additional passive income through revenue sharing. It's a new company that is pioneering the industry. She says, "eXp Realty allows me to build the business that I want. Also, the opportunity to earn revenue share and have stock in the company provided me with an alternative income stream rather than just selling real estate day in and day out."



Happily married to her second husband, Michael Ciesla, and juggling a blended family with five teenage girls, Kati continues to challenge herself at work. Thankfully she has a husband who is happily in charge of domestic life for the most part.

Now, Kati is focused on giving back and improving how the industry functions. She is also inspired to mentor other women. She says, "We are responsible for our actions and results. And that is what I want people to know that they are in charge of their future." She continues, "I want to help women and show them that they can fulfill their dreams. Anything is possible." Kati exemplifies what can happen with a clear vision, a plan, and the right action.

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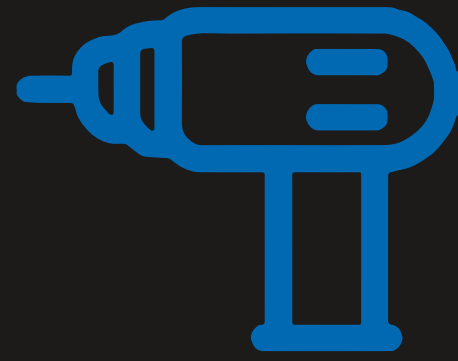
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# Kristen Goodfellow

*Baird & Warner*

## From Deal-Maker Attorney to Agent on the Move

Following a successful legal career, Kristen Goodfellow took on real estate. A deal-maker on the move, Kristen is among the North Shore real estate scene's fast-rising stars.

For almost ten years, Kristen worked long hours as a business law attorney for top firms in the Chicago area. After she became a mother to two twin boys in 2016, she decided to return to work full-time. Looking for a career that would allow her to have more control over her time, residential real estate offered her the flexibility she desired and utilized her strengths as a connector and a negotiator.



Kristen joined Baird Warner as an agent in the summer of 2017. She jokes, "The funny thing is that being a real estate agent is almost the same as being a deal lawyer, but only the fun part- meeting new peo-

ple, negotiating and getting everyone to the closing table." Her background as an attorney gave her the confidence to represent her clients like a seasoned professional against agents with decades of experience.

Kristen quickly overcame her doubts and insecurities about starting fresh in a new industry. Early on, she hosted open houses, and worked long office hours devising marketing plans and learning the real estate market. She also focused on building her connections within the community. Kristen joined the board at her children's preschool, sponsored district park events, and reached out to her established network from her legal career.

Kristen's hard work started to pay off in early 2019. She sold close to \$3 million in residential real estate. Soon



after, she partnered with Meg Sudekun, another Baird Warner agent with 20 years of experience. As a team, their business has grown rapidly.

Kristen defines success as being a strong role model to her children. She wants to instill in her boys that if you want something, you have to work hard to make it happen. Kristen says, "It took a lot of hard work and





hustle to get this business off the ground.” She attributes much of her success to the critical support she received from her husband, Jim, and her colleagues. She continues, “They offered me not only mentorship, but also key opportunities along the way.”

Kristen strives to serve her clients. She says, “You get to know your clients and understand their

wants and their needs, sometimes even before they know what they want out of a real estate transaction. The human connections you make during a purchase or sale are special.” It’s what inspires her each and every day, and why she loves the job. She continues, “The more connected we all feel in our community, the better off we are in life.”

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Article written by **Nora Wall**



Natasha  
**O'Connor**

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## A Former Expat Kid Channels Lessons in Diversity **into Successful Leadership**

Natasha O'Connor spent the first 12 years of her life as an expatriate child moving from one country to the next, mainly throughout the Middle East. Amongst many other lessons, that experience taught her how to be able to get along with almost anyone. Natasha learned how to adapt to different scenarios and situations which has become one of her most significant assets. Today, she works successfully with a large group of agents and is committed to helping them achieve their individual goals.

Natasha says, "Growing up overseas, we never knew when a classmate - or our own family - would be relocated. So, we just made fast friends with the others that were there and we didn't form into cliques or become judgmental about others. In that environment, you are exposed to many cultures and learn to appreciate the differences. Coming back to the US was a bit of a challenge at first - we moved to a somewhat small town where the friend groups were established since the kids all started in elementary school together. However, we ultimately developed wonderful relationships given our

ability to adapt and befriend others quickly." The values and social skills Natasha learned as an expatriate have remained with her ever since.

Natasha got a very early start in real estate after her family settled in Basking Ridge, New Jersey in 1986. Despite being new to town and knowing no one (or how to even get around), Natasha's mother decided to become a real estate agent. Natasha recalls, "It was the classic scenario for a new agent during that time - here's the coffee, here's a phone book and good luck. Training and coaching was just not a thing so the rise of that trend in our industry has been a positive one, in my opinion."

““

Growing up overseas, we never knew when a classmate - or our own family - would be relocated. So, we just made fast friends with the others that were there and we didn't form into cliques or become judgmental about others. In that environment, you are exposed to many cultures and learn to appreciate the differences.

Throughout middle and high school, and while on breaks from college, Natasha continued to help her mother in real estate. When Natasha graduated from college, she got her real estate license so she could be more supportive to her mother and her business. She says, "I'll never forget the look on the faces of the first buyers I represented

when I walked into the conference room at 21 years-old. Transferring from overseas, the buyers had three days to find a house, and my Mom was in Italy. It was interesting to say the least, but it was successful in the end."

In 1997, Natasha moved to Chicago for graduate school to be closer to her sister and explore her

...

future career options in the mental health industry, which was the focus of her undergraduate studies. She received her Master's in Training and Organizational Development at Roosevelt University. She also met her husband, Kevin. At first, she was on a path to become a psychiatrist but she decided not to pursue a career in mental health despite the fact that working in that industry was incredibly fulfilling. She says, "When I chose to get back into real estate, I decided to do so in a different capacity. I entered the management side in 2004 as a trainer/assistant managing broker." Natasha re-channeled her interest into helping people succeed as a managing broker.

Natasha loves supporting the agents she manages. She says, "What keeps me passionate about my job is solving problems and partnering with an agent when they need support." The biggest obstacle for Natasha is ongoing- it's work-life balance. Meeting the demands of being a parent to two sons, Kevin and Aidan, a partner in a marriage, and the demands of real estate is tough.

Natasha says, "As the demands of my role at work ebb and flow, so do those in my personal life. Being a working mom with babies in daycare is entirely different from being a working mom to teens. And in our business, there is no boundary between work and home. Finding a way to handle both is not something you handle once, and it is smooth sailing from there. You have to make an effort at every turn to make a choice, try your best, and forgive yourself if you can't make it happen for everyone. There is no one-time fix for this ongoing challenge."

Finding balance is a challenge that resonates with many professionals in real estate. Natasha's realist attitude towards this common struggle also reflects her deep wisdom. This attribute coupled with her understanding of people and acceptance of differences lays the foundation for her achievements as an organizational leader. It's the springboard from which she has developed a successful real estate career based on empowering the agents she supports to achieve their goals.



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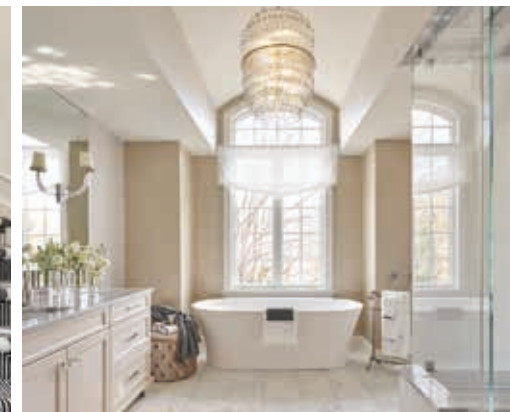
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# Verra Rudolfi

*Euclid Title Services*

## Industry Veteran Says Success is Growth

*Forty years into the title industry, Verra Rudolfi is starting her next chapter at the helm of a new title company. A partner in Euclid Title, Verra Rudolfi is one of the North Shore's most respected industry veterans. In 1979, Verra started at the bottom and worked her way up the ladder. Her successful career is the result of her integrity, tenacity, and commitment to her clients.*

Verra grew up in Glenview, Illinois. Nineteen years old and searching for a job, Verra's mother, a paralegal working for a real estate attorney, helped her get a job as a receptionist at Chicago Title. Wide-eyed and fresh, she quickly advanced in the company. By 1980, she was an escrow closer. In 1993, she got her real estate license and started selling residential real estate part-time. She remained at Chicago Title for 26 years.

In 2007, Gene Galprin, an attorney friend, approached her to run the sales department of Success Title, which later became Proper Title. She recalls, "At first, I was apprehensive. But Jeanne's confidence in my ability gave me the confidence I needed." When it comes to sales, she focuses on developing relationships. She says, "I prefer a soft sell. I don't approach sales as a transaction."

Her values were tested when she left Proper Title for another company that failed. When the company closed



its doors in 2017, she and her colleague, Jenny Yarnall, stayed for two months, unpaid, to make sure every deed was registered. The experience tested her values and strengthened her as a person.

In 2019, Verra and Jenny, along with Bill Vasilopoulos and Dean Argiris, founded Euclid Title. A boutique title firm, they focus on providing clients

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with a lot of personal attention. She makes it a point to always go to closings. She says, "Clients can call me at any time, and get an answer to their question. We pride ourselves on a quick turn around and work well-done." She believes in providing excellent customer service.

A very social person, Verra enjoys spending time with family and friends. She has three children: Jimmy, 37, Rick, 32, and Stephanie, 29. Both of her sons work in television, and Jimmy is married with two children. Stephanie is a newlywed and a special education teacher. Verra adores being a grandmother to Wyatt, 3, and Nina, 2. She notes, "I also love to go dancing!"

Verra defines success as leaving a situation better than you found it. When asked how she would like to be remembered? Verra responds, "That I was a good person, and I did my best to be there for the people in my life." With strong relationships and a legacy of service, Verra is well on her way to achieving that goal.



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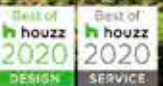
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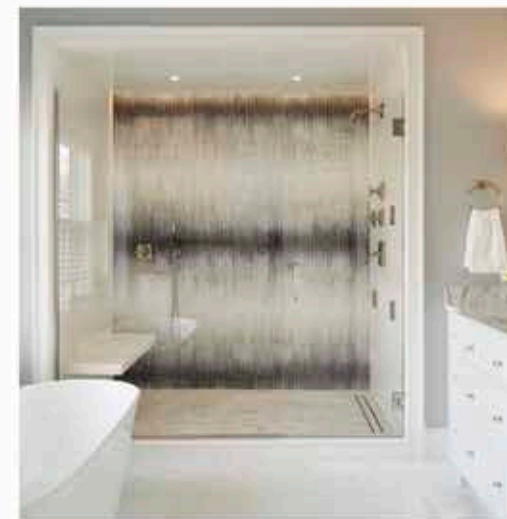
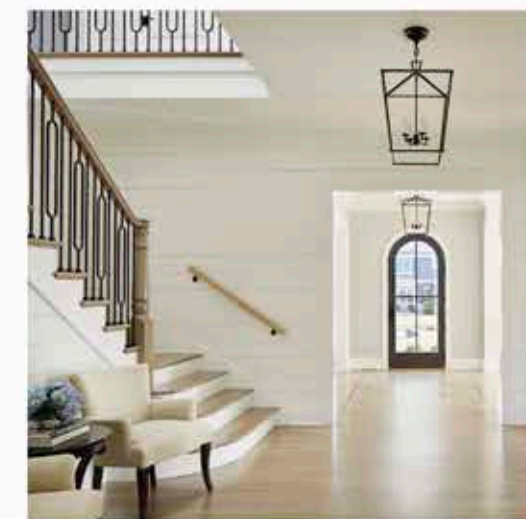
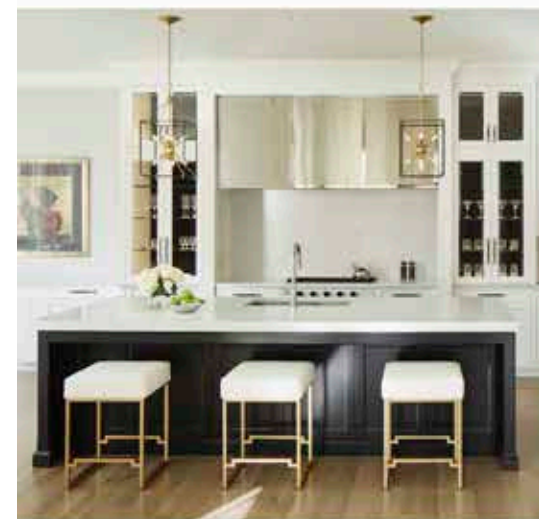


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