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## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

APRIL EVENT DETAILS INSIDE

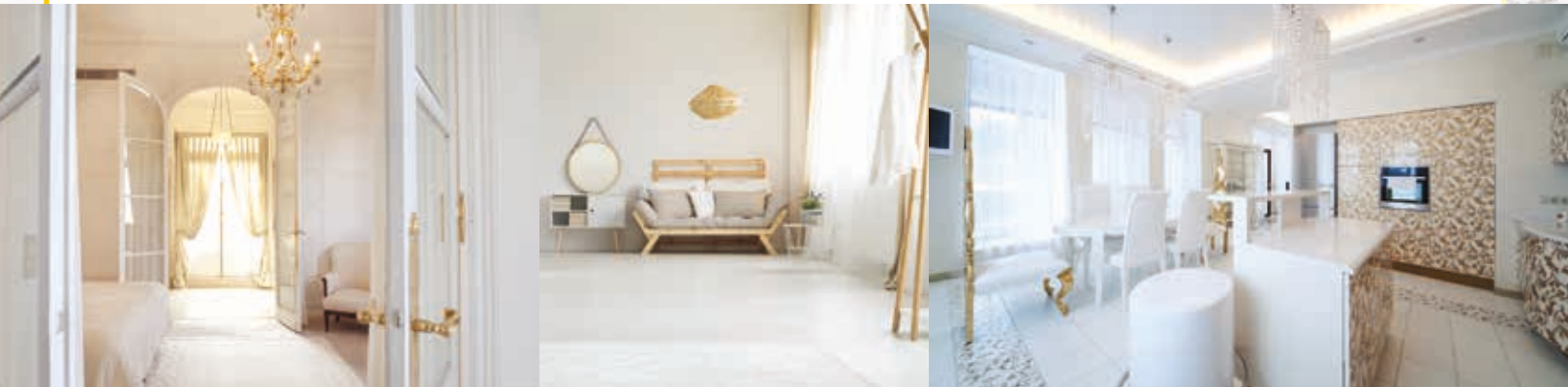
*Partner Spotlight*  
DESIGNER'S HOME GALLERY

*Ask The Expert*  
SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

*Nonprofit Spotlight*  
PASSAGEWAYS

MARCH 2020

# Kari Gilmore



**Kari Gilmore**  
Senior Real Estate Loan Originator  
P: 316.651.5185  
NMLS# 442459  
Kari.Gilmore@meritrustcu.org

Meritrust is proud to welcome Kari Gilmore to our team.

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▶▶ april REALTOR® appreciation event

## Save the Date for our NEXT WICHITA REAL PRODUCERS EVENT!

April 9th at 4825 Brisco in Emerald Bay Estates



It's time to inspire, connect and celebrate the Top 300 Wichita real estate agents!

Come soak up all the beauty and awe of a Craig Sharp Homes \$1.7M spec home, on the waterfront in the gorgeous Emerald Bay Estates.

Food, drink, music, celebration, recognition and networking.

This private event is ONLY for the **Top 300 REALTORS®** and ONLY for businesses that are **Trusted Business Partners** of *Wichita Real Producers*.

Each invitee will be personally invited, so mark your calendars for the evening of **April 9th!**

See you there!



### ▶▶ local events **MARCH**

**Thursday, March 5**

9:00am -12:00pm

**Psychology of Listings: It's All About the Consultation**  
**RSCK**

Dismiss the idea of doing listing presentations and replace it with the concept of doing listing consultations instead. Instructor: Traci Terrill 3 Elective Hours of Continuing Education **316-263-3167**

**Thursday, March 5**

1:00pm - 4:00pm

**Buyers Aren't Liars: Focusing on a Consumer Driven Experience**

**RSCK**

Take a closer look at consumers motivation in the buying experience. Instructors: Cheryl Huebert and Joel Dolloff 3 Elective Hours of Continuing Education **316-263-3167**

**Friday, March 6 - Sunday, March 8**

All Day

**Outdoor Living & Landscape Show Century II Expo & Convention Center**

Join your Trusted Business Partners, Ann and Mike Seybert of Radical Bubbles, as they demonstrate their ultrasonic blind cleaning system. You'll also be able to check out their Hunter Douglas and Polar Shades products. **Call Ann or Mike, 316-204-4694**

**Thursday, March 19**

9:00am -12:00pm

**Required Broker Core:**

**Leadership - Work Smarter, Not Harder**  
**RSCK**

In depth CE course about the most common violations in the real estate industry and best practices to avoid them. Instructor: Chris Noffert 3 Required Broker Core Hours / 3 Salesperson Elective Hours **316-263-3167**

**Thursday, March 19**

1:00pm - 4:00pm

**Required Salesperson/Broker Core: The Realtor's Court - You've Been Summoned**  
**RSCK**

What now? This course is designed to help veteran agents and new agents alike under-

stand Agency in Kansas and how it relates to their business. Instructor: Amanda Rempe 3 Required Salesperson/ Broker Core Hours **316-263-3167**

**Wednesday, March 25**

4:00pm - 7:00pm

**Margs and Mortgages by Andover State Bank Mud Haus 922 E Douglas Wichita, KS 67202**

Talk shop, enjoy local food and drinks, enter to win a 65" tv. To learn more or RSVP: [GoASB.com/margsandmortgages](http://GoASB.com/margsandmortgages) **Call Kevin Sweatland, 316-219-1611**



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# publisher's *note*

I'd like to welcome our newest business partners— Andover State Bank, United Fidelity Funding, Phelps Tax, BNC National Bank, and Emeli Kate. We'd also like to extend a *very* special welcome to our newest Wichita RP team member, the talented photographer, Darrin Hackney. Darrin will be capturing stunning images of our agents and businesses...you might just be his next subject!

Remember, *these businesses have been referred to Real Producers by top agents.* They've been vetted, and are the best at what they do. These trusted partners make Real Producers possible.

Welcome to Q2 of 2020!

By the time you read this, we will have had our Launch Party and I sure hope you were able to attend. If you weren't, be sure to mark your calendar for our next event on **April 9th**. You won't want to *ever* miss another Real Producers event.



Sincerely Your Friend,  
Your Publisher, and also  
your fellow REALTOR®,  
**Samantha Lucciarini**

## MEET THE WICHITA REAL PRODUCERS TEAM



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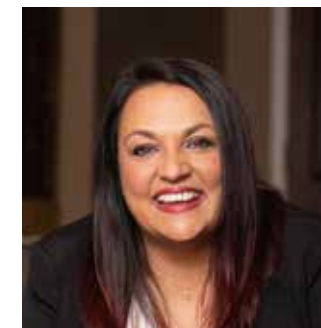
**Heather Pluard**  
Writer



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

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS



**12**  
Top  
Producer  
Samar  
Edenfield



**18**  
Rising  
Star  
Kooper  
Sanders



**23**  
Ask The  
Expert:  
Social  
Media Tips  
by Ashley  
Streight



**26**  
Partner  
Spotlight  
Designer's  
Home  
Gallery



**30**  
Celebrating  
Leaders  
Stacy  
Latimer



**34**  
Niche  
Agent  
Anita  
Cochran



**37**  
Meet Your  
Community



**40**  
Niche  
Agent  
David Lake



**44**  
Non-profit  
Spotlight  
Passage-  
ways

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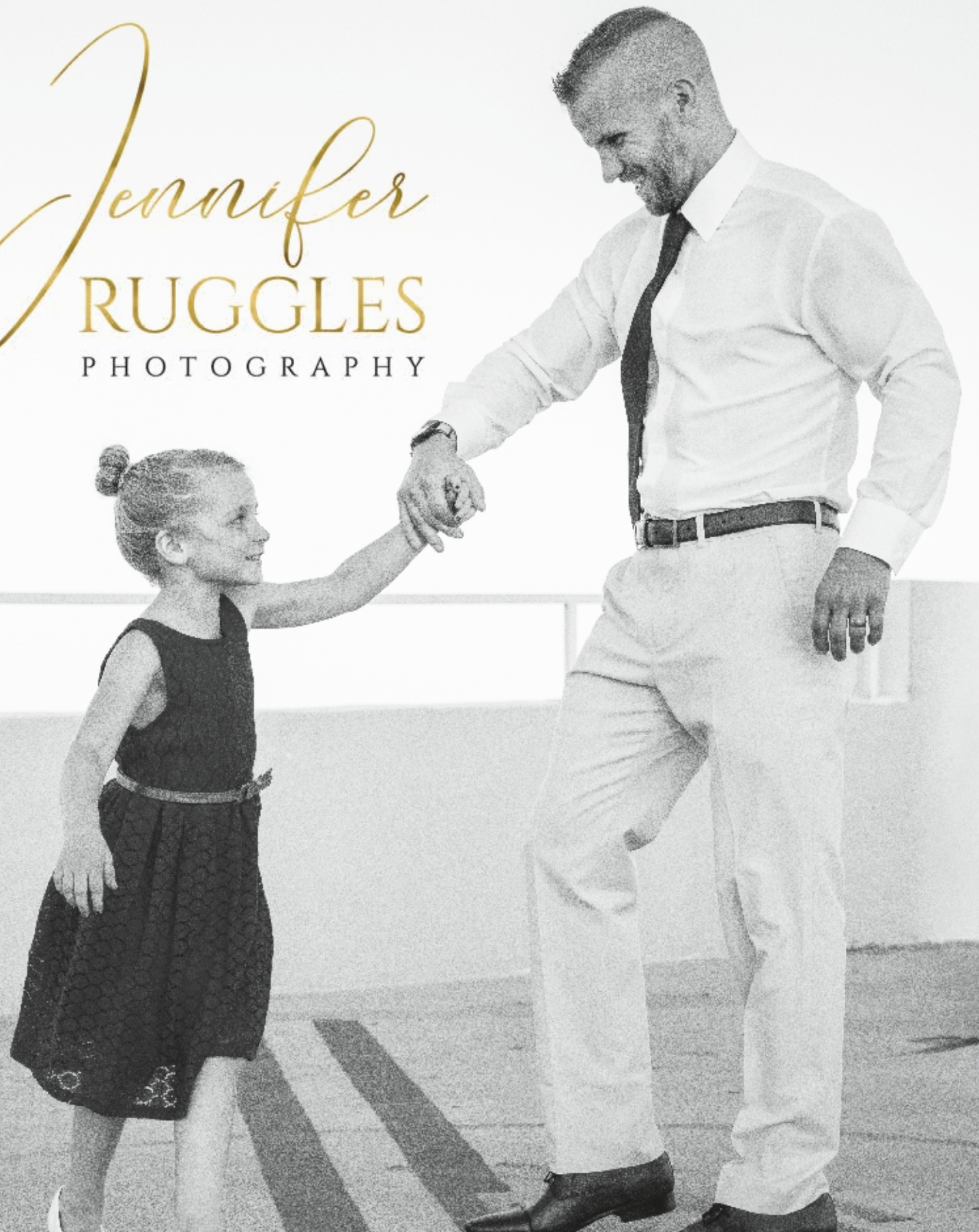
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# SAMAR EDENFIELD

top producer

Written by Dave Danielson  
Photos by Aaron Patton

SHOWS THE POWER OF STARTING WITH YES



## ERA Great American Realty

The world holds amazing possibilities, but getting there isn't always easy. You don't have to look too far to hear plenty of naysayers and negativity. They're easy to find. What's more difficult is finding those diamonds in the rough ... people like Samar Edenfield, Team Leader of Samar & Associates, and Associate Broker with ERA Great American Realty. Those who know Samar will attest she dedicates her life to helping others ... with strong positivity and a natural tendency to start with 'Yes'.

### Early Paths

Born and raised in the Wichita area, Samar had plans for the future. "The first thing I wanted to be was a marine biologist. I've always loved the ocean," Samar recalls. "Part of me also wanted to be a teacher, or own a non-profit organization of some type that helped children. It's still part of who I am." During her late teens, Samar had an early brush with real estate, selling wholesale plumbing. As she says, "I helped people pick out the pretty stuff for their homes. During that time, I also helped judge the Parade of Homes. That's when I really first had an interest in the business."

Samar heard a voice telling her she should go into real estate — from her father. "When I was 18, my dad told me I would be a

phenomenal REALTOR®. And of course, being 18, I thought he must be wrong," she laughs. Samar had other experiences, as well, including moving to Kansas City where she taught ballroom and Latin dance. When Samar moved back to Wichita, she managed a local restaurant.

Again, she heard voices.

"At the restaurant, I got to know several REALTORS®," Samar remembers. "They were very good, two-or three-times-a-week clients, and they kept telling me I should go into real estate."

In 2004, Samar went to work for her dad at his car dealership. The voices came again.

"Dad mentioned me getting my license again," she smiles. "And, two friends in real estate also suggested I look at it. Finally, dad said he'd pay for my license and that I could work at the dealership while I started in the business."

### Overcoming the Negative

In 2007, Samar got her license, but endured a bit of a detour fueled by other voices — negative ones. "There were a lot of naysayers saying real estate was a pipe dream. That made it harder for me to believe in what I was doing," she says. "But when I finally stopped listening and went all in, I started becoming successful."





••• Samar's success has been remarkable. In fact, since joining the industry 13 years ago, she's amassed over \$50 million in sales volume. Samar says, "Sales volume does not measure my success; the lives I touch are the true measure of my success, most of my real estate clients become my friends." Along the way, Samar started her team in 2017, and she earned her broker's license in 2018. She currently serves on the REALTORS® of South Central Kansas Board of Directors and enjoys giving back to the industry she loves.

#### Love of Life

Samar's passion is clear. "I love helping people and being involved ... building relationships and getting to know people. It's so much more than a house. It's helping people through life's transitions. My goal is being a 'YES' person who is able to help different, worthy causes," she tells us.

At home, Samar cherishes time spent with her husband and high school sweetheart, Jake, whom she has been married to for 15 years. They enjoy time spent with their two children,

15-year-old son, Tayten, and their 4-year-old daughter, Lucille. In her free time, Samar enjoys reading, spending time with friends and family and supporting her children in their activities. You will find her cheering loud and proud at her son's basketball and football games. Samar also has a long list of organizations that draw her support, time, and talents. "I like to say 'yes' whenever I can to others and groups that support the greater good," she smiles. "It brings me such joy and happiness to be able to do that."

One of Samar's favorite quotes is from Gandhi.

"He said, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.' If we would all see and treat each other like brothers and sisters, imagine what the world would be like," Samar emphasizes with a smile. "If we could see each other as humans beyond wealth or poverty, or skin color or religious or political beliefs or sexual orientation, we could accept one another as humans and children of God. For me, it's knowing that when I lay down at night, I have helped someone and that I've contributed to better their life."

That's the power of starting with YES.

“

I love helping people and being involved ... building relationships and getting to know people. It's so much more than a house. It's helping people through life's transitions. My goal is being a 'YES' person who is able to help different, worthy causes.

”





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**Darrin Hackney Photography**

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# KOOPER SANDERS

IS A REAL ESTATE NATURAL  
WITH A HELPFUL SPIRIT

*Nikkel & Associates*

Any good structure starts with a rock-solid foundation. The same holds true in real estate. One of those who lives and works by this truth is Kooper Sanders, REALTOR® and Associate Broker with Nikkel & Associates. As this month's Rising Star, Kooper is a prime example of the power of success built on the sound foundation of trust.

"In real estate, one of the things I really enjoy is that you come into a person's life and you have an opportunity to build a relationship and trust very quickly — more quickly than in normal day-to-day life," Kooper emphasizes. "You have to build trust and rapport with people. It's really rewarding. I like being the person who helps them make such a huge decision in their lives."

#### **Helpful Spirit**

As an outgoing, resourceful person, Kooper has been helping people his whole life. "Getting out of high school, I didn't have a clue what I'd be doing. I knew I wanted to help people. At first, I thought about the fire department. Then I went the EMS route. I took EMT classes and blossomed from there," explains Kooper. He worked in the Emergency Department for several years, serving as a vital member of ambulance crews, emergency room team, and clinic staff. While the work was definitely rewarding for Kooper, it was an intense brand of work that took a toll. So, he looked to the next steps in his career. As he remembers, "I still wanted to be able to work with people and wanted to grow as a professional, and I saw that opportunity with real estate."



rising star ◀◀

Written by **Dave Danielson**  
Photos by **Jennifer Ruggles**





For all the advantages, the hurdles still come. “It wasn’t and isn’t easy, but this is a really good fit for me,” Kooper explains. “When you do something you love, it seems to come naturally.”

The numbers prove that out. In fact, in 2019, Kooper finished with over \$5 million in sales volume, qualifying as a Master’s Club member and a spot among the top 10 percent area REALTORS®. “It has meant a lot to me. That was a goal of mine to achieve, and it feels good to have reached it,” he says.

Kooper enjoys a full life with his wife, Bree. Together, they’re expecting their first child in April. He also credits his parents, Kyle and Tammy Sanders, for his work ethic and the examples of success they have provided. Kooper’s free time is filled with demo and renovation work on a house he and Bree bought. He also has a passion for antiquing, thrifting and exploring estate sales to uncover interesting finds.

The future holds more promise for Kooper ... with a strong foundation he has put in place—one built on trust.



...

### Strong Examples

Kooper’s decision was also aided by his mother, who had been a REALTOR® while Kooper was growing up. “She had been a stay-at-home mom. When she got her license, our lives changed quite a bit for the better. She’s still a REALTOR®,” he explains. “I asked mom about real estate, and she warned me about how hard it is ... and that when people see REALTORS® do well, they assume it’s easy.” Kooper made his decision, moved forward and earned his license two and a half years ago. It’s been a rewarding ride.

“It’s meant a lot to me having my mother as a mentor, and I’ve been fortunate to come into the business at a time when a lot of people knew my family and me,” Kooper explains. “I was able to build a client base and have some advantages that a lot of people don’t have when they get started.”

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ask the expert  
Written by Ashley Streight

# Ashley Streight Shares Social Media Tips

A S H L I N M A R K E T I N G

Social media, a tool so powerful yet so underused in the real estate profession. The secret, though, isn't quite as complex as it might seem. Check out these helpful tips that are sure to boost your social media pages to the next level.

*Not sure where to start or just need some advice on how to manage your pages? Check out my website [www.ashlinmarketing.com](http://www.ashlinmarketing.com), give me a call 316-253-7900 or email me today [ashley@ashlinmarketing.com](mailto:ashley@ashlinmarketing.com) and I'd be happy to help with all your social media needs.*

**Videography is Key** – Yet, it's also highly underutilized. If you aren't incorporating videos frequently into your social media strategy, put it at the top of your to-do list. Whether it be a virtual tour of a listing you have or of you providing real estate tips, videos are likely to draw more clients your way.

**Post Original Content** – Sure, it saves time by sharing content you find online, but that's not what your followers want all the time. You need a healthy mix of your own original content as well.

**Be Yourself** – It's great to post about your business. After all, that's why you have your social media business pages, to begin with. Just know that it's still ok to be yourself. Post about things happening in your community that you care about or are involved with, post photos of important things to you and have fun with it. Social media doesn't always have to be so serious.

**Don't Post too Much or too Little** – This is something I've heard many times meeting with clients and agents alike. It's vital to understand the balance of posting enough to keep your followers engaged and coming back for more without overpowering them to the point of not caring about anything you post.

**Engage, Engage and Engage Some More** – It's not enough to post on your social media pages and not engage with your followers. Reply to their comments, ask questions, like and comment on their pages and so much more. This is a great chance to build a one-on-one relationship with each follower, build trust and find potential leads.



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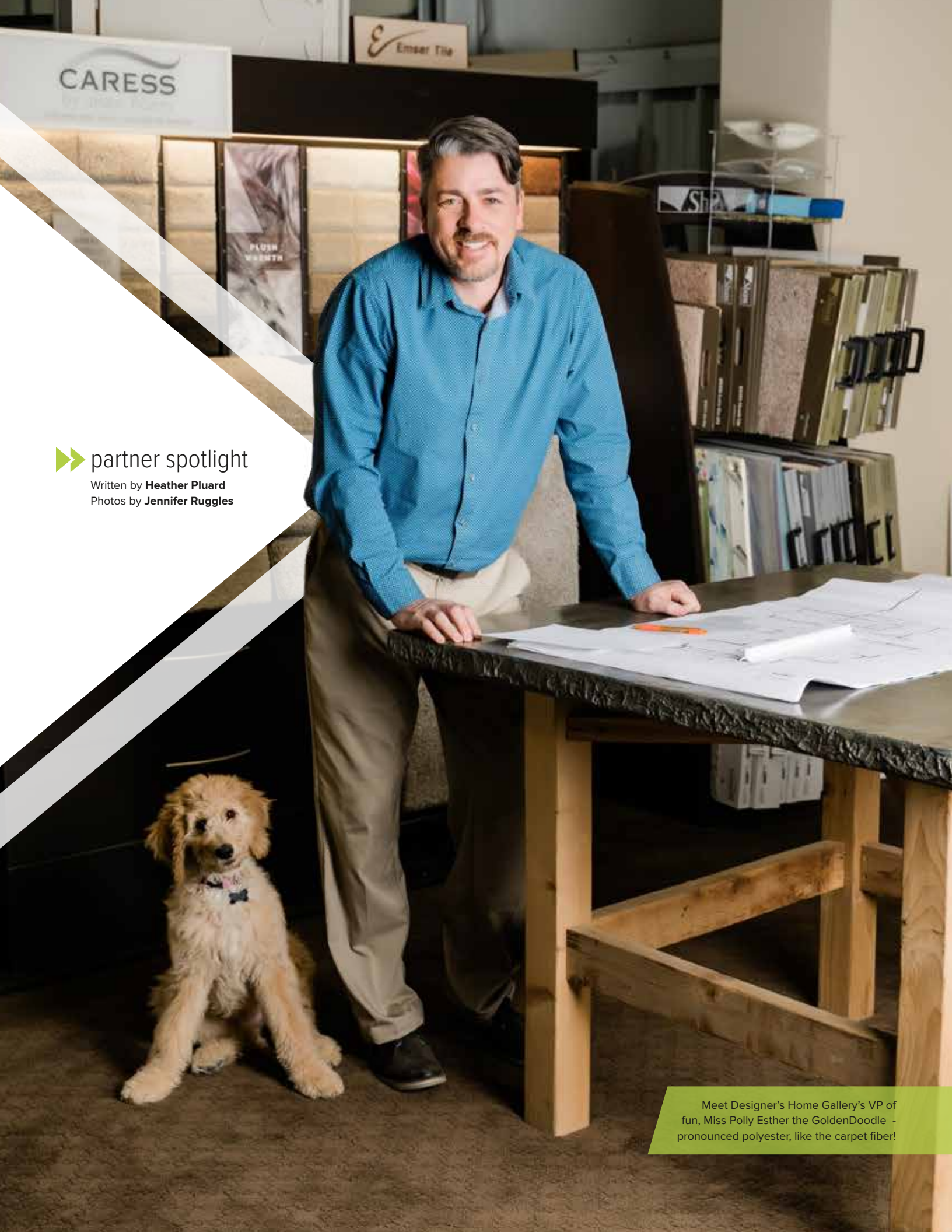
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▶▶ partner spotlight

Written by Heather Pluard  
Photos by Jennifer Ruggles

Meet Designer's Home Gallery's VP of fun, Miss Polly Esther the GoldenDoodle - pronounced polyester, like the carpet fiber!

# BEN Henwood

*Is Saving The World From Ugly Floors!*

**The mission is clear. Ben Henwood and his team at Designer's Home Gallery are "Saving the World from Ugly Floors". A deep commitment to customer service, quality products, and excellent installation are putting this team of flooring professionals leaps and bounds ahead of the competition.**

"We are a full-service, one-stop-shop," says Ben. "We have everything you need under one roof—including carpet, wood, laminate, and tile for floors. We also do backsplashes and showers. Our goal is to simplify the entire process. For customers who need a quick turn-around, we can measure and have an estimate for them in a few hours. Installation can be finished within a couple of days using in-stock materials. For customers who are just beginning to consider ideas, our team of creative professionals can help every step of the way."







and you won't find most of them in competitors' stores," Ben says. "A big-box store typically dials-down the quality of products on their shelves, but they still show the lipstick. It may look great until the wear and tear show up a short time later. We work within peoples' budgets to get them the flooring that truly meets their needs."

The team's commitment to the customer doesn't end at the sale. "We are building long-term relationships," says Ben. "We want people to be excited about their floors and happy to refer us to their friends and family. That's one reason we have an exclusive, lifetime warranty on all of our residential installations. Most stores in town only guarantee a year because that's what the state of Kansas mandates. But I know my installers are the best in the business. I hired them myself. We are all committed to keeping the customer #1."

Designer's Home Gallery offers 12-month, interest-free financing and extends several vendor assisted programs to its customers. "For example, we can accept payment at closing for customers who want to freshen their homes up for sale but don't want to spend any money out-of-pocket," Ben explains. "We love working with REALTORS® and helping them look like heroes to their clients as we solve flooring problems together. It's all about keeping customers happy because that's the whole reason we exist." Mission complete!

...

Ben began his career in the flooring industry when he was 24-years-old as a residential sales professional. He then helped start a flooring company that sold directly to contractors, grew it to incorporate the retail business and also worked for a time as a tile installer. "It was like making art," Ben says. "I've always loved making homeowners happy."

Now Ben owns Designer's Home Gallery, and his 20-years of flooring experience makes him an expert at realistically getting people what they want. "A lot of times, people will walk into the store with their defenses up because they've been frustrated at other places," Ben says. "There's something magical about seeing them lower their shields and open up about their needs because they know we are here to help. Our team is seasoned, and we ask the right questions. We're more flooring nerds than superheroes. We love that moment when it all comes together, and the customer says, 'I want that in my home!'"

Quality standards are essential at Designer's Home Gallery. "All of the products have to pass my 'ok,'



If you would like to get in touch with Ben at Designer's Home Gallery, please call 316.440.8887, email Ben@NoUglyFloors.com, or visit online www.NoUglyFloors.com.



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# RE/MAX PREMIER



# STACY LATIMER

CHOOSES JOY

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Written by **Dave Danielson**  
Photos by **Tim Davis**

## RE/MAX Premier

We all have a decision to make about the path we choose in life and the work we do. Stacy Latimer is Managing Broker with RE/MAX Premier. She's also someone who chooses joy in her path in this world.

### Family Foundations

Stacy was born in Hillsboro, Kansas, and was raised in Aurora, Nebraska, on the family farm where her parents still live. "I really didn't have a clearcut direction in mind for my future. I loved

science, math, and school. But, in reality, I wanted to be a mom and have a family," Stacy recalls. "We always worked on the farm, and I loved that life. It's not that I necessarily wanted to be a farmer's wife, but I loved family."

In time, Stacy went on to college and met her future husband, Tim. The next few years were an exciting blur of events. "We got married very young, and I started working in insurance and banking," she recalls. "One of my favorite jobs was as Secretary for the Chamber of Commerce."

In the meantime, Stacy and Tim began their family. Stacy was a stay-at-home mom for a time, going back to school in 2000 and earning her college degree in Christian Ministry; she also had a strong interest in public speaking.

"Through my work at church, I knew a real estate broker who had an opportunity for a part-time position, and I thought I would do it temporarily until I found my permanent role," Stacy recalls. "That was 19 years ago, and I've been in the business ever since.

I started out as a licensed assistant, then helped reorganize the company as the Office Manager, and finally became the Managing Broker in 2014."

### Lifting Others

Stacy has always enjoyed helping to lift others up. "I love helping others achieve their dream...helping team members. We have a terrific team of 28 agents in our office. It's a true culture of sharing and caring—where family comes first. My main love is supporting our agents and their work with clients...being that person who helps them find that path to success," she emphasizes. "I really like to celebrate people. I'm a firm believer in living life on the positive side."

When Stacy talks about success, she starts with family. "I think success goes way beyond what you do for a living. My mom is a huge influence in







my life. If I could be half the woman she is, then I would deem that to be a great success," she smiles. "It's success as a person, your character, and the mark you leave on people."

#### Inspiring Interests

In life, Stacy enjoys the path of 37 years she has shared with Tim. Together, they cherish time spent with their three sons—Scott, Jake, and Grant. In her free time, she and her family enjoy sports. The Latimers are big Nebraska fans, as well as strong supporters of the Royals, the Shockers, and the Chiefs. Stacy also enjoys reading and antiques.

Giving back to her community is also central to who Stacy is, and she is an active supporter of organizations such as the Children's Miracle Network. In fact, as an exclusive partner, RE/MAX donates a portion of each completed transaction to the organization. Stacy is also involved with the Run2Believe

5K race that raises drunk driving awareness. In addition, she also enjoys playing an active role in her church. She serves as Co-Chair on a Women's Ministry Team, and she also serves on the Leadership Board of her church. Plus, Stacy puts a lot of emphasis on doing her part to support the industry she has loved for so long, serving on the local MLS Board of Directors and sharing her talents as Vice-Chair of the Grievance Committee.

As she considers the past and looks with excitement to her future, Stacy has a plan that begins with strong bonds. "When I work with someone, I always want it to be something where I leave them better than I found them," she says with a smile. "I hope people describe me as being positive. My husband sometimes accuses me of being too positive, but that's okay with me. Life doesn't always go well. But no matter what trials I'm going through, I always chose joy."



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niche agent ◀◀

Written by Heather Pluard  
Photos by Jennifer Ruggles

# Anita Cochran

*Is Now Making Headlines in  
the Real Estate Industry*

## ANITA COCHRAN REALTY LLC

Formerly a famous anchor for KSN-TV, Anita Cochran is now making headlines in the Wichita real estate industry. “My goal is to make the whole process simple,” she says. “Real estate is a lot like the news business in that both are 24/7 commitments, and both can be exciting! Whether my clients are buying, selling, renovating or just need their questions answered – I’ll do the work for them.”

Anita knows how to ask the right questions, make important connections and communicate information perfectly. She has more than 20 years of hard-news reporting experience, and she grew up watching her father give agricultural reports on television. Anchoring the news was a dream job, and Anita was a natural. However, when the network wanted her to change timeslots, she took the opportunity to step out of the spotlight and spend more time with her family in-

stead. “I loved those first five years at home, getting to know my kids and falling in love with being a mom,” Anita smiles.

She and her husband, Kent Cochran, have been married for 34 years. The two were college sweethearts who started dating soon after they met in a Human Sexuality class at Wichita State. Together, they have two beautiful daughters. Lexy is a 23-year-old medical student at Marian University in Indianapolis, and Tanza is a 19-year-old aspiring actress and a licensed REALTOR® like her mother.

Finding a new family home is what led Anita back into the business world. “We were thinking about buying a house in the Rolling Hills area, and I didn’t know anyone I wanted to work with,” says Anita. “So I decided to become the REALTOR® I wanted to hire. I got my license in September

of 2014 and became an agent at Banister Real Estate. I only worked there for a year, but I still look up to Trent Banister. He carved out his own place in Wichita real estate and designs incredible homes. He not only gave me a start, but he gave me a vision of what is possible.”

In 2016, Anita was a member of the Class of Rising Stars. She joined Platinum Realty that year and also got her brokers’ license. Soon after, Anita decided to open her own business in order to have full control over her second career. Ironically, the biggest obstacle at the time was her famous last name. “Getting people to see me differently took time, and great signage!” she says. “My original goal was to make \$30,000 a year and pay for my daughters’ college and cars.”

Anita has done a lot better than that! She closed \$4.6-million worth of property last year and is already on Wichita’s list of Top 300 Agents. “I’m not your traditional REALTOR®,” she says. “I’m continually looking for a better way, and I’m among the first to try something new. Perfectionism isn’t all bad. I’m also not afraid of change, thanks to leaving my broadcasting career ten years ago.”







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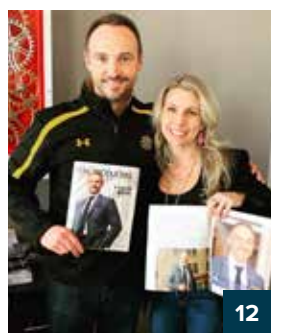
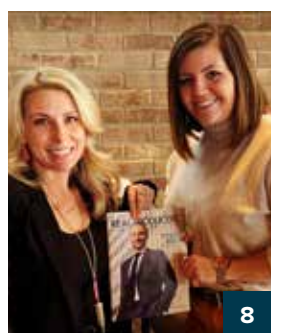
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# david LAKIN

HAS AN  
ARTISTIC EYE  
FOR LIFE



Written by **Heather Pluard**  
Photos by **Tim Davis**

## Preferred Partners of Kansas, Inc.

**David Lake is an artist, a musician, and a highly successful real estate agent who has sold over \$100 million in new home sales during his 15-year-career at Preferred Properties of Kansas – where he is also the supervising broker. “I’m red-headed and left-handed,” laughs David. “I can find art in everything about life.”**

This creative soul grew up in Wichita, attended KU, and moved to Kansas City after graduating from college with a Bachelor’s of Fine Arts. He loves to paint but didn’t think it could pay the bills, so David launched into a sales career in KC. He worked for a variety of companies that helped him develop his business skills. David then met his wife, Farrah, who also happened to be a Wichita native. After the birth of their first child, they decided to move back home. One lucky phone call set David up for his new career path in real estate.

“I called a friend’s dad, who helped me get an interview at Preferred Properties of Kansas,” David explains. “I met with the group, and they told me to get my license and come back. Two weeks later, I showed up for work. It was risky to become a full-commission sales agent, especially since I didn’t know what I was doing at first. But, I’d been interested in real estate ever since I was 14-years-old looking at houses with my mom and step-dad, so I took a leap of faith.”

David has spent the last 15 years selling new homes and building his reputation as an honest, ethical agent. “I worked hard to earn the respect of my peers and clientele,” he says. “You can’t be in this business long if you aren’t trustworthy. I’m proud to say I have a lot of repeat customers who come back years later to upsize or downsize.”

As the company’s supervising broker, David is responsible for eight sales agents in five Preferred Properties Managed Neighborhoods. As a sales agent, he is currently in the Northbrook Addition in Derby, where the community is progressing at a rewarding pace.

With all this success, it’s hard to believe David thought about quitting his first year in the business. “I almost ran out of mon-

ey,” he says. “But I remember looking at these beautiful lake lots and knowing that somebody would sell them. Why not me? It just clicked at that moment. I knew there was no going back to a regular job, and I fought through it. Perspective is everything in both art and life.”

David went on to sell 48 new homes in his first year. The Wichita Area Association of REALTORS® also voted him the 2006 Rookie of the Year. He’s grateful that Preferred Properties owners, John and Judee Smith, took a chance on him. “They’ve given me so many opportunities,” David tells us. “I’ve learned a lot from them. It’s an enormous blessing to be able to do this every day.”

His family is another enormous blessing. David and Farah have been married 20 years and have two teenage boys – Oliver and Gavin. “They are my everything and fuel my drive to succeed,” he says. David is also thankful to have several creative outlets for his artistic mind. He’s a drummer in a couple of bands and a guitar player in another. He also still finds time to paint. His latest work is an abstract series of pieces inspired by Bob Dylan’s song, ‘Wagon Wheel’. Whether he’s working, playing or creating – David finds inspiration everywhere!







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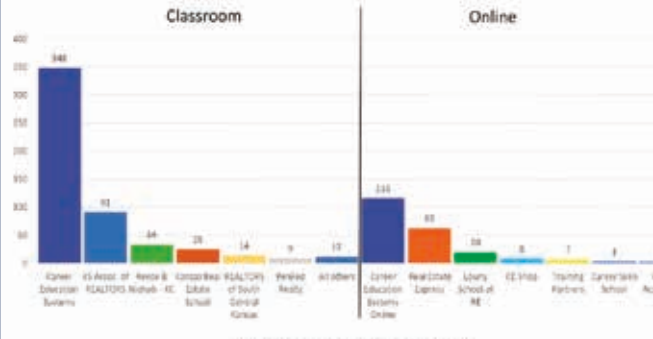


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# Passageways, Ltd

## Jennifer and Sean Garrison Are Taking Care of Our Local Heroes!

When American heroes return home from the battlefronts and tours of duty around the world, the transition is usually challenging. Many aspects of life are drastically different from the military lives and experiences they've had. And, the cities and towns they grew up in can now seem alien. In some cases, those who come home begin a spiral path that can lead to homelessness and even suicide. Among those who are helping to provide a home for heroes are Sean and Jennifer Garrison, and Jennifer's mother, Susan Moellinger, with Passageways, a 501C(3) non-profit organization that started its important mission in 2014.

### Seeing a Solution

Jennifer is CEO and Co-Founder of Passageways. She remembers the moment their path to help began. "I was at home with my husband and our two kids, and we saw a story about a homeless veteran who had died," she recalls. "It really captured us.

The next morning, I talked with mom on the way to work." Jennifer and Susan talked more at lunch and decided to start interviewing the existing groups to find out what services are available to help. "We learned that there were housing vouchers, but there wasn't a place where heroes could go to heal from battle ... a place where they can come without having a timeline on healing," she recalls. "We spent many hours talking, and we decided this was it."

So Passageways was born.

As Jennifer remembers, "We walked away from our careers and hit it hard. And the next day, my mom was invited to a meeting with a lady who had a house for rent that used to be a Homes Plus location in West Wichita. We started renting the house, and that became our Passageways home.

### A Most Important Mission

The mission of Passageways is straightforward and vital.

"We bring in homeless, honorably discharged veterans and give them a home and an opportunity to find themselves," she explains. "We help them find jobs, and they get to stay with us while they reach their financial goals, including getting their licenses back and getting bills caught up. They stay with us for free until they graduate." To date, 89 local heroes have graduated from their stay with Passageways; they have transitioned back into their own apartments or homes in the community. "When they graduate, their name is put on a lease or rental, and we help them move into a new place. We've been there for every move," Jennifer says. "We want to make sure they're transitioning, and we fill in those blanks."

### Before and After

The journey the heroes complete through Passageways can't be overemphasized.

As Jennifer says, "It's been an amazing journey to see heroes coming here broken and crying and then to see them able to be surrounded by

other brothers who understand what they're going through. That brotherhood has a connection and link that helps them be successful."

When each hero is ready, and they've secured housing away from Passageways, it's time to prepare for graduation. "One or two days before they graduate, we take them to one of three storage areas where they can pick up three or four months of toiletries and cleaning supplies for their new home," Jennifer says. "After that, we take them over to a two-car garage that a lady from our church turned into a store with 40 volunteers. There, they can select glasses, dinner plates, and any other kind of household accessories you can think of. Everything is free ... and we follow them around and help them pick out what colors they want and to make all the choices they didn't have before."

Finally, graduation day comes ... a day of celebration.

"On graduation day, we go to a warehouse space we have where they can select furniture for their new place. We meet Two Men and a Truck there, load everything up, and move them to their apartment or house and help them get everything settled," Jennifer explains.

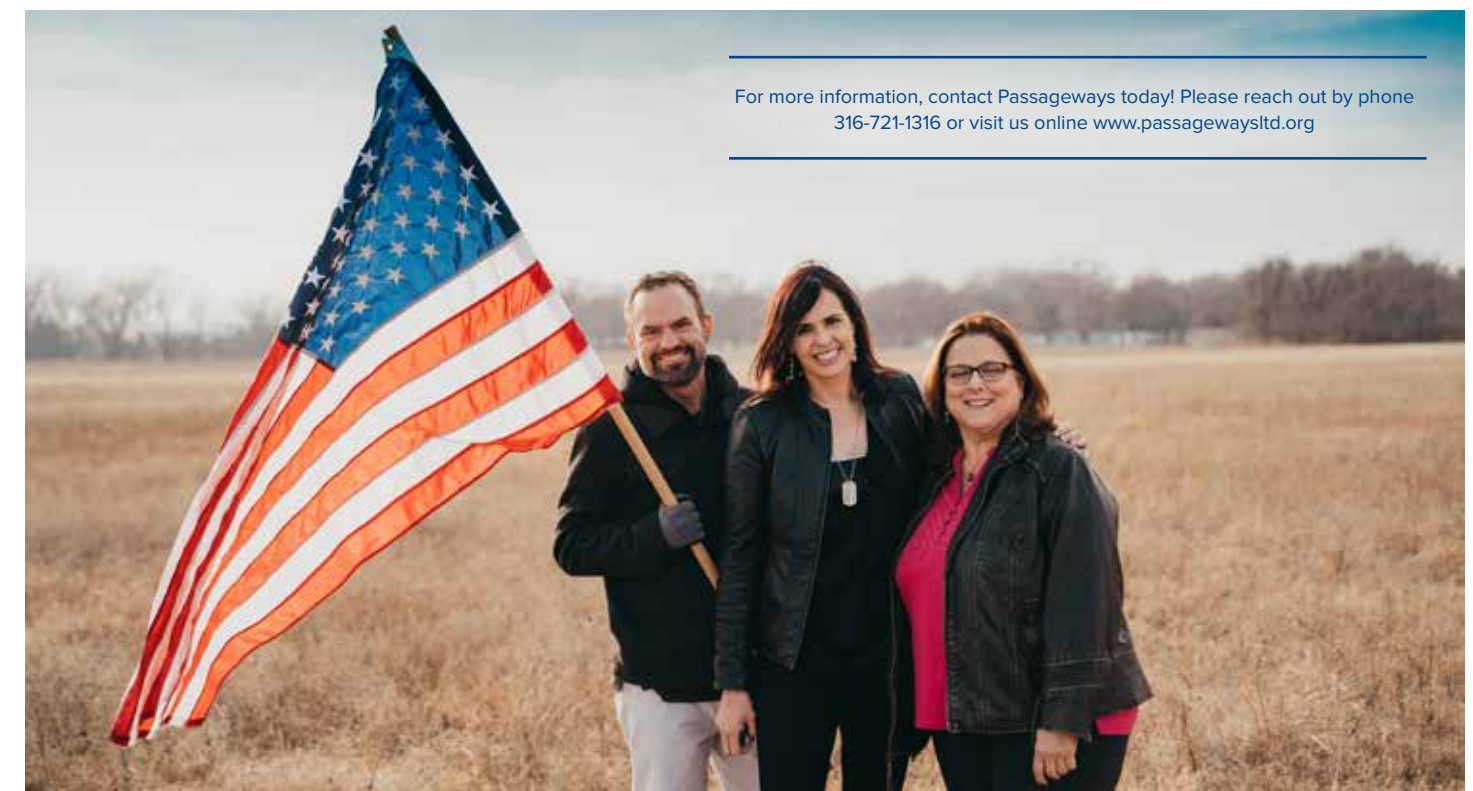
### Efficient and Effective

With Passageways, the community has an invaluable, efficient way of giving back to those who have given so much for their country. As Jennifer says, since Passageways isn't a government pro-

gram, help can be delivered quickly and without red tape.

"Just seeing the difference from when they walk through the door to when they walk through their own door ... it just fills me up," Jennifer emphasizes. "We've had graduation day heroes pull me aside and say that they had picked out their suicide date before they came here ... and now they can get through day by day and breath by breath. They can embrace happiness again and can reconnect with family. They see it's not always going to be this black hole. It means so much for these heroes to see everyone in the community who has embraced them and supported them. They really thought they were in these battles by themselves. So when they see these connections that are going to help, it makes all the difference."

If you know someone who is moving and needs a new home for their new or nearly new furniture, please contact Passageways. In addition, please contact Jennifer if you would like to schedule someone from Passageways to speak to your office or group about the mission of helping heroes find a home.



For more information, contact Passageways today! Please reach out by phone 316-721-1316 or visit us online [www.passagewaystld.org](http://www.passagewaystld.org)



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