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PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

Rob Johnson, Gateway Mortgage

CELEBRATING LEADERS:

Tammy Knowlton

FEATURED AGENT:

Shay Rhodes

NICHE AGENT:

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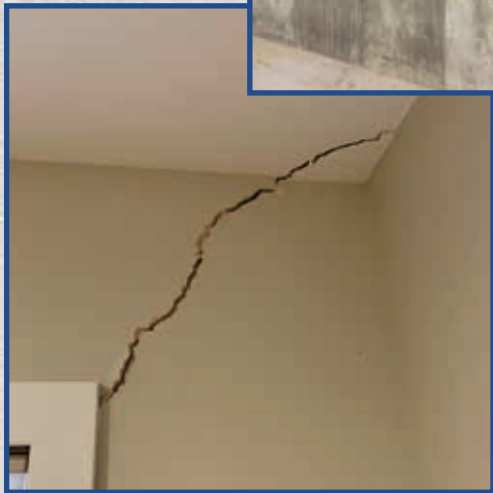


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WHY?

The Importance of REALTOR® to REALTOR® Relationships

AS WE START TO RETURN TO SOME SEMBLANCE OF NORMALCY, WICHITA'S REAL ESTATE MARKET REMAINS A HIGH-VELOCITY MARKET. TITLE COMPANY TRANSACTIONS AND RECORDED DEEDS ARE AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH COMPARED TO PREVIOUS, PRE-COVID YEARS. ALTHOUGH THERE IS A NOTION OUT THERE THAT INVENTORY IS NON-EXISTENT, THAT'S NOT NECESSARILY THE CASE. INVENTORY HAS BEEN SHORT-LIVED AND PROPERTIES ARE MOVING FROM ACTIVE TO PENDING AT RECORD SPEEDS - YIELDING WICHITA'S HIGH-VELOCITY MARKET.

In times of stress and uncertainty like this, relationships, rapport, and reputation are more important now than ever. In this still unprecedented market, I have some questions for you, our Top Producing REALTORS® to ponder:

1. How many transactions did you close in the last 12 months where you represented both sides?
2. Have you ever had an offer accepted heavily based on your reputation and relationship with the co-op agent?
3. If you were listing a property and the top two "highest and best" were between an agent you knew and respected and an agent you didn't know, but knew had a less than stellar reputation, which one would you advise your client to work with to ensure the smoothest transaction possible?

I hope these rhetorical questions cause you to pause and reflect. I already know the answers, not because I'm a real estate wizard, but because I've learned a lot since being licensed in 2005 and I've been fortunate to spend a lot of time with hundreds of you over the past two years.

It has become increasingly clear to me how important REALTOR® to REALTOR® relationships are. This is WHY Real Producers Magazine was created. This is WHY I brought this incredible platform to

my hometown. This is WHY we throw big lavish events and monthly happy hours. Everything I do with Real Producers is geared towards helping you build genuine connections with your real estate peers. And this is WHY I am such a big advocate for your success in real estate.

Without REALTOR® to REALTOR® relationships, **your clients won't experience the highest level of service you can provide.**

Details in communication, integral follow-up, dedication to your client's best interest, and professional finesse are just some of the minimum standards all REALTORS® should set for themselves. I've heard countless stories about agents from different brokerages gush about another agent's performance and what made them successful. I've also heard the ugly side when peer relationships go south and trust and professionalism are deeply tarnished.

Although this market has no shortage of obstacles and challenges for you, I encourage you to nurture your peer relationships and to remember that your reputation and the reputation of REALTORS® is long-lasting, unlike a commission check or an insane sellers' market.

I hope to see ALL of you amazing REALTORS® at our next BIG REALTOR® Appreciation Party on October 14th from 4-8pm at a gorgeous Craig Sharp Homes mansion! Mark your calendars NOW.

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Samantha Lucciarini

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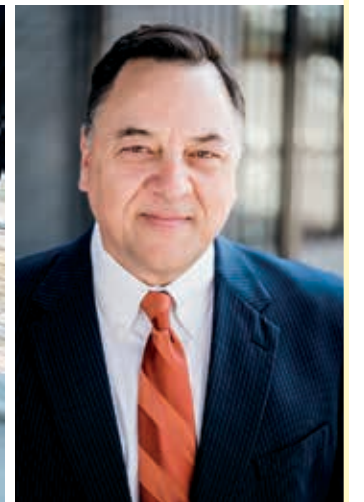
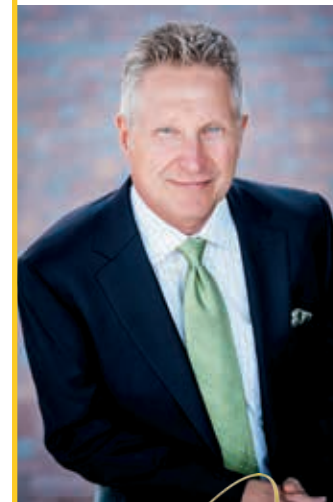
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LORI NEWFER

A WIN-WIN FOR BOTH SIDES



on the rise ◀◀

Written by Ashley Streight
Photography by Jennifer Ruggles Photography





LORI NEWFER BEGAN IN REAL ESTATE 15 YEARS AGO WITH RENTALS. JUST FIVE YEARS AGO, SHE FLIPPED HER FIRST INVESTMENT HOUSE. IT WAS DURING THAT PROCESS, PRIOR TO EVEN SELLING THE HOUSE, THAT SHE DECIDED SHE ENJOYED THE CHALLENGE OF REAL ESTATE AND CHOSE TO BECOME A FULL-TIME AGENT.

Lori has now been licensed for four and a half years, though her history with rentals goes back two decades. She works solo, serving Wichita and the surrounding area, as well as Harper and Sumner counties. She sees about 90% repeat and referral business. Why do people keep coming back? Lori's answer is simple: "I try to do the best job I can for the client," she says. "I try to get the win-win for both sides, an easy transaction, a lack of drama, and I'm very personable with

my clients and become friends with them. I have a good time, and I develop personal relationships."

Lori also takes active measures to stay in touch with past clients, which is extremely important in the real estate industry. Through emails, calls, texts, celebration cards, coffee, and lunch meetings, she makes a consistent effort to keep in contact. Following up after a transaction can be one of the single most important aspects of communication an agent has.

Lori's transactions range in price from \$35,000 to \$450,000 and she's enthusiastic about each and every one. "I feel every client out there, regardless of the amount of money they have to spend on the house, deserve the same representation. I do not discriminate by price range, and I'll help everybody." It's that variety that Lori likes the most about her job. "I like the

people. I like the challenge, taking difficult situations and making them work and just having win-wins for everyone."

Lori's real estate business is important to her, but family is still her main focus. She has two children and six grandchildren – and real estate. "I have a lot of wonderful friends and family, and they all keep me going." Even with her busy schedule, she manages to get some time to enjoy the outdoors, riding horses, and boating on the lake. Having that work-life balance creates the best of both worlds for her.

What does business look like for Lori right now? It's booming. "My business grew – it more than tripled – in one year's time. I was proud of that accomplishment! I just want to be the best REALTOR® I can be. I don't want to compete with other agents. I don't want to do it for any other reason than to just to be the best I can be for my clients. Saying that, I'm hoping I continue rapid growth." It's this attitude that will be sure to keep Lori's business flourishing.



“ I JUST WANT TO BE THE BEST REALTOR® I CAN BE. I DON'T WANT TO COMPETE WITH OTHER AGENTS. I DON'T WANT TO DO IT FOR ANY OTHER REASON THAN TO JUST TO BE THE BEST I CAN BE FOR MY CLIENTS. ”

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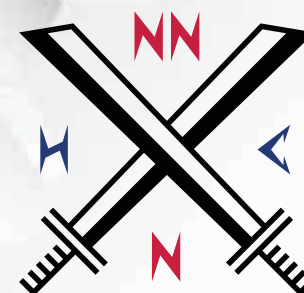
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BRYCE JONES

PUTTING HIS PROBLEM-SPOTTING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS TO WORK IN REAL ESTATE

▶▶ top producer

Written by **Heather Pluard**

Photography by **Kelly Remacle Photography**



Working to identify and prevent criminal activity was all in a day's work for Bryce Jones when he worked in banking. Today, he's putting his problem-spotting and problem-solving skills to work in real estate, selling \$15 million last year and on track to do the same in 2021.

"I enjoyed making the world a safer place through banking," Bryce says. "But I love helping clients find a place to call home. I'll do whatever it takes to help them reach their real estate goals and live their best lives."

Bryce grew up on a farm near Frankfort, Kansas, a small town of 900. He met and married his wife of 37 years, Kim, while both were attending Kansas State. After graduating, the newlyweds moved to Wichita, and Bryce started his banking career. Before becoming a REALTOR® in 2007, he worked on a national team responsible for making sure almost 200,000 employees complied with the new anti-money-laundering regulations established after 911.

"It was not an easy job," Bryce says. "People think real estate is stressful, and it can be, but showing homes felt like stress relief after being tied to my phone and computer for eight hours a day trying to stop crime and making sure everyone was following processes correctly!"

After putting in a full day at the bank, Bryce sold real estate on nights and weekends during his first seven years in the industry. "I don't like sitting still very long," he says. "I started in real estate more as a hobby and something I could do when I retired, but I fell in love with helping people buy and sell homes. My banking experience served me well because I had a wide sphere of influence, and there's a shared knowledge base between the industries."

Bryce chose to work at Prudential, now Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices PenFed Realty, because they were flexible and offered excellent training. He closed on a handful of transactions his first year there, rapidly increasing his business and selling more homes than most full-time agents. Finally, in 2014, after selling six homes in three days, Bryce decided to focus on real estate full time and leave banking behind him.

"It was time," Bryce says. "I obtained my Broker's License that same year and helped coach new agents. My best advice is to be available when your clients are available, know what tools you have access to, and follow up constantly. Nothing will just fall into your lap. You have to get yourself out there

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and remind people you can help them with all of their real estate needs.”

With a reputation for being dedicated and always doing the right thing, Bryce enjoys a repeat and referral business of more than 50%. He also does a significant amount of online advertising and is a firm believer in open houses.

“The key is to find a connection,” Bryce says. “For me, that’s often the financing aspect because most people don’t understand loans. I’ve sold homes at open houses just by making myself available to answer questions, and I can guide people to loans and lenders that are best for them. Open houses are never a waste of time if you interact with prospective clients.”

Bryce constantly looks for ways to improve and serve clients better. “It’s always about my clients,” he says. “I work with all price ranges and types of homes, including investment property, rentals, condos, patio homes, and single families, and a wide range of clients, including first-time homebuyers, move-up buyers and sellers, downsizing sellers, investors, and kids selling their parents’ home. I appreciate and respect the trust clients put in me, and I always tell them the truth about a transaction so they can make good decisions as we move forward. A lot of people are jumping too quickly in today’s market and regretting it. We still need to do our due diligence. I represent clients as if I were doing it for myself, making sure everything is done correctly. If agents constantly monitor the process and work through issues as they arise, things will stay on track through closing.”

This business approach has earned Bryce multiple awards. He was Rookie of the year in 2008, a Rising Star by REALTORS® of South-Central Kansas in 2008, and the Top Individual Agent for his brokerage in 2019. He’s earned Berkshire Hathaway’s Chairman’s Gold Circle six times, Circle of Excellence



eight times, and been a Top Ten Award Winner eight times in the last 14 years. He credits his assistant, Sara Mullen, with saving his life and keeping him sane as his career flourishes. To give back, Bryce volunteers at Central Community Church, most recently on the Building Committee and previously in various adult education and service roles. He is a long-term supporter of the United Way, where he’s been a Leadership Level Giver for the last 20 years, served as an Allocations Committee member, and was a campaign co-chair at the bank. Bryce has also volunteered his time as a member of the Board of Directors of the South-Central Kansas MLS.

When he isn’t working, Bryce loves relaxing with Kim at their home at Breezy Lake and spending time with their two sons, Grant and Nick, two daughters-in-law, Emily and Miranda, and his first grandson, 7-month-old Briggs. The whole family likes going to Table Rock Lake together, where they enjoy boating, skiing, wakeboarding, and tubing. Bryce and Kim are season-ticket holders for K-State Football, and he loves attending Wichita State University Men’s Basketball games. He’s grateful for a career where he can have a positive impact on people’s lives. “My banking teammates used to close down 500 customer accounts a month due to illegal or suspicious activity,” Bryce says. “I’m happy to be closing on 70 homes a year instead!”

“ I represent clients as if I were doing it for myself, making sure everything is done correctly. If agents constantly monitor the process and work through issues as they arise, things will stay on track through closing. ”





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TAMMY KNOWLTON

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As Broker/Owner with Knowlton Group Real Estate, Tammy begins with service to help those around her find success.

“I love meeting and helping new people from different walks of life. That’s the biggest thing for me — being able to help someone,” Tammy says. “I’ve met people who were credit deficient. I’ve helped people through the process who then became repeat clients, and now their kids are working with me, too.”

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Tammy first earned her real estate license in 2002. Before that, she reached excellence in another industry.

“I lived in Illinois and worked as a machinist in a machine shop — a role I had since I was 18 years old. There, I earned my Class A tool and die maker certification,” Tammy remembers.

In time, she was transferred to the Wichita area as a Class A Tool and Die Maker, then she graduated to become a Crew Chief.

“I had enjoyed the work, but I was starting to get worn down from standing on concrete all day long every day,” she remembers. “In 2002, I was in the

middle of flipping a house, so I thought I could get my real estate license and do my own transactions.”

The move seemed to come at just the right time for Tammy because the company she was with at the time had proposed a layoff with some early-out options available.

“After thinking about it, I decided to take the voluntary payout, and to give real estate a shot,” she says.

GAINING GROUND

Like most who get their start in real estate, Tammy found the early going a bit tough.

“During my first three months, nothing happened for me. But then, in my fourth month, I had nine closings,” she smiles.

After turning that initial corner and gaining momentum, Tammy just kept going.

“A year later, the company where I had been a machinist had called, asking me to go back to work with them,” Tammy remembers. “But I told them that I was making too much money in real estate to come back. It was at that moment that I decided I was going to make real estate my career.”

Tammy earned Rookie of the Year honors, then went on to earn a spot in President’s Club and Master Circle.

By 2008, Tammy had built her own team. But when the economic downturn hit that year, she was one of the many people across the country who needed to take new steps.

...

“I’ve really enjoyed helping a lot of people to get from point A to point B, whether it be financially or through their career.”



agents who work with me, along with those who have their own team under my company. That’s one of the aspects of having my own firm that I really enjoy,” Tammy says. “There are all kinds of ways we structure things that work the best for each individual agent. Because I’m independent, I’m able to do some things that some of the franchises can’t.”

Away from work, Tammy enjoys time with her family, including her sister, Pam Knowlton, who lives in Wichita, and her mother who works with her husband in pastoring a church in Missouri.

In her free time, Tammy has a passion for gardening, spending time on her patio, and enjoying her pool.

She also is very involved as a member of Heritage Family Church, where she spends time with her church members doing outreach. She teaches Bible studies, has spent time working as a mentor with ladies who are transitioning from prison back into society, and puts together the church bulletin every month. In her spare moments, she also has a love of music. In fact, she plays guitar.

Those who know Tammy appreciate the way she supports them on their journey, whatever that might be.

“I’ve really enjoyed helping a lot of people to get from point A to point B, whether it be financially or through their career,” Tammy points out. “I would love to leave behind in my life a legacy of people who I have helped be successful or do something that maybe they didn’t think they could do.”

Each day, Tammy makes a difference ... starting with service ... and driving forward to success.

As Tammy says, “I just kept moving and did my own thing. I worked as an estimator for a construction company and did part-time real estate. Plus, I even worked at UPS for a time loading trucks. I could do that from 3:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m., and that didn’t interfere with anything.”

After doing business out of her home through 2010, Tammy joined another group until 2017, when she re-opened Knowlton Group Real Estate under the umbrella of another firm. In 2020, she decided to go fully independent. It has been a journey she relishes.

TERRIFIC TEAMWORK

Tammy has the drive to support the needs of her 15 team members who work with her at Knowlton Real Estate. It’s a dynamic she has long enjoyed.

“We’re all working together here, and have a very diverse team which gives us so many strengths together. I have independent

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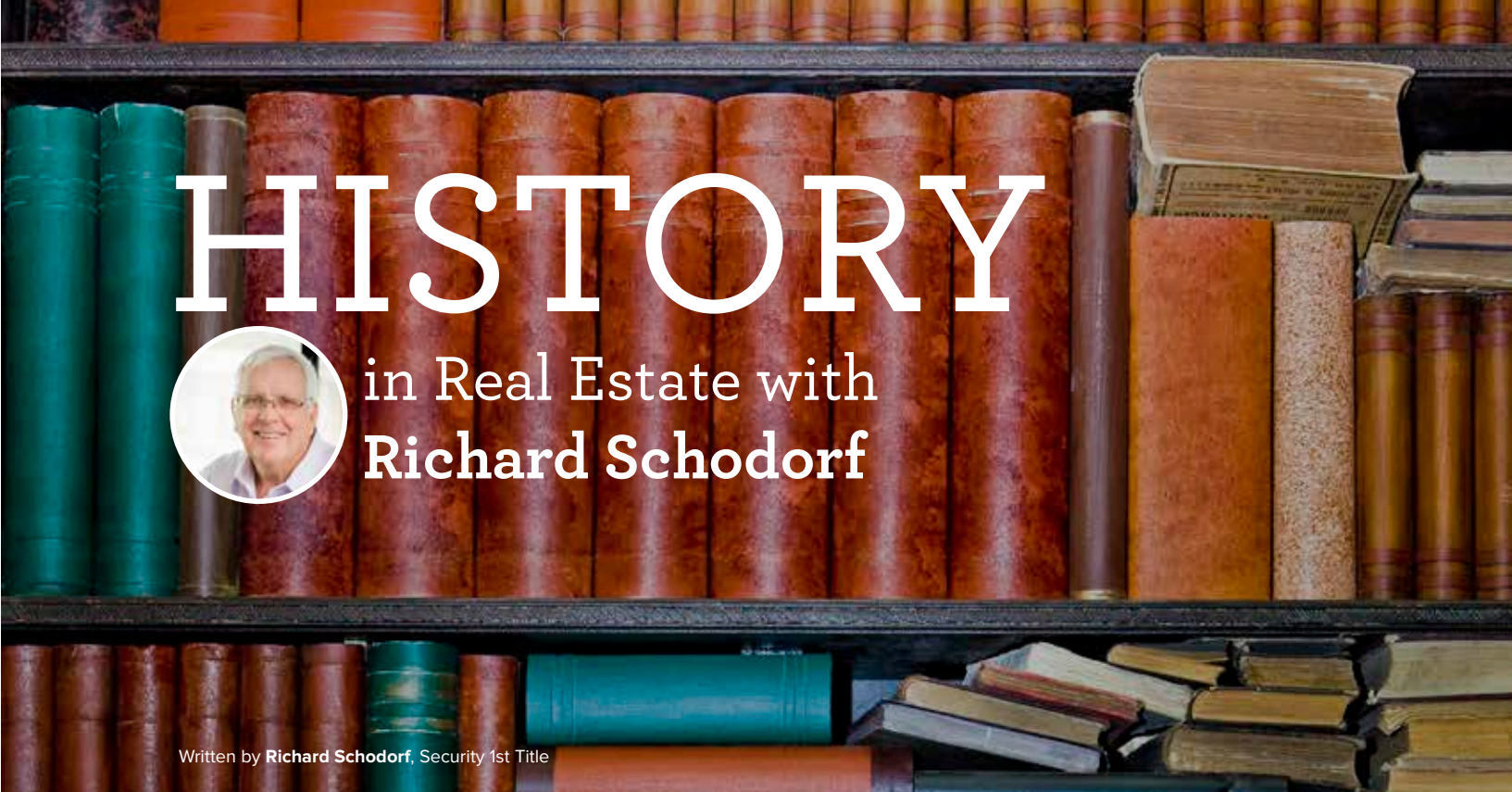





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HISTORY

in Real Estate with
Richard Schodorf



Written by Richard Schodorf, Security 1st Title

(Editor's Note: Today we are starting a series of articles called History in Real Estate. The articles in this series will discuss little-known historical facts about real estate that we hope you will find interesting and informative. The author is Richard Schodorf, a real estate attorney who teaches both real estate law and history)

Every year thousands of Kansans transfer the titles to their homes into revocable trusts. The goal of these homeowners is to leave a blueprint for the care of their loved ones when they pass without the time and expense of a formal probate. However, few people know that the circumstances that gave rise to the creation of trusts also brought with them the building blocks for our courts, our judges, and even a body of law called Equitable Law. And all of these legal principles trace their origins back to the Crusades which took place during the 12th and 13th centuries.

The catalyst for all of these wonderful doctrines can be found in the operation of the Feudal System and the English Common Law. Here are the details. When the knights decided to head off to fight the Crusades, the Feudal System dictated that the knight deed his lands to a nobleman's

friend so the friend could manage the estate and pay bills, collect profits, and most importantly, pay the king his share. However, five to 10 years later, when the knight returned and went to talk to his friend, he often encountered: "Do I know you—you look so familiar." And, generally speaking, the not-so-noble nobleman often refused to deed the property back to the knight.

The only recourse for the knight was to petition to the king. However, there was no remedy at Common Law that would allow the king to make the not-so noble-man friend deed the property back to the knight. So the king decided to pass the buck and handed the matter off to the Lord Chancellor (a position that still exists today and who functioned as the highest Lord in the government).

The Lord Chancellor was in quite a mess, the returning knights were very popular with the people of the realm, having just returned from fighting for country and church. Additionally, the knights were generally armed and dangerous and had friends who were best not angered. Out of this

predicament, the Lord Chancellor came up with the following inspiration: The king, in theory, owned all of the lands in the Realm, so he served as the Grantor; the friend nobleman served as Trustee since he was trusted with the knight's property, and the knight served as the Beneficiary. The Lord Chancellor had no trouble connecting the dots and decided in the king's name that he could order the Trustee Nobleman to deed the property to the Beneficiary. And thus was born Trust Law, Equitable Law Principles, and sowed the seeds for our entire court system.

If you are looking for a flow diagram to pull this all together, here is my best effort: The authority of the king and in his place the Lord Chancellor and in his place our modern-day judges; to decide cases in a court using the facts as presented; under the principle of the king's conscience (doing the right thing) in order to achieve an equitable result. Every state in the union has passed formal trust laws, and all of them can trace their beginnings to both the Crusades and to a foundational principle of trying to do the right thing.

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SHAY RHODES

featured agent ◀◀

Written by Dave Danielson
Photography by Kelly Remacle Photography



POWER IN THE POSSIBLE

When we act only on what we see, we can sometimes miss out on what might have been. If only we would have taken that next step.

Shay Rhodes is one who helps those around her take the next, right step forward.

As a Team Lead and REALTOR® with Shay Rhodes and Associates with Keller Williams Signature Partners, she helps them find power in the possible.

“I love nothing more than when I can hear and see an agent on my team be proud of something they’ve done that’s real estate-related ... whether it be achieving a goal of theirs or negotiating through a tough deal,” Shay says.

“I get the biggest warm and fuzzy feeling seeing my team members accomplishing things on their real estate path. I love helping clients who thought it wasn’t possible to buy or sell a house or flip their first house. It feels good when I know what they can accomplish, for them to not see it, but then to help them get there. That is powerful.”

Getting Her Start

Shay was born in Bedford, Texas, a suburb of Dallas.

“We moved quite a bit when I was growing up,” she remembers. “I’m a gasoline brat. My dad worked for Exxon Oil Company, so we moved around Texas.”

In 1987, when Shay was a freshman in high school, her parents divorced.

“That’s when my sister and I came to live in Kansas with my mom, while my dad moved to Massachusetts,” Shay says.

Shay graduated from high school in 1992. In the process of coming of age, Shay was a teenage mother, giving birth to her son right before her 17th birthday.

As Shay started her working life, she ran a daycare at home.

“My oldest son was born with a birth defect in his ear and had to go through a number of surgeries. When my oldest son was 11, I remember I had helped one of our friends move and they had their contract from their closing. I asked to look at her copy to learn more. She said, ‘What for?’ I said, ‘I am extremely interested in the real estate business and want to pursue it.’”

Moving Ahead

In 2003, Shay started her path in real estate.

“My first opportunity came as a Mortgage Loan Originator with Bank of America. I went through the steps to get my NLMS license. I originated loans in 2003. The highest achievement I had was I could underwrite home loans up to half a million by myself and then I would have to get a second underwriter signature above that. I underwrote loans for four different states. I gained a lot of knowledge from that. It was fast and intense. We would have zero to 60 loans on our desks at any one time.”

At the end of 2004, the service center she worked in was closed. From there, she joined the team at Kansas Secure Title doing title research, setting up files and getting files ready for closing.



“At the time I thought I could use this as my path to real estate,” Shay says. “I still knew I wanted to be in real estate. I needed steady benefits for my family, including my son for his medical care.”

In time, Shay moved into insurance, working as an assistant in a firm.

“I put quotes together for homeowners and auto insurance and learned the ins and outs of insurance from a residential standpoint,” Shay says. “From there I started working with Mike Grbick in 2012 as a property management assistant, which lead to getting my real estate license in 2013. In December of that year, I became an independent buyer’s specialist. And in January 2014, I became an independent agent and ran with it.”

Shay’s real estate career quickly gained traction. In 2016, she brought on an assistant and moved to Keller Williams in 2017.

“In October 2018, I formed the team and in 2019 brought on an agent,” Shay says. “Today, in 2020, I have six agents on my team. We are a team of eight,

including my Transaction Coordinator. None of them had real estate experience before they joined. We are a young team that covers three different MLS areas, covering 10 different counties.”

Here are the members of the team:

- **Shay Rhodes** – Owner/Team Lead
- **Gerri Carrell** – Director of Client Services
- **Peggy Denton** – Lead Agent in South Central KS MLS, Mid-Kansas MLS and surrounding areas
- **Charletta Camp** – Agent in Salina MLS, Mid-Kansas and surrounding areas
- **Shawntel James** – Agent and Social Media Guru
- **Daylene Hueftle** – McLean – Agent
- **Grace Gooch** – Agent
- **Jerry Pennington** – Agent

Fulfilling Life

Away from work, Shay looks forward to time with her family.

She was married for 11 years, and then remarried her husband, Ray, and her sons — 30-year-old Nathan Graves and wife, Sara, and their three children, and 26-year-old Jack Graves.

“ **YOUR FUTURE** is created by what you do **TODAY** ...not tomorrow ”

In her free time, Shay and her family have a love of travel and spending time at the beach. Shay and her team support Kevlar K9, a local organization that trains rescue dogs for veterans. Shay and her team also have worked to recognize first responders — visiting fire stations, police stations and sheriff’s offices with gifts of food and well wishes of thanks for their service.

The passion Shay has for her work is easy to see.

“If it wasn’t for our clients, we wouldn’t be able to do the job we chose to do. We are always trying to

learn and grow. The more knowledge we have, the more we can share it with those who work with us,” Shay says. “The majority of consumers know what the outcome is, but they don’t know how to get there. For someone to trust us to walk them through the process is powerful.”

Shay has a favorite quote that she applies to her real estate journey.

“The quote is from Robert Kiyosaki... ‘Your future is created by what you do today ... not tomorrow.’”

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Submitted by **Angie Vailas** with Equisset

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WENDY CARTER

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

» niche agent

Written by Dave Danielson | Photography by Kelly Remacle Photography

Clients who embark on the process of buying or selling a home know there are a lot of moving parts and pieces that come with it. They just don't know how they fit together. They turn to you and your expertise to help them.

As a REALTOR® with JP Weigand & Sons, Wendy Carter excels at that process of guiding clients through the journey.

"No two days are ever the same in this business. The basics of it are the same. The process of taking

someone from looking at the first house is the same, but within all of that, there are different pieces to put together," Wendy says.

"I love that you're not sitting at a desk every day doing the same thing. You can have your day all planned out, and then you have to drop something you're doing to help someone. I love the fact that it's always different."

Wendy earned her real estate license five years ago, but sales have always been part of her journey.

...



“I spent quite a while in retail management. When we moved to Wichita, I was in outside sales with a fundraising company. When that company went bankrupt, I went back into retail management for two years.”

CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

One night over dinner during the spring of 2016, Wendy and her husband, Darren, had a talk that paved the way for a new door opening.

“We were talking about what else I could do professionally. My schedule wasn’t flowing well with our family. Our boys were in high school and middle school. My retail schedule wasn’t jiving very well with their schedules. I needed more flexibility,” Wendy remembers. “Darren said he thought I should think about doing real estate. I said, ‘Me, sell houses?’ He said, ‘Yes, you’re really good with people and with sales.’”

Wendy considered the idea but had doubts.

“The thought of taking classes and passing a test didn’t sound like something I was sure I wanted to do. But it felt like the right path, so I got right on it, took the class and passed the test,” Wendy remembers. “After that, I interviewed with brokerages to find the right fit for me. It was my husband who urged me and encouraged me to take those first steps.”

FULL-TIME COMMITMENT

Wendy threw herself into her new-found role.

“I just thought I would get out there and hit the ground running. That’s my personality. I’m sort of a go, go, go person,” she smiles.

It worked. She had her first listing within her first three months.

“I had made the decision that I didn’t want to overlap in my job. I gave my notice in retail and then dove into real estate full-time,” Wendy remembers.

She approached her work with a voracious appetite to learn.

“I went to a lot of Weigand training and did as much online training as I could to learn before I got busier. I started doing open houses,” Wendy says. “My first buyer transaction was completed with the property being bought sight unseen.”

In her first few years in the business, Wendy’s trajectory in the business has continued on the upswing, as she averages from \$3.5 million to \$5 million in sales volume each year.

Her drive to achieve is based on service.

“I think everyone should have a home, and I like doing what I can to make that happen,” she says.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

Away from work, Wendy cherishes time with Darren and her 18-year-old son, Bode. The family treasures the time they had with their other son, Cole, whose life was cut short last year.

In her free time, Wendy is a member of a ladies’ tennis league where she plays a few times a week. Exercise is also important to her, so she works out a few days a week. She’s also in a book club. Another favorite pursuit is hiking in places around the country, including locations like Pike’s Peak in Colorado.

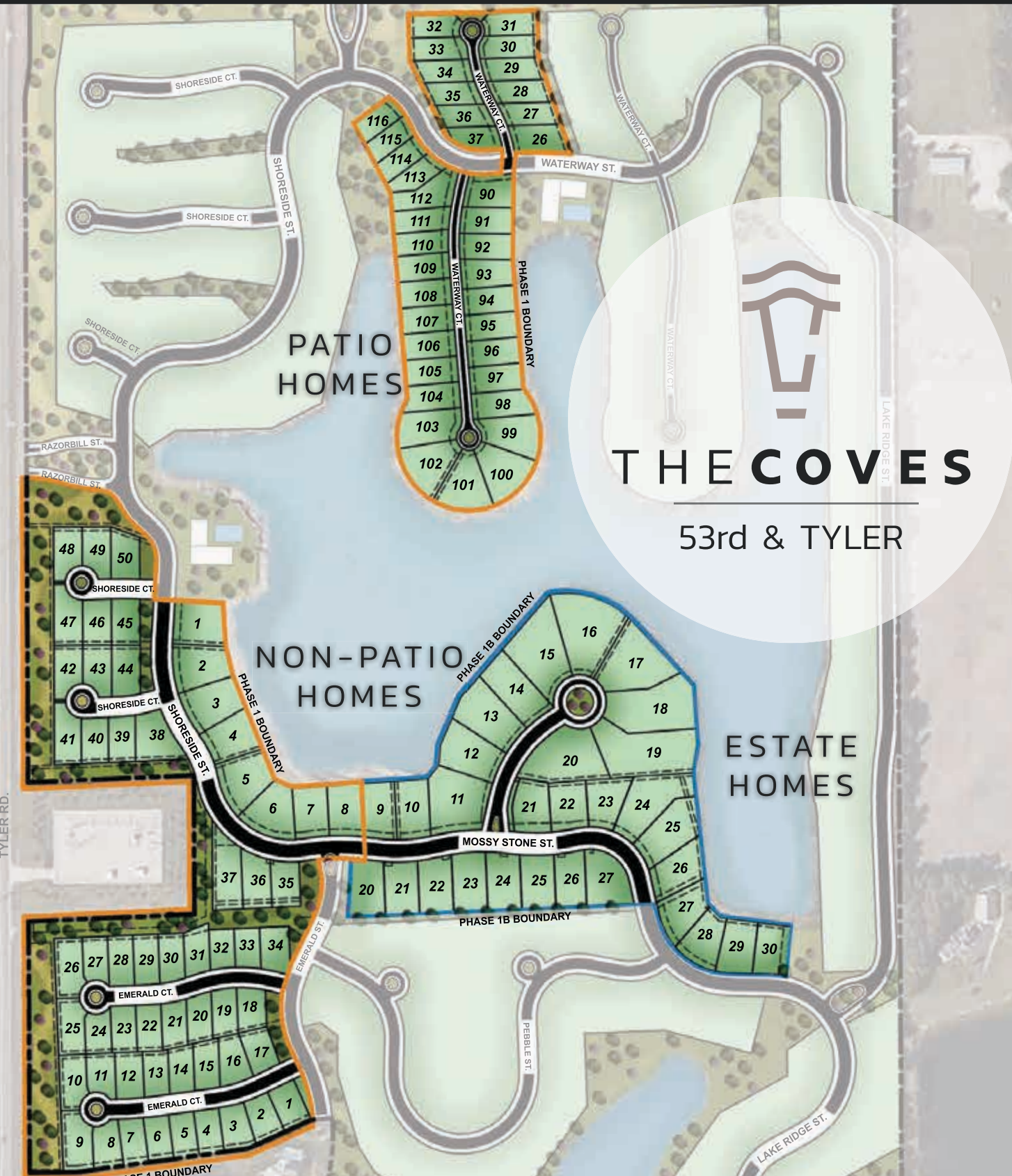
In today’s busy life, there isn’t always time to connect each day. With that in mind, Wendy has been known to put notes and messages on the inside of the garage door—thoughts of encouragement that her family sees as they leave the house for the day.

One of her favorite quotes that she returns to for strength is, “When you can’t control what’s happening, control the way you respond to what’s happening. Because that’s where your power is.”

As Wendy considers the path she and those around her take through life, she does so with deep care.

“Everyone who I meet and I help with a transaction, I want to become a lifelong friend. I want them to know they can count on me and reach out to me for anything,” she says. “I’m a REALTOR®, but I want to be more... I want them to see me as their friend who took good care of them.”

There’s no doubt that they do.



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KANSEL

▶ charity spotlight

Written by **Dave Danielson**
Photography by **Kelly Remacle Photography**

POSITIVE ACTION. LASTING IMPACT.

“The biggest reward for any of us is knowing the actions we are taking can positively change the lives of others and end lifelong or generational poverty and struggle.”

When you hear Thomas Montiel talk, KANSEL’s Executive Director, the excitement he has for what their grassroots organization is achieving is contagious.

KANSEL, a local nonprofit, is committed to creating academic and economic empowerment from within the local communities it serves.

“This organization has always been about helping people break down barriers to a better life.”

In 1989, KANSEL was founded to help advance the careers of local workers, who were limited by not having a high school diploma or needed to improve

their reading or math skills. Starting with six students in the basement of the local Machinist Union, KANSEL quickly grew to serving more than 100 students after partnering with the local United Way.

“Today, we serve over 1,100 families every year. Our education and literacy programs include GED Preparation, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Rock It Out Theater (a free youth performance arts program) and middle school summer camps.”

KANSEL Firebirds is Born

The newest KANSEL program, Firebirds, was created by volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s all about action. I was frustrated with specific barriers in the nonprofit and education communities that limited the ability to make real sustainable change to scale... Nonprofits do the great work of their missions but struggle to accomplish their mission... In education,



swagger of the movement. We were going to be a place for everyone to roll up their sleeves and get things done!”

“This program is a full family, all ages, come as you are, do-good work, volunteer program that helps people in our community realize their potential in reaching academic and economic freedom,” Thomas says. “We launched the group publicly on Valentine’s Day and had over 100 people sign up in just two weeks.”

It does not take long to realize Thomas does more than just talk, but he, and his incredible family, are a part of this volunteer movement as well. You can find him, along with his wife Karen, and their seven children at workdays and community events.

“They are all involved. With Firebirds, families are not a barrier to participate, we want everyone to be there. That is how you build for the future, by including it.” Thomas says with a smile.

Making Real Differences

Firebirds understand the power and influence action can have in inspiring and creating sustainable positive change in the lives of others. Providing their talent, time, and resources to the accomplishment of their shared mission in equal opportunity, personal responsibility, and the endless potential of others.

“Those who become KANSEL Firebirds embody the energy and strength of a community who believe in second chances and that the best things happen when everyone finds their place in this movement to uplift others,” Thomas says.

So far, the group has started to build an urban farm in north Wichita and participated in community events. They want to get the word out about resources that families have in making positive steps forward.

“In most cases, the solution isn’t about having the resources in the community. It’s about making sure people have an access and a bridge to those services so that they can take advantage of the benefits,” Thomas points out.

The passion and mission are clear.

“My favorite part of what we do is watching people find success through their own will and dedication, after giving them the right tools, that uniquely fit them. They get to discover they can accomplish great things. Our staff loves celebrating with students, dancing, and high fiving in the hallways when they pass a test or earn their high school diploma,” he says. “We’re here to make a real impact. This is not about resume-building. This is about community building.”

in our county, more than 72,000 adults are considered functionally illiterate, and nearly 50,000 in-school students are behind in reading and or math... That is not the world I want my children or your children to grow up in. We are going to have to start having the difficult conversations, without blame or fear, to move things forward.”

Thomas put out an open invite to join him for coffee on campus with the expectation one or two people might show up. To his amazement, dozens of people showed up over a series of coffee invites, many of which were meeting him and KANSEL for the first time.

“Firebirds really started taking shape when one person, who has since joined our board of directors, said that she was tired of people using soft language. She wanted organizations to be direct and for people to “step up or shut up.” That comment quickly became the identity and

To learn more about KANSEL:

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