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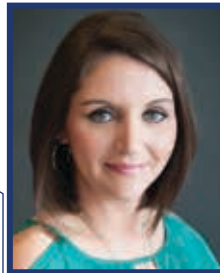
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS



**04**  
Meet the  
Staff



**09**  
Publisher's  
Note  
Dees  
Hinton



**12**  
Top  
Producer  
Austin  
Prowant



**20**  
Rising  
Stars  
Donna  
Burks and  
Iana Gilder



**28**  
Partner  
Spotlight  
Arthur  
"Skip"  
Jernigan  
Jernigan  
Copeland  
PLLC



**34**  
Holiday  
Social  
Night  
Recap



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▶ publisher's note: dees hinton

# Merry Christmas AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We had a great time kicking off the holidays with our social night on November 9 at Summerhouse in Ridgeland. There was a big turnout of REALTORS® and our ad partners. We love seeing everyone together, networking and having a good time. That's what we are all about – bringing everyone together so that you can make connections and get to know each other on a personal level to enhance relationships in your personal life and your business life. If you missed this one, don't worry, we will have another in a few short months!

December is a busy time for everyone in the real estate industry and at

home. We hope that everyone's year ends on a high note both professionally and personally. And we look forward to a new year. We have some new things planned in the publication and with our events for 2022, and we look forward to telling you about those in January!

Take time to rest and enjoy the holiday season!

*And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for*

*behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:9-11*

From the whole staff of *Central Mississippi Real Producers*, we wish you a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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# AUSTIN PROWANT

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OPENING DOORS HAS BEEN A LIFELONG OBSESSION FOR AUSTIN PROWANT, WHO FROM AN EARLY AGE FACED MANY DOORS THAT SEEMED CLOSED TO HIS DREAMS. GROWING UP IN A FAMILY OF VERY MODEST MEANS, THE FIRST CLOSED DOOR WAS THAT OF OPPORTUNITY. HE KNEW A COLLEGE EDUCATION WAS NOT AN OPTION AND REALIZED THE KEY TO HIS SUCCESS WOULD COME FROM HARD WORK AND HELPING OPEN DOORS FOR OTHERS.

Opening car doors were his first steps on his journey at the young age of 17. “I told a bit of a fib,” he recalls. “I told them I was 18. I sold a car to the first customer I talked to, and the general manager called me in and said that he couldn’t legally hire me, but he told me to come back when I turned 18.” Not deterred, Austin went to another dealership and there he told the truth about his age. “The owner there liked me and he took me under his wing. He saw something in me and became a mentor to me.” By the time he was 19, Austin was the general manager of that store. Austin says the car business “felt right,” and he ended up selling cars for the next twenty years. Opening doors to a life of luxury for his clients through automobile ownership was what he thought would be his lifelong career. “It was such a great and lasting feeling to see the joy on the faces of my customers and to

know that I helped play some small part in it,” says Austin. But something amazing and unexpected happened. One door closed and another beautiful door opened.

Austin was working as a manager at the Mercedes dealership in Jackson when he met his wife, Victoria, at I-Hop and was smitten. The couple married and on June 30, 2011, had their first child, Ariana. “My boss told me it was ‘just another day,’ to kiss the new baby, then come back to work to close out the month.” That incident made Austin take a hard look at what he was doing. He loved the car business, but the hours weren’t family-friendly. “I loved what I was doing and the connection with my customers was amazing. But I needed to find a different path.” Soon Austin would be opening entirely different doors for himself, his family, and many others.

The couple bought a new home in anticipation of their growing family. It was just after the recession and they were having trouble selling their old one. “We decided to rent the home out and we were fortunate to find some wonderful renters. We were hooked and wanted to purchase more rental properties. I encouraged Victoria to get her real estate license because she had a real passion for it. She did and we continued to buy more properties.” Today the couple owns a large residential and commercial property portfolio. Austin eventually ended up getting his license as well and left the car business for good. They started Southern Homes Real Estate in Flowood. In addition to being a real estate agent, broker, and owner, Austin enjoys helping people through the process of making the biggest decision of their lives. “We work to cultivate an environment

...





and culture of excellence by focusing on cutting edge technology and staying current with the trends in an ever-changing industry.” Austin is now opening doors to the golden dream of homeownership throughout the state of Mississippi. “There is the satisfaction of someone buying a car – that’s one thing, but handing the keys of a house to a family and seeing their visions of kids laughing and playing, birthday parties and warm fires during the holidays become a reality is absolutely priceless,” says Austin.

As successful as he has been, Austin readily admits he’s not the smartest person in the room, “But I can spot the smartest person and align myself with that person. I know what my gifts and talents are and I combine those with others’ gifts and talents to provide the very best for our clients. I feel like I have surrounded myself

with good people. I’ve always felt we should pour into others what we have learned. My passion is teaching people what I know and lifting them up.” Southern Homes Real Estate is part of the community. “We are not just a business in Flowood, we are neighbors. We live here and we are raising our children here.” Opening the doors of opportunity for family and friends and those he has mentored has been a gift. “It has been a blessing beyond measure,” says Austin.

Balancing work and family life is something Austin focuses on every day. “Family is my primary importance. While I am working all the time in real estate, we are able to carve out time for our family. I drive my kids to school and we take four family trips each year. It is our goal to visit all 50 states before our children turn 18.” Ariana is now 10, and their son,

Alexander, is 8. “My wife is the best partner in the world, so that helps!”

Austin started another company in 2020 with a partner called Property Addicts. “We buy and rehab homes. For each home we sell, we sponsor someone in treatment for addiction.” Austin considers this project one of the most rewarding endeavors of his life. “I am truly thankful for this chance to help those who may be out of chances themselves and only need a helping hand,” he says. “Those are doors of the most important kind.”

In his spare time, Austin is getting into hunting. “We recently purchased a hunting camp, so I’m looking forward to spending more time outdoors with my family.” He still enjoys cars but his priority is with his children and their activities. “They are both in soccer now, so we spend a lot of time



“ I LOVED WHAT I WAS DOING and the connection with my customers was amazing.”





## “ FAMILY IS MY PRIMARY IMPORTANCE. ”

While I am working all the time in real estate, we are able to carve out time for our family.

at the soccer fields. It's not unusual for both Victoria and I to be working on the sidelines, but we are still there for our kids.” He adds that the family tries to eat dinner together each evening and the dinner table is a no-phone zone. “We talk about our day, and then we spend time helping the kids with their homework. After they've gone to bed, we work for another couple of hours.”

Austin also serves on the board of directors of Harbor House in Byrum. “That's an important organization to me. They do excellent work there.”

So Austin may be many things to those he has met along the way, an eager young car salesman, a strong manager, a successful realtor, a devoted father and loving husband, a “producer,” but at his core, he sees himself as just a simple man opening doors and helping others. And that is a “REAL Producer” thing indeed.



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# Donna Burks & Iana Gilder

## ► rising stars

Written by **Susan Marquez**. Photography by **Abe Draper Photography**

### Three Rivers' Dynamic Duo

Anyone who meets Donna Burks and Iana Gilder immediately knows they are a dynamic duo. "That's what many call us," says Iana. Donna agrees, explaining that they have known each other and worked together long before they ever got into real estate. "I worked for an insurance company," says Donna. She explains that she had "teacher hours," meaning when school was out, she worked from home so she could be with her daughter. "After working from home for the summer, I returned to the office and there was a new girl in the office." That "new girl" was Iana. "She needed to be trained, and we became fast friends."

Donna grew up in north Mississippi, but she has lived in the Jackson/Brandon area with her husband for 27 years. She has a daughter who graduates from Belhaven next spring. Iana's journey to her Mississippi job was an interesting one. A native of Moldova, Iana first visited America in 2007. "I came back again in 2008 after college," she says. "I lived in Orange Beach for three years working in the food and beverage industry. I moved to Jackson after an oil spill in Orange Beach and decided I wanted something different. I applied to many different banks, but I had not heard back from any of them. After a divine appointment, I met the CEO of an insurance company and he hired me almost immediately."

Donna and Iana became fast friends and enjoyed working together. But Iana wanted something more in life and was introduced to someone at Keller Williams who told her about the training program there. She decided she was going to go for it.

When Iana told Donna about her plans, Donna was stunned. "From the time I was in high school I have been infatuated with the market and with real estate. It's something I thought about from time to time but had never pursued. In the back of my mind, I thought I might go into real estate when my daughter went to college, but with my daughter in dance and soccer, a more flexible schedule sounded appealing." What amazed Donna was that she had never talked about real estate with Iana until that day.

Donna and Iana took the real estate course in 2017. "We took the test together, and got our license together," recalls Donna. "We met and talked with Tena Myers. She not only became our managing broker, but she was also, and still is, so much more."

When Tena started Three Rivers Real Estate, Donna and Iana followed her. "If not for Tena, I don't think we would be where we are today," says Donna. "She has been our spiritual leader,

...

Jabez cried out  
to the God of  
Israel, 'Oh, that  
you would

*Bless Me*

and enlarge my  
territory. Let your  
hand be with me,  
and keep me from  
harm so that I will  
be free from pain.'  
And God granted  
his request."

*Chronicles 4:10*



therapist, mentor, and more." Iana says that she owes so much to Tena. "She will work to find peace for you," she says. "I can call her day or night, and she will always answer."

Since getting into real estate, Donna and Iana have always worked together. "If we absolutely have to be in two places at once, we will split up, but generally, we are always together," Donna explains. "Our clients see that as a great asset, as they have two agents working for them instead of one." Iana says they really try to get to know their clients. "We both have the same goal," she says, "which is helping people find their dream home." In the process, Donna and Iana say many of their clients have become friends, with some becoming like family.

Working together has lots of advantages, including having another person to pick up the slack when the other is not operating at one hundred percent. "If I'm not mentally prepared, or if I'm having a difficult day," Donna says, "Iana's positive personality always lifts me up. I try to do the same for her."

“  
Our clients see  
that as a great  
asset, as they  
have two agents  
working for them  
instead of one.”

...

With a passion for fur babies, Donna and Iana both support CARA (Community Animal Rescue and Adoption). "We have done a fundraiser for them in the past, but we haven't been able to do much during the Covid pandemic," says Donna. "We want to do another fundraiser soon," adds Iana, who says that CARA doesn't have central air or heat at their Jackson facility. "We are collaborating with the Builder's Association to try to provide a more comfortable environment for the animals there."

Donna and Iana both believe their initial meeting was meant to be. It began with an office relationship and grew into a loving partnership in real estate.



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# Arthur “Skip” Jernigan

JERNIGAN COPELAND PLLC

From Football Field to Fielding Title Issues

Written by **Susan Marquez**. Photography by **Abe Draper Photography**



hundreds of adoptions for Mississippi Children’s Home Services, other agencies, and private parties.

One area he especially liked was dealing with titles. “We bought a new building and had the opportunity to get into the real estate title closing business. With the space we had, in the location we had, and with easy front-door parking, it just made sense, so we thought we’d give it a go.”

That was two years ago, and today Jernigan Copeland Title is going strong. “I reached out to Cathy Finch, an expert real estate paralegal, to see what she thought of the idea. She liked it and now we are in it together. Cathy works with lenders and does all the document preparation. I manage all the peripheral issues, and that can get interesting.”

Skip says that all kinds of things can pop up when it comes to titles. “There can be an obscure lien that was never taken off, or even Scribner’s errors, where someone made a mistake when typing a deed. There can be a lot of clean-up to be done that requires a lawyer.” Skip says he also works with builders a good bit. “We have had issues with people who buy houses and realize after they moved in that the builders didn’t do what they were supposed to do. Oftentimes, when that happens, they need a lawyer.”

The dynamics of a deal and the people involved keep Skip’s work interesting day-to-day. “It’s interesting to go to a closing with a buyer and a seller. The sellers often get very attached to their property, and it can lead to a very emotional experience. I see it especially with older folks who are downsizing. They may be selling the home they raised their kids in, celebrated holidays in, and where they built a lifetime of memories. It can be

After a lifetime of practicing law, Arthur “Skip” Jernigan has settled into a niche that he is enjoying. Helping people get into a home with the least amount of hassle is something that gives him personal satisfaction.

Raised in Jackson, Skip attended Murrah High School. After graduating, he headed north to Oxford, where he played football for Ole Miss. “I played football with Archie Manning.” Like many young men, the lessons Skip learned on the football field continued to serve him well in life. Hard work always equals success.

He stayed in Oxford to attend law school, then went on to have an “interesting and varied” law practice for many years at Jernigan Copeland PLLC law firm. In addition to handling complex insurance and other types of litigation, Jernigan has also practiced in the area of adoption law for over forty years, having handled

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...



“The market is good, and we have low interest rates. Historically, when mortgage rates are low it is a good time to be in the title business. We’ve always handled commercial property titles, and it’s nice to have the opportunity to expand into the residential area.”



...

hard for them to imagine someone else living there. There is a reason they call attorneys 'counselor at law,' because it's not unusual to counsel people during the process."

The timing for starting this new business was perfect, "The market is good, and we have low interest rates. Historically, when mortgage rates are low it is a good time to be in the title business. We've always handled commercial property titles, and it's nice to have the opportunity to expand into the residential area." Skip says he's been in practice for a long time and going into the title business has been a good way for him to do something that isn't as stressful. "It is stressful to a certain extent, but I don't really bring it home with me."

Home is in Madison, where he has lived since 1999. He has been married to Judy Williams Jernigan for 50 years. "Judy is from Jackson, as well." The couple raised two sons, and they now have three grandchildren.

For 15 years, Skip has been involved with Mississippi Baptist Health Systems, now serving as chairman of the board of trustees. "I really love being involved with them. It's a way to help people in our community. They do excellent work." In his spare time, Skip is an avid duck hunter. He also enjoys playing golf with some of the guys he once played football with at Ole Miss. "We have a text group we call 'The Dirty 30.'" Skip also enjoys watching his granddaughter ride. "She is a hunter-jumper horse rider, and she is really good at it."



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