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TABLE OF CONTENTS

 <p>10 Publisher's Note Still Here.</p>	 <p>14 Rising Star Lisa Thomas</p>	 <p>18 Event Recap TacO' Clock</p>
 <p>24 Cover Story Michelle Knobloch</p>	 <p>30 Broker Spotlight Diane Abadie</p>	 <p>34 Partner Spotlight Webb Wartelle</p>

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» publisher's note

Still HERE.

By Gina Miller



We did it.
We gathered.
We partied.
We celebrated.
The high winds of April knocked us off our rockers, and we had to bump our original Spring Networking event to May, but we did it.
We recovered.
We took the photos and we had a good time. *Check them out in this issue! So many happy faces!*

Change is synonymous with the past year and a half. A lot of plot twists and turns and what nows. Sometimes it's felt like the world doesn't want us to get together, have fun, or laugh! If not COVID, you want to cause a storm and blow the power lines an hour before the event I've been working on for months!?! What the heck?!

It's all in the attitude. We can grumble and give up and see the negative, or we can embrace the day and deal with the disappointments and seek the beauty instead of the bitter.

Just last month I watched as my neighbors placed their belongings outside and lined the streets after floodwaters swept in and took over ... all their possessions soaked and ruined and waiting at the curb for trash pickup. Breaks our hearts.

It happened to the kind-hearted and the cold-hearted.
It happened to the sinners and the saints.
It happens.

As I meet with the real producers of our area, I am not surprised anymore to hear of the struggles and hurdles so many have had to overcome. Every cover story, rising star, broker, and partner we've featured has a story laced in tenacity and grit.

Michelle Knobloch sat down with me over lunch a couple of months ago and shared with me a portion of her journey. She is an incredible REALTOR®, but more than that she is an incredible person. She could have easily said,

this is too difficult, and given in to the challenges she's faced with her health ... but she didn't. She saw the beauty. She sees the beauty.

What an honor to feature her as our cover story this month.
I am an advocate of story.

I know that what we are doing here at *Baton Rouge Real Producers* is reaching you and encouraging you and strengthening the relationships within our real estate community.

I am proud of each of you. Like Mama Bear proud.

You are telling the obstacles, high winds, power outages and negativity to kiss your backside and staying in the race. Keep running.

There was a time I could have given up, too.

I'm still here.
Gina

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Lisa Thomas

ALL IN ATTITUDE



▶▶ rising star

By Breanna Smith | Photos by Aaron Cox

While in Orange Beach, Alabama, Memorial Day weekend 2018, Lisa Oliver Thomas turned to her husband, Jason, and said, “When you retire, we should move to the beach, and I’ll get my real estate license and sell condos.” Not sure how serious she was, he replied with a short “uh, okay.”

They had purchased a condo in Orange Beach three years before, and they make time to get away four to five times a year with their Cairn Terrier, Toby, for some rest and relaxation. This trip was different, though, because Lisa was having to think about a new career path. In April 2016 she left her long-time position as an executive assistant to focus full time on her successful direct sales business helping others learn to meal prep. But then her business took a major hit due to the 2016 flood. “When you don’t have a working kitchen, you don’t really care about meal prepping,” she said. Lisa worked hard to keep her business going, but ultimately it just wasn’t bringing in the income needed, and it was time to figure out her next chapter in life. “I went from two full-time incomes to half of an income in four months.” She turned to the words she lives by: The past is not perfect, but it’s how we react and move forward that matters.

As she reflected on the ups and downs of recent years while watching the waves lap onto the beach, she thought more about what she had just told her husband, and it made her think back



to a conversation she had with her dad and sister back in 2011. They suggested she get her real estate license, but she was adamant that it wasn’t the industry for her. “I was like, y’all are crazy... I would never, ever do that.” But as she sat there thinking about her current job situation the more she thought maybe she should give real estate a try in Baton Rouge. The whole process of buying the condo had intrigued her, including the ease and professionalism of her agent. Plus, Jason wasn’t retiring anytime soon, and she would need experience before moving to the beach.

Give It Heart

Six weeks after they got home from the beach, Lisa had completed real

estate school and had passed both the national and state licensing exams. She hit the ground running with Latter & Blum Perkins. “I’m an all-in person, so when I got licensed, I was immediately going to meetings, participating in training, taking phone duty, holding other agent’s listings open and shadowing whenever possible.”

Lisa’s parents instilled in her a dedicated work ethic while emphasizing the importance of putting her heart in everything she does. Her mom, Carolyn Oliver, taught her to cook from a young age. “My mom has always loved to plan a get-together and take care of the whole menu. I definitely got my love for cooking and party planning from my mom!” Lisa says others are always commenting about how organized she is. “I owe that all to my mom; she is the most organized person I know, and I am not half as organized as her!”

Her dad, William “Bill” Oliver, started his 37-year career as a BellSouth engineer, rising through the ranks to become the president of BellSouth and later AT&T Louisiana. Lisa remembers fondly his unique professional presence built on seeing others smile. When they would walk around before sporting events, he would chat and get to know people, eventually making someone’s day by giving them tickets to the big game or upgrading them to suite tickets. “That was just who he was,” she said. “He was an

“ I never have limiting beliefs. I seek out what successful people are doing and tell myself it is the norm.





amazing person that had the ability to make everyone feel special.” He has been the biggest influence on her career, she said.

“I watched him for 40+ years working his way from entry-level to top-level... The key was listening, keeping your cool and following through,” she said. “My sister and I talk often about how we can never be him, but I do think he is looking down and very proud of us.” His professional yet caring demeanor has inspired her throughout her life and career, showing her the value of grit and working to make other’s lives a little better. Lisa also attributes much of her success to the guidance of her broker, Connie Kyle. “She believed in me from the minute we met. She is truly gold in this business and makes me want to be the best REALTOR® I can be!”

Lisa is a supporter of Go Red for Women locally, the American Heart Association’s signature women’s initiative. It is a comprehensive platform designed to increase women’s heart health awareness and serve as a catalyst for change to improve the lives of women. “That cause is close to my

heart, no pun intended.” Her mother was diagnosed with Atrial Fibrillation four years ago, and her father had a defibrillator put in just two months before his unexpected passing. As a tribute and a way to help others, she donates a percentage of her closings to the Cardiology Fund at Ochsner, which creates opportunities for improvements and innovations in patient care that are changing and saving lives every day.

Envision It

Lisa dreams big and reminds herself of her goals daily with her vision board hanging above her desk in her home office. Those from years past hang on the wall behind her, serving as reminders of her long-term mission and goals accomplished.

“I never have limiting beliefs. I seek out what successful people are doing and tell myself it is the norm. I think that’s one thing that has kept me from having small goals.”

Lisa didn’t just jump into her own real estate career but also immediately got involved locally to grow the industry. She serves on multiple committees

with GBRAR, is a 2019 graduate of the LA Realtors Leadership Program, served on the 2020 Board for Women’s Council of REALTORS® as Program Director, participated in 2020 YPN, and is a second-year Major Investor.

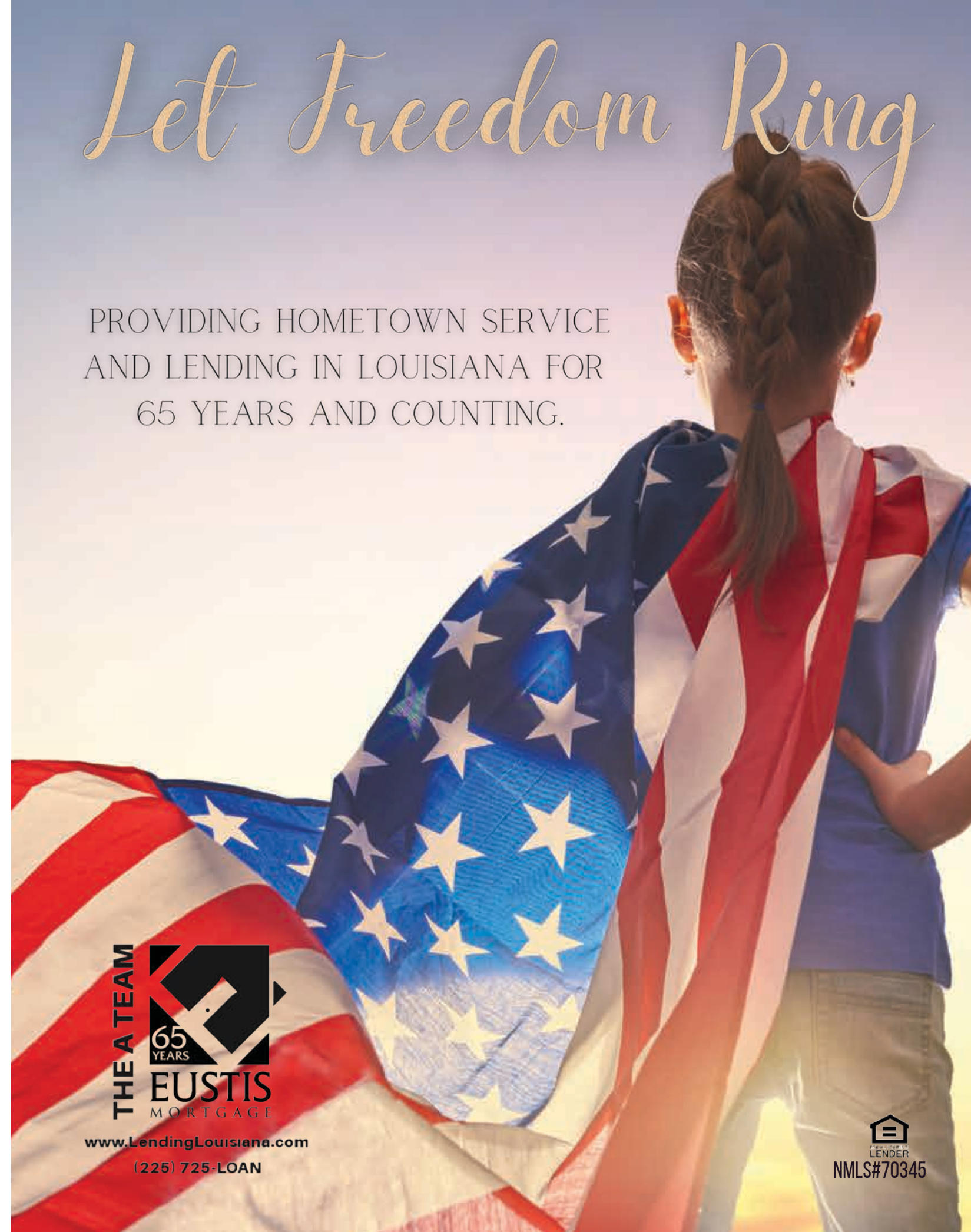
How does she do it all? With the support of her family and friends, she said. Her husband, Jason, and daughter, Ellen, 25, are her biggest cheerleaders. “He never had a doubt,” she said of Jason. “He just knew real estate was for me. I also have amazing in-laws. My mother-in-law is always first to comment on a post or ask me how business is going!”

Wine helps, too. Lisa and Jason’s favorites right now are Phantom by Bogle and Zinfandel by VGS Vineyards. This past May, Ellen finished grad school then they added a son to the family the same month when Ellen married Benn. Lisa says maybe it is time to put a family trip to Napa and Sonoma on the vision board to celebrate new beginnings and heart-warming successes.



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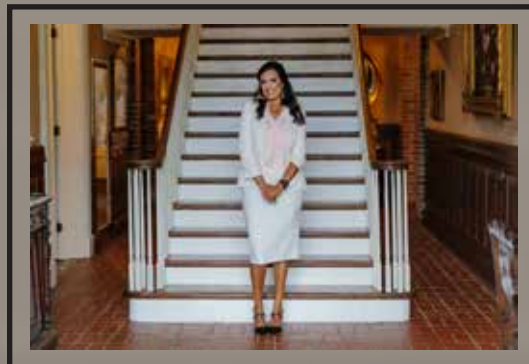
Michelle

► cover story

By Breanna Smith | Photos by Aaron Cox

KNOBLOCH

Michelle Knobloch was coaching her son's basketball team through a game when suddenly, something didn't feel right. By the time she got home, she decided she needed to go to an urgent care clinic but felt so weak she could barely get to the phone. Since her soon-to-be husband was out of town, her director of operations stopped by to check on her. Shortly after arriving, she rushed Michelle to the emergency room.



Doctors told Michelle she suffered an aorta dissection, a life-threatening tear in her lower aorta that extended to her abdomen. "By the grace of God it didn't go into my kidneys – it went right past them so I didn't have kidney failure." Doctors diagnosed Michelle with Marfan Syndrome, a condition that affects connective tissue. "I was a health nut doing triathlons, watching what I eat, staying hydrated all the time – I took care of myself. But you never know when you will be faced with something huge in your life that gives you a brand new perspective. It gave me a profound, deep appreciation for life."

Lean on Me

Michelle enjoys being a trusted confidant her friends and peers look to for an encouraging word, an empathetic ear and a helping hand. She volunteers with St. Jude Church, youth ministry and several professional organizations in Ascension and Greater Baton Rouge.

"I love to give back to our next generation of kids and young adults, inspiring them and helping them get through life," she said.

Following her diagnosis, she saw the power of friendship, generosity and kindness all come right back to her. "I'm a giving person with my heart and my time, and to see that all come right back to me – it was touching to have all of the love and support that came back to me just because I was there for them at some point. I've been someone that a lot of people lean on and being in that vulnerable state was not easy. My kids, my family, my business – all bases were covered. I don't know what I would have done had I not had my fiancé, sister and director of operations by my side," she said. "They did any and everything for me; they moved mountains." Her friends and family supported her each step of the



way as she recovered and began building her new lifestyle with a renewed perspective.

One Step at a Time

For years, triathlons were Michelle’s escape – her favorite way to spend “me time.”

After losing her mother during a particularly tough year, she turned to running to clear her mind. Michelle quickly developed a passion for it and pushed herself to the next level, competing in triathlons where she would swim, bike and run for long distances. She had been training for a half IronMan in Georgia before her diagnosis. “It was my therapy, my morning routine and a habit that was ingrained in me that made me strong when I was weak,” she said. “Having it stripped took a new level of soul searching and reigniting my purpose in life.”

As she has made major changes to her lifestyle, opting for walks around the neighborhood in place of triathlon training, she’s had an amazing support system right by her side with her family and work family at Keller Williams Red Stick Partners.

“When your environment and support system is rock solid and fueled by your faith, you are in the best position to face anything life throws at you,” she said.

Each day, she strives to live life by design with faith, intention and passion at the center of everything she does. She thanks Mary Garner DeVoe, the Team Leader of Red Stick Partners in 2006. “When I walked into our office, she saw a fire in me that I did not know was there and helped to ignite that, and it was the beginning of creating a life by design.”

The French Settlement native does not let anything slow her down – not a diagnosis, not a change in lifestyle and certainly not doubt. Each day she is invigorated by those around her, especially her kids, Abby, 14, Ethan, 11, and her bonus daughters Kayleigh, 18, and Miranda, 27. “My kids are my why. I want to create a legacy for them and my team.”

And don’t let her polished look fool you; she’s not afraid to get down to business, whether flipping a property with her fiancé, Fred, or spending time on the water. “People see me as girly, but I’m a huge tomboy. I clean up nice, but I will get dirty. I grew



up fishing, crawfishing, rabbit and deer hunting. I love the outdoors and being in nature.”

Michelle keeps putting one foot in front of the other, pushing forward and always striving to uplift those around her. She lives by her best advice: Make every day count. Use those talents and share them daily... “You are never promised tomorrow.”



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DIANE ABADIE

CAPITAL REAL ESTATE

For years, Diane Abadie and her husband, Michael, hit the open road for rides and rallies with the Christian Motorcycle Association and other groups. These days, Diane is along for a new ride as an owner of Capital Real Estate alongside her son, Cam Pyle. It's her new big adventure with only a little less leather.

Along for the Ride

Diane began riding motorcycles with Michael shortly after they got married. When they married, he brought a few heavy boxes and stuck them in the attic. "One day, I came home and found out there was a motorcycle in pieces in them, and he had put them together."

After attending a few rides and rallies on the back of Michael's bike, Diane decided it was time for a motorcycle of her own. Her dad had a Honda Shadow in the garage. "It was beautiful. He said I could *borrow* it to learn how to ride, and I never gave it back," she said with a smile.



Diane is always up for a new experience and ready to “collect calories” at the newest restaurant. Her sense of adventure and desire to uplift others is evident in her business style.

In the late 1990s, after a stint as a salesperson for the Yellow Pages, Michael introduced her to Becky Miller, an agent with C.J. Brown who sent her to Connie Kyle, and there was no looking back. She cracks up remembering the fun times and memories she made with the three other ladies that were also rookies at the time. “We went into a house we weren’t supposed to be in accidentally,” she said with a big laugh. “We walked into the house thinking, “Isn’t it supposed to be empty?” and then someone noticed breakfast dishes in the sink, and we realized it was the wrong house!”

Over 22 years, she has made plenty of memories and learned valuable lessons. “I always say I could write a book, but by now, I could write two books!”

She enjoys the nuances of each transaction and the opportunity to learn from every experience. Above all, she trusts her gut.

“Connie Kyle told me on a very challenging day early on in my real estate life to “go with your gut!” It’s advice Diane didn’t take lightly. She trusts

her gut and brings her strong work ethic, passion for people and zeal for life along for the ride.

In 2005, she felt the call to a new avenue to help others get what they wanted out of life.

“I ended up at the Keller Williams office during Katrina,” she said, recalling that Mary Garner DeVoe had invited her to come to the office many times.

“They were the only place that had a telephone, and they had ice chests and said whoever wants to come over here, we don’t care what company you’re with, the next person that comes in the door, they’re yours!” She continued, “There was no competition; it was all about getting out there and helping people. I just fell in love with that.”

New Chapter
As Diane began thinking about the future, her son Cameron approached her with an idea. The two would co-own a boutique brokerage built on personalized service, communication and availability. “I never thought about having my own company. I just wanted to be a good REALTOR®.”

But she had to admit it sounded better than her idea of gathering a “crew of sort-of retired REALTORS®,” she said with a whooping laugh.

Diane went with her gut and buckled up. She trusted in her relationships and, with encouragement from Cam, earned her broker’s license. “Cam has really been my inspiration. I never thought he would get into real estate because he’s a successful professional musician, but gee – it’s been fun. I’m so glad we did it,” she said with a big smile.

The two started Capital Real Estate in 2018 and in 2020, celebrated their most successful year ever.

“Proof of worth can be gained with compassion, kindness, competence and generosity by DOING. Then, do not quit, because every day is a new opportunity,” she said.

Diane seeks adventure every day, and with each new friendship she forms, especially those with her fellow REALTORS®.

“Once you have a personal experience with another agent, working together on the biggest thing in someone else’s life, you get to know them and remember them. That’s been one of the most joy-filled parts of my real estate career – getting to know other REALTORS®, getting comfortable with them, helping them and having them help me.”

Where’s Diane?
After a long day, Diane can be found relaxing in her she-shed. The name doesn’t quite fit the getaway spot Michael built for her after she requested a storage shed for her signs. It is so much more. Michael, a chaplain and retired home inspector, got to work on Diane’s one-of-a-kind she-shed, complete with a porch for sipping wine, living room for curling up with a good book and a jewelry-making station for when creativity sparks. “It’s not like anyone else’s, and he built it from the ground up,” Diane said. He repurposed the windows from a 98-year old home in the Garden District Diane has sold three times ... most recently to her son, Cam.

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▶ partner spotlight

WEBB WARTELLE

Old Republic Home Protection

By Breanna Smith | Photos by Aaron Cox

What happens in Vegas is supposed to stay in Vegas ... but when Webb and Leah Wartelle attended a real estate conference there in the early 2000s, they met with an Old Republic Home Protection representative. Soon, headquarters tapped them to bring Old Republic Home Protection to Louisiana. They were sold on the company's mission: people helping people.

Protection and Peace of Mind

According to a NerdWallet study, only about 31 percent of homeowners say they do not have money set aside for home repairs — and about 44% of homeowners experience their first unexpected repair within the first year of purchasing their home. With the protection of a home warranty, you can turn a budget-busting headache into a minor inconvenience.

That type of problem-solving and a *people helping people* approach is at the foundation of Old Republic Home Protection, a home warranty company that has been in business for nearly 50 years.

Webb is most proud of the client-centric service Old Republic provides every step of the way — from easy-to-understand contracts to the courteous and helpful call-center staff clients use to request repair service.

The company's foundation falls in line with his core principles. "Create a mindset that instills good habits and removes or eliminates bad habits or energy-draining activities," Webb said.

"We're always revamping the plan to make it more consumer-friendly or make it easier to understand," Webb said. And when clients call in a request for repair service, the wheels are immediately set in motion to dispatch a qualified, insured, independent Network Service Provider to handle covered services.

Webb is dedicated to serving those around him, always looking for a way to help his clients breathe easier. He and Leah often discuss work "after hours," thinking through ways to better serve their clients and support REALTORS® at the dinner table. Webb attributes the company's steady

growth and top position to Leah. She is an industry expert with 30 years under her belt and continuously brings new perspectives to navigate unique situations. "She was doing this a full 10 years before I was, and we have 30 years of relationships built here," he said.

Real Service for REALTORS®

Each week, Webb delivers boxes of renewal notices and newsletters to his REALTOR® partners that they have personalized with their names, photos and contact information. "I look like the postman some days," he said with a chuckle. It's one of his favorite ways of showing REALTORS® how much he appreciates them. "Doing this for 20 years, I've built a lot of relationships," he said. "And yes, they're clients, but they're friends first."

Old Republic was one of the first companies to offer a website platform for agents to create personalized newsletters for their clients.

"We realize that 99.9% of our business is through real estate agents.

...

“CREATE A MINDSET THAT INSTILLS GOOD HABITS AND REMOVES OR ELIMINATES BAD HABITS OR ENERGY-DRAINING ACTIVITIES.”

They're the ones providing us with the business, so we are thankful for each of them and the business they have trusted us with over the years.”

Old School Values, New School Service

By putting people first, Old Republic has built a reputation as the best in the business. The company has a lion-share of the statewide market – the largest state market share in the nation. But being at the top is no reason to slow down, Webb said. “It’s not only getting to the top of the mountain but getting to the top and saying ‘what can I do to get better?’” Webb said. “Half the battle is getting there, the other part is analyzing and making adjustments.” Webb and the Old Republic team continue to find ways to better serve their clients and support their REALTOR® partners. “We do business the old-fashioned way. You always have to revamp things, but you have to remember what got

you to where you are.” Relationships are at the heart of Old Republic Home Protection - that’s what led Webb and Leah to Old Republic, and what they continue to build on after 17 years with the company.

“Our goal as a warranty company is to make the homeowners raving fans of the real estate agent that recommended us,” he said. “We always try to exceed your clients’ expectations and strive to do better.”



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-Deante' Thomas with Keller Williams Red Stick Partners



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Tell us about your education.
Baton Rouge kid through and through. I went to Catholic High School. Then got my BA from LSU in International Studies and French. I then went on to get my JD from Southern University Law Center were I graduated from in 2016.

Why did you want to become an attorney?
I was naturally drawn to the law and was told since a young age that I should be an attorney. I worked in the family business as a Professional Landman for a while after I finished my undergrad degree at LSU. By doing this type of work, I learned a lot about property law, real estate law, mineral law, contracts, etc. and became very interested. Then in about 2012 when the oil & gas market took a hit I decided to go back to law school.

If you were not practicing law, what would be your alternate profession?
I would probably be back working in the oil & gas industry or working back with the Walt Disney Company and/or Universal Studios.

What is one thing you wish you would have known before you went to law school?
How to manage my time better! That is by far one of the most valuable things I learned in law school. It is something I still practice in my everyday life and without good time management there is no way I could accomplish everything that needs to be done.

Are you involved with any other organizations or causes?
My wife and I are parishioners at St. Jude Catholic Church. I am also a member of the American Bar Association and the Louisiana Bar Association.

What is the best piece of advice you have received?
"Why worry? If you've done the very best you can, then worrying won't make it any better."

Tell us something interesting about yourself.
I attended the French immersion program at St. Anne's University in Nova Scotia, Canada twice and I am still fluent in French.

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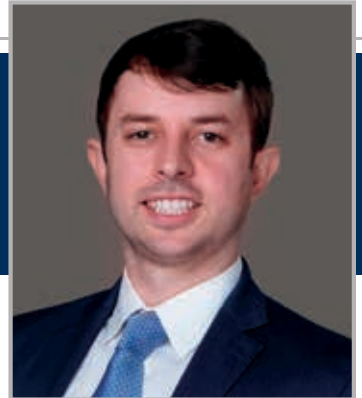
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