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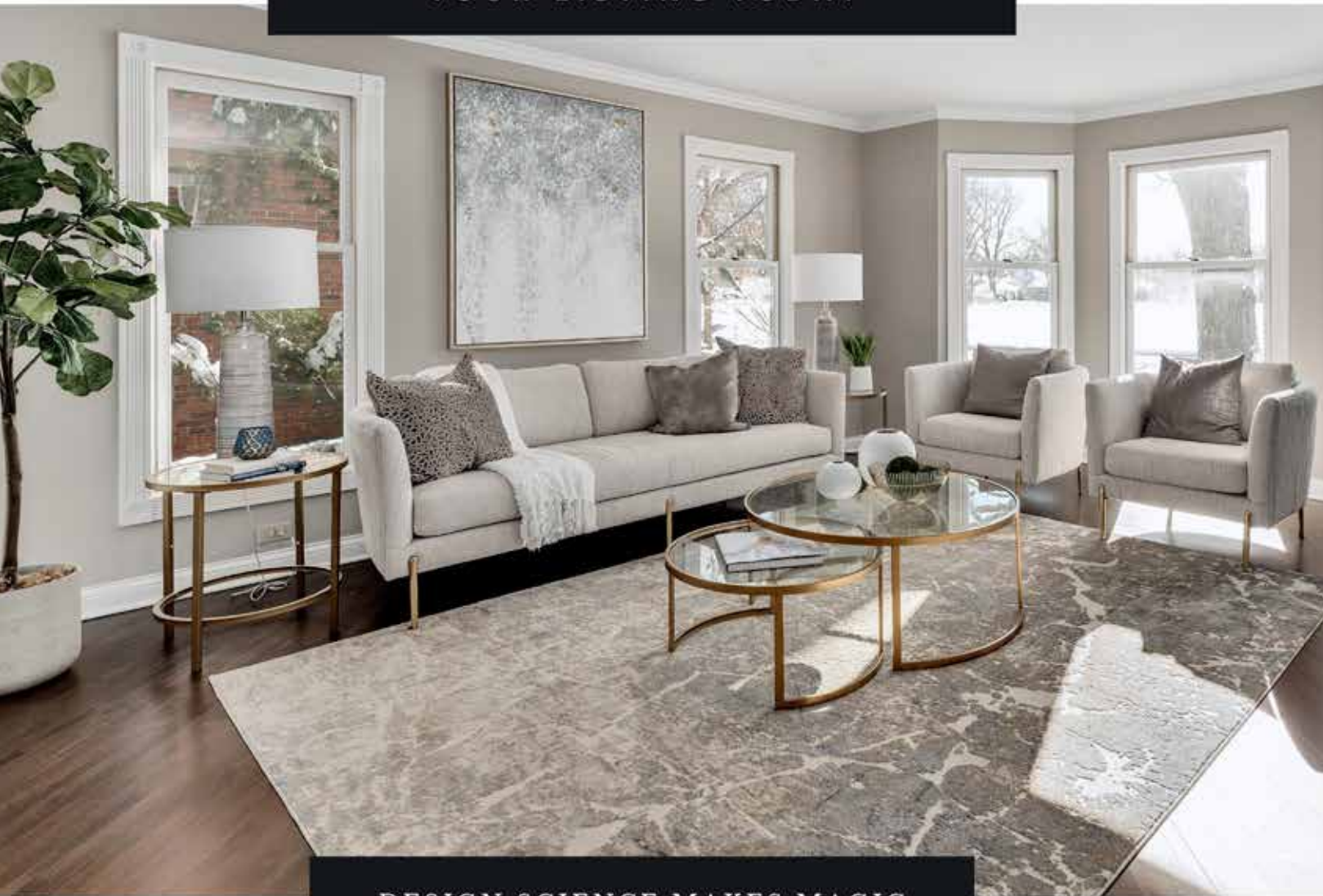
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PUBLISHER'S note

I was reminiscing with a friend recently recalling some of the conversations I had with people at the end of March last year. Knowing what we know now, we were laughing at how naive we were simply because of the uncharted territory that lay ahead of us at the time. I'm sure most of you can relate as those exchanges went something like this:

"Hey, I think we might have to reschedule our dinner plans for next week."

"Yeah I agree, let's circle back in a couple weeks toward the middle of April and wait for this whole COVID thing to die down."

Little did we know what was ahead. It is refreshing and hopeful to see signs of light at the end of the tunnel. Most of you who follow me on Facebook know that I take my two older daughters to Dunkin' Donuts religiously every Friday morning before school. This came to a halt last year and it was energizing to finally start the #DunkinDonutsDaddyDaughtersDateDay tradition again! The experience has been a little different without eating inside, but nevertheless, it is a small taste of normalcy.

I guess what I am trying to communicate is that it feels like we are on mile 23 of this marathon. The challenge is that the finish line is so arbitrary. How will one know when it is crossed? Time will only tell, and I believe that it is right around the corner!

Fighting the good fight,



Andy Burton
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Virtual JAM SESSIONS



DUPAGE REAL PRODUCERS
JAM SESSION #5 **f LIVE**
 An intergalactic conversation about DuPage real estate

Participants: ALICE CHH, EVA BURKE, LEZ EDNEY, MONDY PANLAK, THE MARIE MATTEIN, NORA BENCHONET, THERESA JOHNSON, THOMAS NEUBRECKER, RYAN MORVATH

Hosted by: ANDY BURTON

TUESDAY MAY 4TH 9:15 AM CST

DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live. *The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page. In-attendance guaranteed.

virtual events

Top REALTORS® and Preferred Partners Engaging Virtually

As an organization, we are fully aware of the need to continue to connect, inspire, elevate, and add value to both our REALTORS® and Preferred Partners during a time when we are unable to host in-person events. As a response to this need, we have started hosting virtual jam sessions with the *DuPage Real Producers* community.

Jam sessions are small group Zoom calls designed to get a handful of experts on a call (both REALTORS® and Preferred Partners) to discuss what they are seeing in their industry and to help add value to the individuals who are able to tune in. This is a great way to meet people on a more personal level and to get to know what's happening in different industries in the real estate community.

Jam sessions have been filled with creative ways to encourage our *DuPage Real Producers* community to continue to engage and serve as a way to build relationships. Plus, it has been great seeing even more engagement as we have recently been hosting sessions on Facebook Live!

A huge thank you to all our amazing REALTORS® and Preferred Partners for your willingness to join together as a community and maintain our human connection!



DUPAGE REAL PRODUCERS
Jam Session #4 **f LIVE**
 An organic conversation about DuPage real estate

Participants: Maureen Rooney, Samantha Bauman, Gail Niemeier, Kris Maranda, Jackie Angiello, Chase Michels, Diana Ivan, Diane Coyle, Nathan Stillwell, Pete Rodriguez, Janelle Iacino, Woytek Niemiec, Gary Giovannelli, Michael Patti, Tia Duderstadt, Margaret Gehr

Hosted by: ANDY BURTON

Thursday April 8th 9:15 am CST

DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live. *The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page. In-attendance guaranteed.

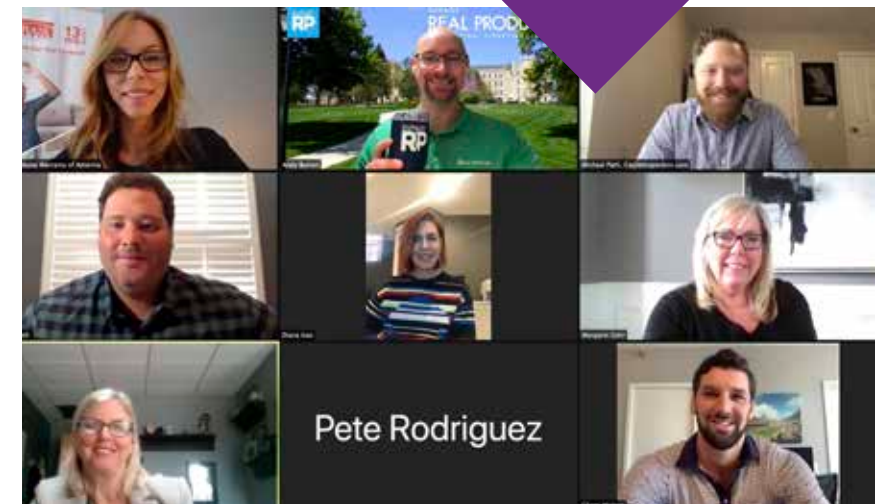
DUPAGE REAL PRODUCERS
Jam Session #6 **f LIVE**
 An organic conversation about DuPage real estate

Participants: Chase Michels, Diana Ivan, Diane Coyle, Nathan Stillwell, Pete Rodriguez, Michael Patti, Tia Duderstadt, Margaret Gehr

Hosted by: ANDY BURTON

Tuesday May 18th 9:15 am CST

DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live. *The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page. In-attendance guaranteed.



We have received great feedback about these events so we are continuing to schedule them for the summer! Want to join one? Let us know by emailing us at andy.burton@realproducersmag.com.



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▶▶ on the rise

By Lauren Young
Photos by Katherin Frankovic



Courtney Monaco

LIVING LIFE BY DESIGN

If you were to ask REALTOR® Courtney Monaco which movie character she most identifies with, she'd tell you that it's Sandra Bullock from *The Blind Side*. "That mom is a strong woman with a selfless heart," she says. "She knows how to tell people what they need to hear, not what they want to hear, and in a caring way. That's my goal in my life, too. I want to help people reach their full potential."

Courtney and her two siblings grew up in Darien, Illinois, raised by entrepreneurial parents and accomplished grandparents. Their grandfather taught them the importance of taking control of their own futures. From both grandmothers, they learned that

serving others with a kind and giving heart is the path to true happiness. It may come as no surprise then that all three siblings pursued a career in sales. Courtney's brother owns his own commercial tenant representation firm in Austin, Texas, and her sister works for AT&T's corporate office.

"I've had many mentors that have shaped my life, many of them were in my family," says Courtney. "My parents created a strong foundation for my siblings and me. They taught us at a young age the importance of creating strong relationships, how to manage money, and even how to negotiate effectively."

Courtney went on to Illinois State University. That's when she and her now-husband, Elmer, started dating, but the two had been close friends since junior high. After getting married in 2010, Elmer's job required them to relocate from Chicago to Bloomington, Illinois. While Courtney was

job-hunting, their REALTOR® introduced her to BJ Armstrong, the operating principle of the area Keller Williams office. She was offered a position as his administrative assistant but quickly moved into the role of buyer's agent.

"I credit BJ for creating a strong foundation for my real estate business and I respect him as a mentor," she says. "It's funny, I had always thought about becoming a REALTOR®. When I was a senior in college I considered enrolling in real estate classes, but life led me in other directions."

Over the next few years, Courtney earned her real estate license, started a family, and worked as an agent. In 2014, the Monacos returned to the Chicagoland area, settling in Darien. That's when Courtney decided to create her own business and build "a life by design." She credits her quick success to those early days at Keller Williams. ●●●



Courtney with her team - Tara Basta (operations manager) and Doug Lee (buyer's specialist)

...

“Right at the beginning, I attended my first Keller Williams BOLD class,” says Courtney. “This was the first time I had thought about creating a ‘life by design,’ and that has been my focus ever since. Real estate is my career for life, and I look forward to it evolving and changing over time.”

In the decade since her start, Courtney has reached a total career sales volume of over \$100 million, including \$14 million in 2020. The Courtney Monaco Group has received many top producer awards and has also been named the number one sales team in Darien.



“My team members have become such an integral part of this path, and their life goals have helped to shape our goals as a team,” she says. “Tara Basta, our operations manager, and Doug Lee, our buyer’s specialist, have been with me for the past few

years and are the wheels on this bus. We would not be here today without their support.”

When Courtney is not managing her business, she makes it a goal to give back to the families in her community. In the past, she served with the Family Shelter Service. Today, she regularly contributes to the Darien Lions Club

and the Oak Lawn Sertoma Club, and her current team participates in St. Jude’s Ride for a Reason.

Courtney also enjoys spending time with her husband and three children (ages eight, five, and one and a half). “We love to go on adventures together,” she says. “We all are very active and play sports, and we enjoy wildlife hikes and going to my grandfather’s lake house in the summer. I get my Zen time when I exercise, usually five to six days a week; I enjoy yoga, spinning, and golf.”

To those looking to make more from their life and goals, and live their own life by design, Courtney offers this advice: “Take more risks and have more self-belief,” she says. “If you are struggling to stay motivated, remember that even a semi-productive day is better than nothing. How you plan and start your day sets you in motion for success.”

“This was the first time I had thought about creating a ‘life by design,’ and that has been my focus ever since. Real estate is my career for life, and I look forward to it evolving and changing over time.”

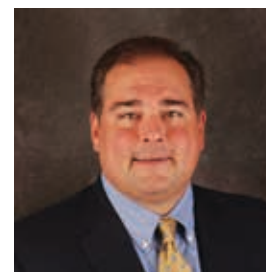


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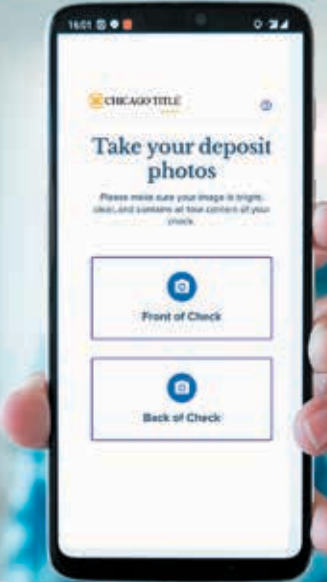
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GAIL NIERMAYER

Doing Good In Her Neighborhood

► cover story
By **Lauren Young**
Photos by **Katherin Frankovic**

Having spent years as a trustee on three foundation boards as well as engaging with many charities, Gail Niermeyer is always looking for ways to help others in her community. “I really want REALTORS® to take up the challenge to support our communities’ financial, social, and health needs,” says Gail. “As a REALTOR® you are so connected. You have to use that for the good of your local population.”

Gail is a graduate of Randolph College where she majored in Russian. Her first job was in Boston with Bache & Co., as an operations administrator, but she decided to transfer to New York City and sell for Xerox.

“I always wanted to get into sales,” says Gail. “My father was always a top manager with the Bulova watch company and inspired that competitive edge in me. My mother is the one who insisted I always be on time for every appointment. You have to put yourself out there to stay as informed as you

can if you want to be successful.” Gail adds, “It was my parents, too, who encouraged me to take every opportunity to give back.”

Gail worked for Xerox for the next fifteen years at their office on Wall Street in New York. She then moved to Leesburg, Virginia, to become one of their sales trainers. That position eventually brought her to Oak Brook in 1980 as the training manager. “What was fun about that experience is that I got to work with all kinds of buyers,” says Gail. “Now, as a REALTOR®, I get to work with many of the children of those past clients.”

But in 1980, Gail was involved in a major car accident. Her injuries meant she had to learn how to walk again. She moved to Naperville with her future husband, Don, to receive rigorous physical therapy at the renowned Edward Hospital. She also began volunteering there in thanks for the wonderful care she had received. Over the next ten years, while on disability, Gail spent time volunteering for local organizations. She discovered and fell in love with the town and many of its organizations.

Ten years after her accident, Gail decided to pursue her real estate career. She started with Coldwell Banker and decided to become a NEF (Naperville Education Foundation) board member to raise money for needed projects in District 203, as she had four children in school. She continues today as District 203’s presenting sponsor for the Healthy Driven Naperville Half Marathon & 5K. She also became very involved in local redevelopment. From 2005 to 2010, she was a part of the revitalization of Naperville’s “teardowns.” She worked with many buyers and sellers during this time and volunteered with Community First, an organization that assisted the town with initial guidelines for future redevelopment plans. ●●●



Gail with her family.

...

At the Edward Hospital, Edward Foundation, Gail serves as a trustee who works on funding projects. She and her husband were on the original committee that funded the Edward Cancer Center, and since Don's passing in 2013, she has almost completed an eight-year commitment to fund its Welcome Center. "The hospital is such a major asset for the town," says Gail. "I want the community and my clients to understand all the resources that are available to them at Edward Hospital."

Gail annually donates a sculpture to the Downtown Naperville Alliance. One of these sculptures, *The Heart*, was purchased by a neighbor and placed on display in the Edward Healing Garden in memory of Gail's husband.

In honor of her husband, she also joined the Debbie's Dream Foundation, a national advocacy group for stomach cancer. Gail travels annually to

Washington, DC, to meet with Illinois congress members to encourage their participation in important legislation related to this issue.

Amidst all her involvement in charity work and her success as a REALTOR®—she has been a Presidents Club member and holds a career sales volume of over \$684 million—Gail is most proud of her membership with the Coldwell Banker Charitable Foundation. She is a founding trustee on a board that has raised over \$2 million to support twenty-six charities throughout Chicagoland. She donates part of her commission on each real estate transaction to support the foundation's efforts.

Of her involvement, she says, "It has given me great insight into more nonprofits that can benefit from REALTOR® assistance. I like to get others involved and I host an annual



Gail with sculpture *The Heart* which was donated to the Downtown Naperville Alliance in memory of her husband. You can find this sculpture on display in the Edward Healing Garden.



Gail with her grandchildren.

I think it is my role as a community partner that is the catalyst for my success...I'm so proud of Naperville and all that the community has to offer."



office," says Gail. "They have enabled me to be a top producer." She also praises Coldwell Banker Realty's management and corporate leaders for their personal support.

When Gail is not volunteering or managing her real estate business, she enjoys spending time with family, especially her grown children, Jess, Reed, Brian, and Gayle, and her grandchildren. "I stop by my daughter's house several days a week to play with or put my grandkids to bed," says Gail.

She also enjoys traveling the world with friends and family and playing her weekly round of golf. She and her family enjoy visiting St. Barts each year.

Gail views herself as the "community welcome committee" of sorts. When a new business opens in town, she stops by to introduce herself and buys gift certificates for clients and/or agents to help promote them. It's her way of letting them know that they, as members of her beloved community, have her support.

"I think it is my role as a community partner that is the catalyst for my success," says Gail. "I'm so proud of Naperville and all that the community has to offer." And she's delighted that she'll be able to watch her grandchildren grow up there.

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Gail credits the management at Coldwell Banker Realty for her success. "I am so appreciative of the staff in my Naperville

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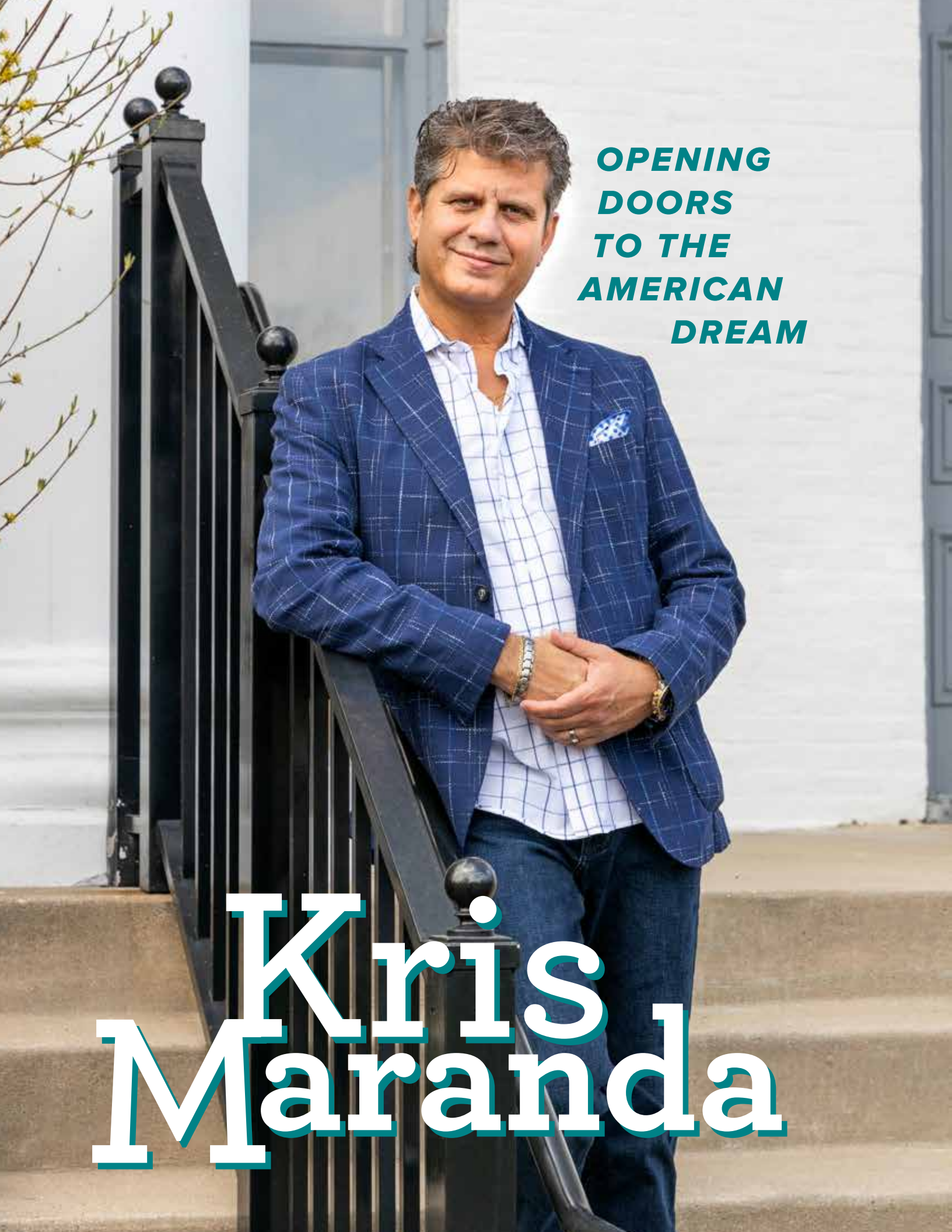


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OPENING DOORS TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Kris Maranda

▶ agent feature

By **Lauren Young**
Photos by **Katherin Frankovic**

“GROWING UP IN ALBANIA, THERE WERE NOT TOO MANY OPTIONS, BEING THAT IT WAS UNDER COMMUNIST RULE,” SAYS KRIS MARANDA FROM @PROPERTIES IN ELMHURST. “MOST EVERYONE’S DREAM WAS TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY.”

During his childhood, Kris learned key lessons about dedication and honesty from his hard-working family. His father was the chief mechanic at a factory and his mother held part-time jobs while raising Kris and his siblings. Kris finally left Albania for Italy with his wife in 1993. Thanks to distant relatives in Chicago, they were able to move to the United States in 1998.

“We came to Chicago not knowing much about the American culture,” says Kris. “I decided to study computing and got trained as a Microsoft certified engineer. This gave me the opportunity to work for the city for three years.”

During that time he developed a new and growing passion for real estate. Owning a home in Albania was a luxury not many could afford, so he and his wife were attracted to the opportunity and freedom to own property in the US, and to the chance to help others achieve similar dreams.

“I always had in mind ‘the American Dream,’” says Kris. “We came here without knowing many people and started from zero. If you have the [right] mindset and do the right thing, you can achieve anything. It’s so much different here than in Europe in that way, especially with regards to real estate.”

His first year as a REALTOR® included a steep learning curve, but Kris caught on quickly. He joined Schiller Real Estate in the middle of 2005, right before the downturn of the economy. In spite of the challenges, after only five months he was named the Rookie of the Year and has been a leading producer ever since.

“I have met a lot of people along the way,” says Kris. “Because of my background, I speak five languages. That has opened other doors for me to really help people in this industry.”

Over the years, he has been recognized as a Platinum Producer by BHHS and a Top Producer by @properties, where he also won the Rolex Achievement award. The Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS® named him a Top 1% Producer; he has a career sales volume over \$300 million, including \$22 million in 2020. Now at @properties in Elmhurst, Kris’s team includes three agents who cover a broad area of both DuPage and Cook counties.

When Kris is not managing his business, he gives back to his community with both time and resources. He actively supports St. Jude Children’s Hospital, the Albanian-American community, and religious institutions tied to his family. ...



...

“It has always broken my heart whenever I see a child who suffers, which is why I promote St. Jude,” says Kris. “I am a big believer that children are the future and if you support them, God will bless you. For the Albanian-American community, I have been very involved in starting festivities and helping people here adapt to their new lives.”

Kris describes his wife, Rudina, as his life’s “left, right, and center direction.” Together, they enjoy traveling the world with their children, Erina (twenty-two) and Kevin Spiro (eighteen). They also frequent music concerts and sporting events. Around Elmhurst, you’ll find them biking through their neighborhood and trying the local cuisine.

Reflecting on his successful career in the US, Kris says that the most worthwhile part of his job is the people he’s met and the connections he’s kept.

“I always say that real estate is a way of life more than a career,” he explains. “Relationships continue after the closing, and there is always something you can be doing for your business or your clients.”

“But it’s not just the business side that is rewarding,” he adds. “It is the relationships you create. It is amazing how many friends I have found through the years. That is the best reward and the best gift this business gives. Knowing so many people in the world is a beautiful dream come true.”



Kris with his children and nieces enjoying a weekend get-together.



Kris and his wife in Paris.

“**REAL ESTATE IS A WAY OF LIFE MORE THAN A CAREER. RELATIONSHIPS CONTINUE AFTER THE CLOSING, AND THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING YOU CAN BE DOING FOR YOUR BUSINESS OR YOUR CLIENTS.**”

▶ partner spotlight

By Lauren Young

Photos by Katherin Frankovic

Stuart D. Polizzi

with the Law Office of
Stuart D. Polizzi LLC

Hands-On So Clients Can Dream Big

“I always have been one who defends others who need help; it’s in my DNA,” says Stuart D. Polizzi, attorney and founder of a leading real estate law office in Naperville. “My goal is to help my clients make sound decisions for their families and to reduce the anxiety that comes with a home sale or purchase.”

After graduating from the University of Illinois College of Law in 2002, Stuart worked as an associate attorney with large firms in downtown Chicago including Neal Gerber & Eisenberg LLP and Jenner & Block LLP. There, Stuart learned what it meant to provide elite service to high-end clients including Fortune 500 companies and high-net-worth individuals. In 2010, he started his own firm with the goal of providing that

same elite service to small businesses and individuals. He now represents clients in home purchases, sales, short sales, and business litigation.

“If you look at my firm’s logo, you will see a picture of me holding a home in one hand and an office building in the other,” he explains. “The message is that we are here to assist you in those most important parts of your life: decisions about your home and your business.”

Stuart believes many real estate law practices are volume-based, and that attorneys rarely communicate directly with their clients prior to closing day. So when establishing core values for his firm, he settled on the acronym CAPE: Communicate, Advise, Protect, and Educate. Unlike other firms, Stuart talks with his clients directly numerous times before they meet at the closing table.

“I share my cell phone number and willingly take calls both evenings and weekends to address any concerns my clients may have throughout the purchase or sale process,” he says. “I also try to educate them about the home purchase and sale process as we go.”

Stuart views a home purchase or sale as one of the most important financial decisions a person

...



...

can make, and that home ownership is a core part of the American Dream. That's why his chosen mission is to help guide his clients with those decisions and protect them throughout the process.

"For years, owning one's own home has served not only as a way to build wealth, but it is fundamental to the American belief that hard work pays off," he says. "It provides a foundation from which we and our loved ones can dream and thrive."

"Particularly in times of uncertainty, like the last year during the pandemic, it provides us with a safe sanctuary in which we can protect our families," he adds.

Part of his commitment to service includes providing solutions to meet the evolving needs and wishes of his clients. Over the past year, Stuart has created solutions to better accommodate his clients' needs and keep them safe. One such example is the ability to pre-sign closing documents at more convenient times and locations.

"Our motto is 'We treat our clients like family,'" he says. "We want to give them a level of personal attention that's equal to the importance of owning a home in their lives."

When Stuart is not managing his business, he enjoys exploring different places, including Chicago, with his kids and friends. Since 2010, he has joined his children—Nicholas, Sana, and Matthew—on a family road trip each year to explore different regions of the United States. They've visited Boston, New York City, New Orleans, Montgomery, Gettysburg, San Francisco, Seattle, and many places in between. One of his fondest memories is visiting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s home in Montgomery, Alabama, where he lived during the Montgomery bus boycotts.

"Dr. King's house was a very modest home, but it was a place where great ideas were born—ideas that changed the world," he says. "That's how I see my clients' homes, too. Their home is a place where they can dream and create a better world for themselves and their families, and, perhaps, for the rest of us."

Stuart would say that success is being able live your core passions and values and be fortunate enough to derive a career from them. For him, that is helping his clients find solutions to problems that affect their lives. "I truly believe in the power of living out your passion and dedicating your life to helping others," says Stuart. As Professor Joseph Campbell once advised, 'Follow your bliss'¹ when choosing your career path. It will take you where you were meant to go."



Stuart and his family in San Francisco.

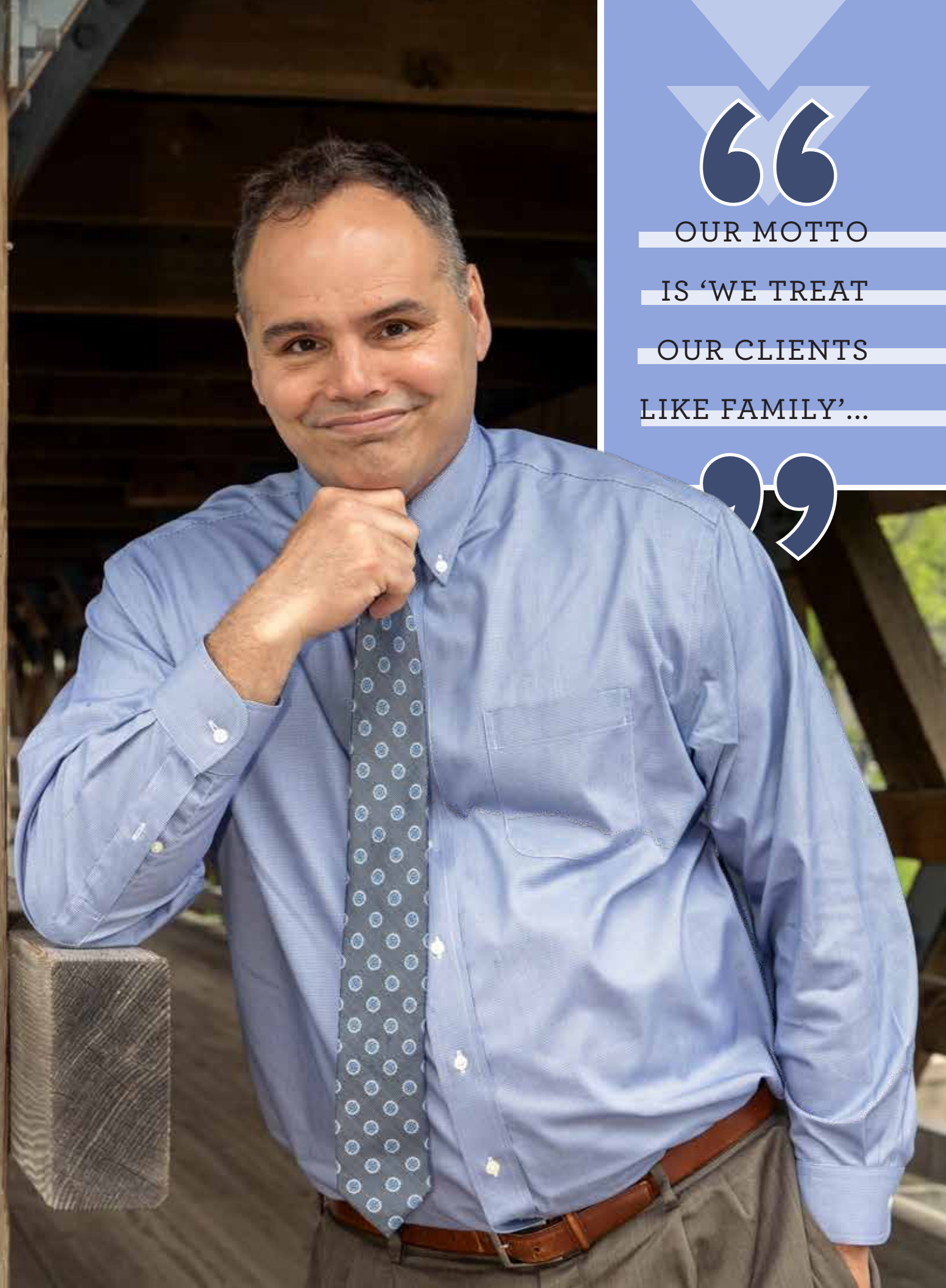


Stuart with his son, Matthew, helping him tie his first perfect tie.

¹In an interview with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell observed, "If you do follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in your field of bliss, and they open doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be." J. Campbell and B. Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 120. (See also the video/DVD of the same name.)

To reach Stuart or to learn more about the services the Law Office of Stuart D. Polizzi LLC provides its clients, call 708-476-6852 or email stuartpolizzi@gmail.com or visit his Facebook Business page: <https://www.facebook.com/Stuartpolizzilaw>.

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