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Cover photo courtesy of **Bodie Kuljian**.

Mya Lopez

I'm familiar with the escrow process and working to ensure the proper documents are in place to not hold up the loan.



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Meet Debra




In her own words, Debra used to be a "bad girl." Facing addiction, homelessness, trouble with the law, and no sense of being. Then came Goodwill. Debra now has a great job in e-commerce and she's found purpose, pride and dignity.

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Learn more about Debra's story and Goodwill's job placement programs at ocgoodwill.org.





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Welcome, NEW TOP 500 AGENTS!



►► publisher's note

Dear REALTORS® and Partners,

For those who are new to *South OC Real Producers*, congratulations and welcome! I'm the publisher, Michele Kader.

Our mission, at *Real Producers*, is to inform and inspire industry professionals such as yourselves all over South Orange County. It is a badge of honor to be a Real Producer. Receiving this publication means you are in the top 500 (top 3 percent) of your industry.

We are thankful for our preferred partners. Without their participation and all they do for this community, none of this would be possible! The publication, our quarterly events, and being featured is free because of our

partners. Thank you! We also appreciate the Real Producers who referred them to us. All partners have been referred and vetted by Real Producers.

Our Real Producers are wonderful people who do great work in real estate and in our communities. Do you know an amazing agent who you'd love to see featured in the magazine? We are taking nominations for the rest of this year right now! You can nominate a cover story, a rising star, a "Making A Difference" agent who does great work with a charity, and a "Behind-the-Scenes All-Star" — a right-hand, back-office rockstar. Nominate in the private Facebook group or send an email to me at michele.kader@realproducersmag.com.

Our Zoom Connect groups are currently in session! Reach out to us if you'd like to connect via a private Zoom mastermind with a small, exclusive group of top real estate professionals sharing tips, tricks, and creative ideas for navigating the current market.



With gratitude,
Michele Kader
Owner and Publisher
South Orange County

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FAQ

ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE

By Michele Kader



If you just made the 2021 Top 500 producers in South OC list and are new to our publication, you may be wondering what it's

all about. "FAQs About This Magazine" answers the most commonly asked questions around the country regarding the *Real Producers* platform. My door is always open to discuss anything regarding this community — this publication is 100 percent designed to be your voice and to connect, elevate the industry, and inspire!

Q: WHO RECEIVES THIS MAGAZINE?

A: The top 500 REALTORS® in South OC. We pulled the MLS numbers (by volume) from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020, in South OC, cut the list off at number 500, and our new 2021 Top 500 distribution list was born. This magazine is free exclusively to the top 500 agents in the area each year. This year, the minimum production level for our group was \$12.9 million in 2020, based on data reported to MLS.

Q: WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR BEING FEATURED IN THIS MAGAZINE?

A: It's really simple — every feature you see has first been nominated. You can nominate other Realtors, affiliates, brokers, owners, or even yourself! Office leaders can also nominate Realtors. We will consider anyone brought to our attention. We don't know everyone's story, so we need your help to learn about them.

A nomination currently looks like this: You email us at Michele.Kader@realproducersmag.com with

the subject line, "Nomination: (Name of Nominee)," and explain why you are nominating them to be featured. It could be that they have an amazing story that needs to be told — perhaps they overcame extreme obstacles, they are an exceptional leader, have the best customer service, or they give back to the community in a big way. The next step is an interview with us to ensure it's a good fit. If it all works out, we put the wheels in motion for our writer to conduct an interview and for our photographer to schedule a photoshoot.

Q: WHAT DOES IT COST A REALTOR®/TEAM TO BE FEATURED?

A: Zero, zilch, zippo, nada, nil. It costs nothing, my friends, so nominate away! We are not a pay-to-play model. We share real stories of Real Producers.

Q: WHO ARE THE PREFERRED PARTNERS?

A: Anyone listed as a "preferred partner" in the front of the magazine is a part of this community. They will have an ad in every issue of the magazine, attend our quarterly events, and be a part of our online community. We don't just find these businesses off the street, nor do we work with all businesses that approach us. One or many of you have recommended every single preferred partner you see in this publication. We won't even meet with a business that has not been vetted by one of you and "stamped for approval," in a sense. Our goal is to create a powerhouse network, not only for the best Realtors in the area, but the best affiliates, as well, so we can grow stronger together.

Q: HOW CAN I RECOMMEND A PREFERRED PARTNER?

A: If you have a recommendation for a local business that works with top Realtors, please let us know! Send an email to Michele.Kader@realproducersmag.com.

2020

BY THE NUMBERS

9,886

TOTAL TRANSACTIONS

\$10.39BILLION

SALES VOLUME

666

DOUBLE-ENDED TRANSACTIONS

5,515

LISTING SIDE TRANSACTIONS

3,705

BUYING SIDE TRANSACTIONS



Based on information reported to the MLS for residential sales in 2020 in South Orange County by the top 500 producing agents licensed in South Orange County.

\$20.78

MILLION

AVERAGE SALES VOLUME PER AGENT

19.77

AVERAGE TRANSACTIONS PER AGENT

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CUTTING THE CORD:

THE LATEST ON STREAMING SERVICES

By Shauna
Osborne

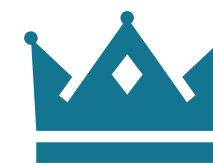
Last year was truly the year of stay-at-home entertainment. Being locked down indoors for most of 2020 gave us ample time to explore what shows, performances, and films could be experienced from the comfort of our own living rooms. Particularly for those depressed by the closure of movie theaters and entertainment venues, streaming offered the ability to bond with other fans over live-streamed music performances, to stay in touch with box-office trends, and, importantly, to zone out from pandemic-related stress with endless episodes of *The Office*, *Gilmore Girls*, or *The Great British Baking Show*.

Unsurprisingly, 2020 saw video streaming activity increase by up to 40% in the U.S., with the average user streaming over three hours of content daily during the key months of lockdown, primarily on the most familiar and well-known, over-the-top (OTT) media services: Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and Disney+. Each option provides instant access to a wide-ranging library of high-quality content – with a growing segment of original programming – at a variety of price points, devices supported, and simultaneous streams allowed. Newcomers to the streaming scene, like Peacock, Quibi, and Acorn, are moving toward niche content; for example, Quibi streams short videos exclusively to smartphones, while Acorn offers U.S. viewers programming specifically from the UK, Ireland, Canada, and Australia. Other recent streaming trends that will continue into 2021 include...

- **Nostalgia:** Streaming services are bringing back the '80s and '90s to capitalize on the nostalgia factor for millennials. In 2020, Netflix brought us the popular *Cobra Kai*, a *Karate Kid* reboot, as well as *The Baby-Sitters Club*, based on the beloved literary sisterhood from an erstwhile era.
- **Health and wellness:** Virtual fitness has become the “new normal,” as over 80% of U.S. households report they utilized live-streamed workout services during 2020. Yoga and HIIT (high-intensity interval training) / bootcamp classes topped the list. Notably, many consumers say they plan to continue to stream fitness classes post-COVID.
- **Docuseries:** Remember the *Tiger King* mania of spring 2020? The show was reportedly watched by over 60 million households in the U.S. last year. Documentary miniseries are growing in popularity, with more being released for streaming constantly.
- **Non-English original programming:** Step aside, Hollywood. Streaming services like Netflix and Prime have seen massive success this year with local-language series like *La Casa De Papel* and *Dark*.



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» cover story

By Lindsey Wells
Photos by Nigel Etem

SUZIE MALERBE

BORN FOR THIS



Suzie Malerbie with her husband, Adrian, and their daughter, Priscilla.

“Your work is a reflection of yourself. What I put into it is what I get out of it.” —*Suzie Malerbe*

We’ve all heard that when two things are meant to be, they fit together like missing puzzle pieces. Two pieces that, when put together, produce something more significant than the sum of its parts. Such is the case with Suzie Malerbe and real estate. As a child growing up, Suzie’s parents owned a home decorating and design business. “Since I was young, my brother and I would go and decorate homes for Christmas, or even just for everyday use. The customers would come to our store and ask if we were available, and that’s what we did. I thought all kids did that, actually,” Suzie says, laughing. She was born for this.

Before she got her real estate license 16 years ago, Suzie was buying and selling homes to flip. It wasn’t long before her friends began asking her to help them too. In her first year as a licensed real estate professional, Suzie closed \$20 million in real estate transactions, with her first-ever sale being \$3.3 million. “It just took off from there and has grown every year,” she says. Her sales tripled the following year, and grew steadily every year after that.

Now an agent with RE/MAX Select One, Suzie’s client base is world-wide. Not only does she help sellers and buyers with their homes, but

Suzie is also a developer and designer herself. Her from-the-inside-out product knowledge has, no doubt, been a significant factor in her success as an agent. With that knowledge and Suzie’s team of workers backing her, sellers choosing her as their agent have that added benefit when selling their homes. “A lot of times I will remodel their home for them upfront or just do small things, for example new floors, new paint, or new counters, and nine times out of 10, I’ll front the money for them as an added bonus, and they pay me back through the sale of their home,” she says. “I’m presenting their house in the best way possible. Sometimes clients may not have the means to accomplish this or know how to. That’s when I step in and help them.”



I’m presenting their house in the best way possible. Sometimes clients may not have the means to accomplish this or know how to.

That’s when I step in and help them



These days, I'm
happy dedicating my
time to MY PASSION:

“REAL
ESTATE.”

...

Suzie's passion for what she does shines through in every transaction — just ask her clients. At the time of this interview, Suzie had just shown one of her listings to a potential buyer and could hardly contain her excitement. “My buyer was showing his girlfriend the house for the first time, and he said to her, ‘Oh, my gosh, I think Suzie is more excited than you!’ The girlfriend started laughing, but I really think I was,” Suzie says joyfully. “I was so excited to show her. I could not wait. I was bursting.” To hear Suzie tell it, she lives and breathes real estate.

However, as big as her passion is for real estate, it doesn't hold a candle to how she feels about her family. Suzie and her husband, Adrian, have been married 25 blissful years. As

the interviewer, I was curious: how does one manage to keep a marriage going strong for that long? Suzie says, “We're that rare couple. It really is communication. I know that probably sounds cheesy, but you have to choose your battles, and you have to communicate. Nothing's ever perfect, of course, but I really appreciate him. I adore this man completely, and I feel that from him too.” Adrian, a former bodybuilder, is licensed in real estate, too, and helps Suzie out with her business when she needs it.

The couple's one daughter, Priscilla, 27, is currently working with Suzie as her marketing manager until the pandemic is over and she can put her master's degree in psychology from Pepperdine University to good use.

When asked what her interests are outside of real estate, Suzie had to pause to think about it for a minute. “Real estate really is 24/7 for me. It never stops. Before the pandemic, my husband and I would travel at least every other month because I had a lot of clients overseas. In normal life, we would travel a lot. We actually joked about it this past year, and I said, ‘Wow, look at all that money we saved from not traveling,’ she says. “These days, I'm happy dedicating my time to my passion: real estate.”

Needless to say, Suzie has landscaped a future of which she can be proud. For her, success is being grateful for everything that has been given to her and everything she's worked for. The numbers are just the icing on the cake.



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» business partner spotlight

By Lindsey Wells | Photos by Bodie Kuljian

SANDY VIETRO

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We hear it all the time: buying a home will probably be the biggest financial decision anyone will ever make. When it comes to protecting the funds used in the transaction, the safest bet is to place your trust in the hands of an unbiased, neutral party whose only objective is to ensure that you are taken care of. That's where Versal Escrow Services, Inc., shines.

At Versal Escrow Services, your first point of contact, as a real estate professional, will most likely be Sandy Vietro, the company's account executive. While Sandy has been with Versal for under two years, she is no stranger to the world of escrow and real estate. An Orange County native, Sandy obtained her real estate license and began selling in 1995. While she enjoyed selling real estate, Sandy found that working in escrow was a much better fit for her life. "It was a seamless transition (into escrow) because I know the industry and so many people in it," she says. "I was already familiar with how things work; being a real estate agent really helped me to know what to do and what not to do."

Sandy worked 17 years as a sales representative for an escrow company in the North Orange County area before it changed ownership. Looking to make a change, she accepted the position as Versal Escrow Service's account executive at its Newport Beach location about a year and a half ago. Her role in the company is to cultivate relationships with real estate professionals, something she is extremely well-versed in doing. Sandy finds excellent gratification in connecting with local real estate professionals and providing them with valuable information.

A real estate professional's second point of contact at Versal Escrow Service's San Clemente location is Christopher Keahey, the escrow officer and branch manager. According to Sandy, since Christopher is one of the best and most sought-after escrow officers in Orange County, her job as his account executive is that much easier. Not to mention, Versal Escrow Services, Inc., is a well-established escrow company jointly owned by Fidelity National Financial (FNF), ranked 402 in the Fortune 500. The company's bread and butter is the luxury resale market along the coast, and

...



“Whether enjoying some down time or advocating for the real estate community, one thing is sure about...”

... since its inception has become known to provide a concierge level of quality and service to its clients. Needless to say, both Chris and Sandy fit in perfectly. “Chris is so easy to sell that if they just give us one try, just one time, they won’t ever go anywhere else,” Sandy says. “His service is impeccable; he’s one of the smartest, most circumspect people I’ve ever worked with.”

When she isn’t working, Sandy is happiest when she spends time with her husband, Kevin, and three French bulldogs, Mia, Isabella, and Giana. As with most everyone, most of Sandy’s hobbies and interests came to a halt when the pandemic hit California. “We belong to a couple of different clubs, like



the Pacific Club, and I’m still a member at Disneyland’s Club 33. I’m a big Disney fan — at least until COVID started,” she says, laughing. Sandy also volunteered at the local Humane Society twice a month until the pandemic forced her to stop.

Sandy is an avid gardener at home, and she and Kevin love a good bourbon or whiskey. Whether enjoying some down time or advocating for the real estate community, one thing is sure about Sandy Vietro: she’s going to do it to the best of her ability, and she’s going to have fun while she’s at it.

For more information, email Sandy.Vietro@versalescrow.com or visit VersalEscrow.com.



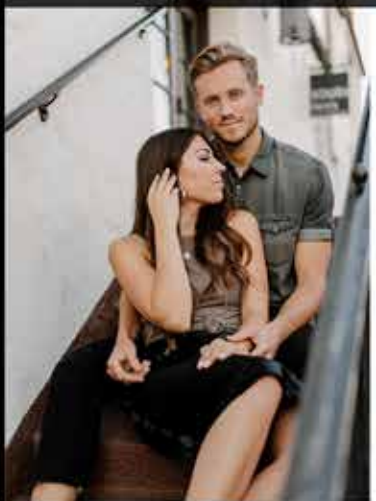
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“...Sandy Vietro: she’s going to do it to the best of her ability, and she’s going to have fun while she’s at it.”







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A man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a dark jacket over a light blue shirt, is leaning out of the driver's side window of a white van. He is smiling and holding a laptop. The van is parked on a street with palm trees and a beach in the background. The sky is overcast.

JEREMY SCHULTHEISS

►► rising star

By Lindsey Wells
Photos by Bodie Kuljian

BURNING THE SHIPS AND GOING **ALL-IN**

We're always told to trust the timing of our lives, which, let's face it, can be easier said than done.

No one knows better than Jeremy Schultheiss the sheer importance of having patience while God works in the background of one's life. When he stepped into the real estate industry just over one-and-a-half years ago, Jeremy went all-in.

Jeremy's story begins as a child growing up in a small town in Northern California. He moved to Southern California for college, stayed in San Diego for a few years, then put down roots in Orange County. Jeremy met his wife, Elyssa, in 2016 while pastor-

ing at Mariners Church in Irvine. "It was just one of those things where a friend introduced us and there was some immediate interest from both of us — at least, I hope so," Jeremy says, laughing. "There was immediate interest on my end, at least!"

This pastor turned real estate agent worked in non-profit leadership for eight years before realizing he also had a knack for entrepreneurship. The decision to make the career switch was made while Jeremy was honeymooning in Maui with Elyssa. "I absolutely loved being a pastor," he shares. "A consistent theme for me was working with people and being there in really significant moments, whether it was weddings or funerals or what have you." Perhaps this is why Jeremy's transition into real estate was so seamless; it allowed him to continue his passion for caring for people while also providing the level of financial freedom he wanted for his family.



“ I WANT TO BE
KNOWN FOR
**DOING THE
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REGARDLESS IF
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NEAR TERM OR NOT.

...

If Jeremy was going to redirect his path and go into real estate, he knew he had to go all-in. He used the “burning the ships” analogy. “In ancient Greek warfare, generals, when they were going to conquer another land, would burn their ships,” Jeremy explains. “That way, they had no point of return to get home other than going through what they were about to go through in war. Obviously, real estate is not war, but I think that I liked the idea that you have to go all-in and not have an easy fallback. For me, that was important just to say, ‘OK, I’m either going to make it or I’m not.’ I’ve been really blessed and fortunate to be where I am at this point.” Jeremy went into real estate full-time in July 2019 and hasn’t looked back. In 2020, he transacted \$11 million in sales volume.

Now an agent with Pacific Sotheby’s International Realty, Jeremy’s first year in real estate was a successful one. His mindset from the beginning was a huge factor in the level of success he has achieved thus far.



Jeremy Schultheiss and his wife, Elyssa, were married in 2018.

“Going in, I prioritized the long view versus the short view. It’s easy to view things very transactionally because we are working with people through transactions. The mindset I had, and I hope to continue to have, is really viewing the person — their satisfaction, their joy, their lifestyle and health as a family — and placing that far above any outcome of the transaction,” Jeremy says. “I want to be known for doing the right thing, regardless if it

immediately benefits me in the near term or not.”

Jeremy and Elyssa were married in the summer of 2018. Elyssa is currently finishing her master’s degree at Cal State Fullerton and teaches undergrad communications classes. “My wife is definitely the brains of the family,” Jeremy says, laughing. When he isn’t working, Jeremy is an avid surfer. He and Elyssa also bought an old Volkswa-

gen van during quarantine and they’ve been working on fixing it up. When they aren’t doing that, the couple takes advantage of the amenities afforded by living in San Clemente. “We love the lifestyle that is on offer here,” Jeremy says, “whether it’s going to the beach or going to get a cup of coffee at Bear Coast, a local coffee shop. I really think we have a special little place here in South Orange County.”



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►► healthy living
By Shauna Osborne

Wild & Wonderful ELDERBERRIES.

The month of March brings the timely end of cold and flu season as well as the beginning of spring allergy season. And after a year like 2020, everyone is significantly more concerned with boosting those immune systems. Let's learn more about elderberry, one of the most commonly used medicinal plants in the world.

Nutritious elderberry berries and flowers come from *Sambucus nigra*, a medicinal plant native to Europe and grown worldwide that has confirmed antibacterial and antiviral properties. The berries of the *Sambucus* plant can be found in small black or blue-black bunches and should not be consumed raw (the raw berries could be poisonous, at worst, or cause digestive issues, at the least). Elderberry is generally consumed through syrups

(raw elderberry syrup is the most potent preparation), lozenges, gummies, juices, jams, and teas.

While scientific research on elderberries is always ongoing, experts believe this medicinal plant shows promise in several areas of wellness, namely:

- **Nutritional content:** Elderberries are rich in vitamins and minerals, low in calories, and high in dietary fiber (over one-quarter of our recommended daily intake) and antioxidants (particularly, phenolic acids, anthocyanins, and flavanols). Elderberries are remarkably full of vitamin C, containing 6 to 35 grams per 100 grams of fruit, which accounts for up to 60% of our recommended daily intake.
- **Impact on cold and flu symptoms:** Elderberry has high bio-flavonoid levels and has been shown to reduce the severity and duration of the flu, decrease pain and sinus inflammation, and reduce symptoms of upper respiratory infections.

This beneficial plant remedy slows the replication of viruses, which in turn reduces the severity of symptoms and lessens recovery time.

Elderberries have also been linked to health outcomes such as lower cholesterol and improved vision, skin, and heart health.

When available, elderberry products made locally – with local berries and local honey – are preferable, particularly when it comes to springtime allergies, as these products will contain allergens native to the region, believed to help desensitize the system and lessen allergy symptoms. Elderberry products are safe for both children and adults (though children under 1 should not consume honey); have few, if any, drug interactions; and are available widely across the U.S., from commercial products in big box stores to local concoctions at farmers' markets. As always, please consult your trusted healthcare professional before taking any new supplement.



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- The inspector will be cleaning and disinfecting all of his tools and equipment before and after each inspection.

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