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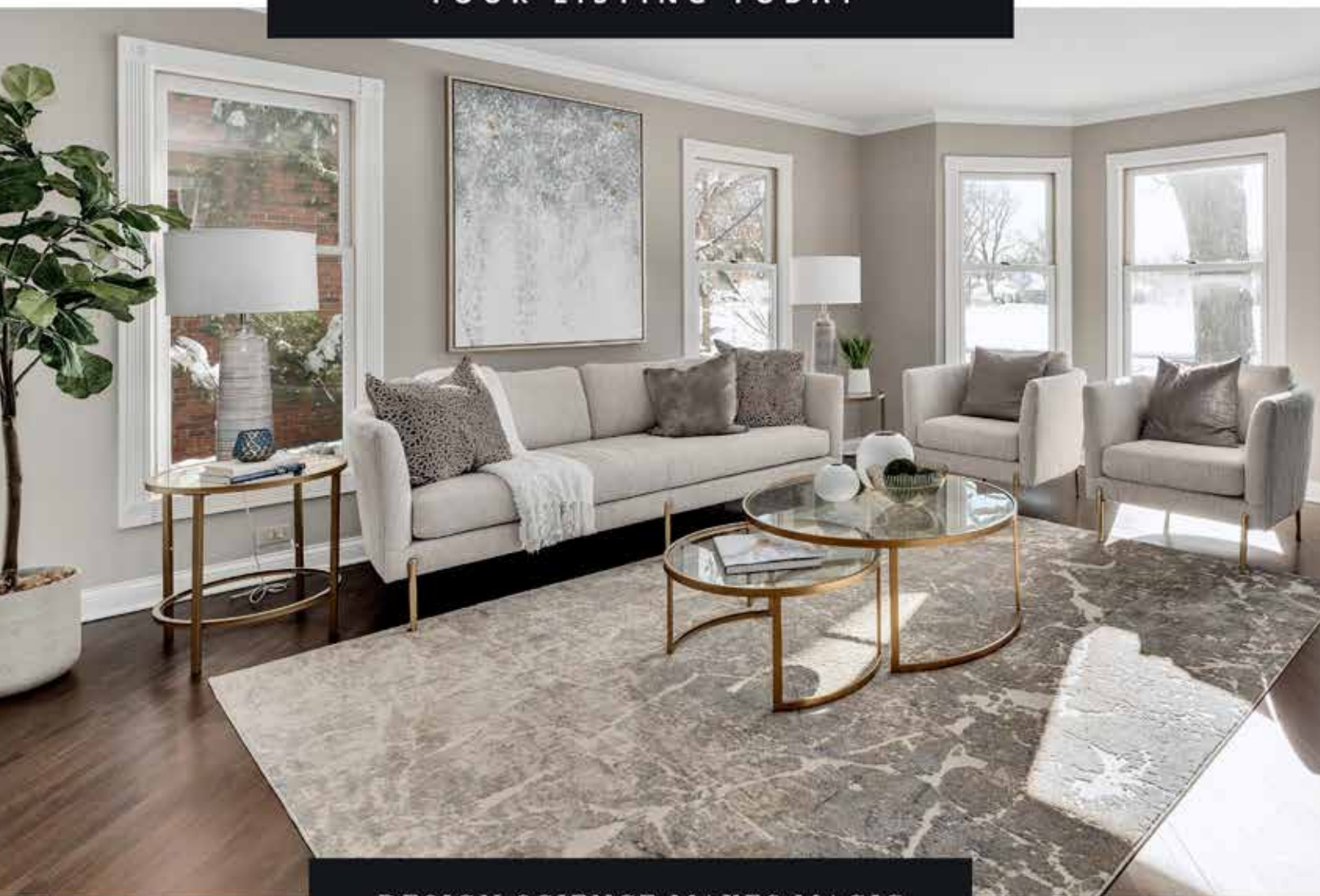
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

 <b>11</b> Publisher's Note	 <b>12</b> On the Rise: Emily Kaczmarek	 <b>18</b> Partner Spotlight: John Rot with Hortons Home Lighting	 <b>24</b> REALTOR® Feature: Michele Marks
 <b>28</b> Events: Virtual Jam Sessions	 <b>32</b> Cover Story: Alexa Mimi Wagner	 <b>39</b> REALTORS® Give Back	 <b>40</b> Fall Event Hosted by Solemn Oath Brewery

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**Andy Burton**  
Publisher

**Emily Burton**  
Director of Partner Success and Editorial Content

**Melissa Lopez**  
Operations and Content Specialist

**Christine Thom**  
Managing Editor

**Katherin Frankovic**  
Photographer



**Abi Voightmann**  
Photographer



**Lauren Young**  
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**Emily Peacock**  
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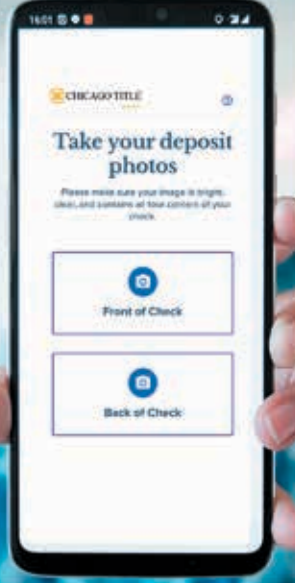


**Vanessa Cici Fry, Attorney at Law**  
Residential & Commercial Real Estate Law

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# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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Finally getting the opportunity to connect with most of you at our first event last month was one of the highlights of my year. Don't get me wrong; planning our events is a ton of work, and I am grateful to have a talented team who does the heavy lifting. Experiencing our community interact in person for the first time truly magnified how rallying everyone together consistently benefits this industry. I cannot believe how fast those three hours flew. A special thanks to Kevin Camden with Camden Law Office LLC and Solemn Oath Brewery for hosting us. Feel free to reach out to Solemn Oath Brewery directly to inquire about utilizing their space for your own events, client appreciation parties, or company get-togethers. Simply mention you attended the *DuPage Real Producers* fall event, and they will take good care of you. It was great seeing everyone in 3D!

January of 2020, which, in retrospect, was not an ideal time to start a community that thrives on face-to-face relationships. The world did a 180° from January of 2020 to April of 2020, and we have prevailed. Zoom has obviously been an innovative tool to keep us plugged in, but nothing will replace breaking bread with one another and letting our guards down. Be on the lookout for event photos in our December issue!



**Andy Burton**

Publisher, *DuPage Real Producers*

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As we enter into the holiday season, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for what we have accomplished considering when we launched our platform. Many of you know that our first issue was



▶▶ on the rise  
By Lauren Young  
Photos by AbiV Photography

# Emily Kaczmarek

## MOTIVATED TO GROW, INSPIRED BY LEGACY

Three of Emily Kaczmarek's four grandparents were real estate agents. As a child, she watched as her grandmother, DJ, shared her infectious smile and love of people through her work as a popular REALTOR®. When Emily was ten years old, DJ passed away, leaving behind a legacy to live up to.

"I sort of feel like I am picking up where she left off," says Emily. "She passed away at too early an age—she was only fifty-eight. I hope that I am doing her career justice and making her proud."

Emily and her sister, Lauren, grew up in Lombard. Emily has always admired her hard-working parents.

"My mom is a hard worker even to this day," says Emily. "Both my parents succeeded in their all-consuming jobs and still made time for my sister and me. It was a great example."

In middle school, Emily developed a passion for home-makeover television shows, running home from the bus to catch the latest episode of *Trading Spaces* or another HGTV program.

"I realize HGTV is not the most accurate depiction of being a REALTOR®," she says. "But it sparked an interest in home renovations, design, interacting with people, and building a business that I knew was not going to go away."

Emily attended Augustana College, where she obtained her bachelor's degree in business administration with concentrations in marketing and finance. While there, she was a captain on the varsity tennis team and an active member of her sorority. After she graduated, she held advertising account management and marketing roles before making the leap into real estate in 2018.

"My family thought I was nuts for leaving a stable corporate job and jumping into the unknown world of real estate," says Emily. "But now I can look back and feel proud of the decision I made." ...

**You cannot have success in this industry without a hunger to grow and evolve. If there was no desire [within me] to better myself, I do not feel I would be reaching my full potential. And that, to me, would mean failing.**

“Deep down, I know I needed to take a big risk in order to grow personally and professionally,” she adds. “It was actually quite terrifying. But what was more terrifying [to me] was not taking the risk and getting stuck where I was.”

Emily’s big risk has indeed paid off. In just a few short years, her career volume exceeded fifteen million dollars; she has closed over eight million dollars in the last year alone. She won the 2019 Great Lakes Region Rookie of the Year award from Realty Executives, and the Silver Award for production in 2020 from Realty Executives Premiere.

“You cannot have success in this industry without a hunger to grow and evolve,” says Emily. “If there was no desire [within me] to better myself, I do not feel I would be reaching my full potential. And that, to me, would mean failing.”

Outside of real estate, Emily stays active through various causes in her local community. Because of her love of dogs, she has volunteered at PAWS Chicago. She also supports DuPagePads, an organization that offers programs and shelter for the homeless.

Emily also enjoys spending time with family. Her parents, Amie and Chris, recently purchased a second home in Galena, so the family often gathers together there now. Emily also enjoys reading, taking long weekend trips, and staying active.

Looking forward, Emily has dreams of serving her neighbors while continuing to learn, grow, and persevere as a REALTOR®. It’s the mission she inherited from Grandma DJ, her other REALTOR® grandparents, and her mentors in the business.

“There are many different ways to use a career in real estate to help those around you,” she says. “Especially in the beginning, it’s not always easy, but it’s important to not give up. You can’t fail if you don’t stop trying. ‘Strategize and adjust to keep moving forward.’ That’s always been my mantra.”



Emily as a baby with her grandma, DJ.



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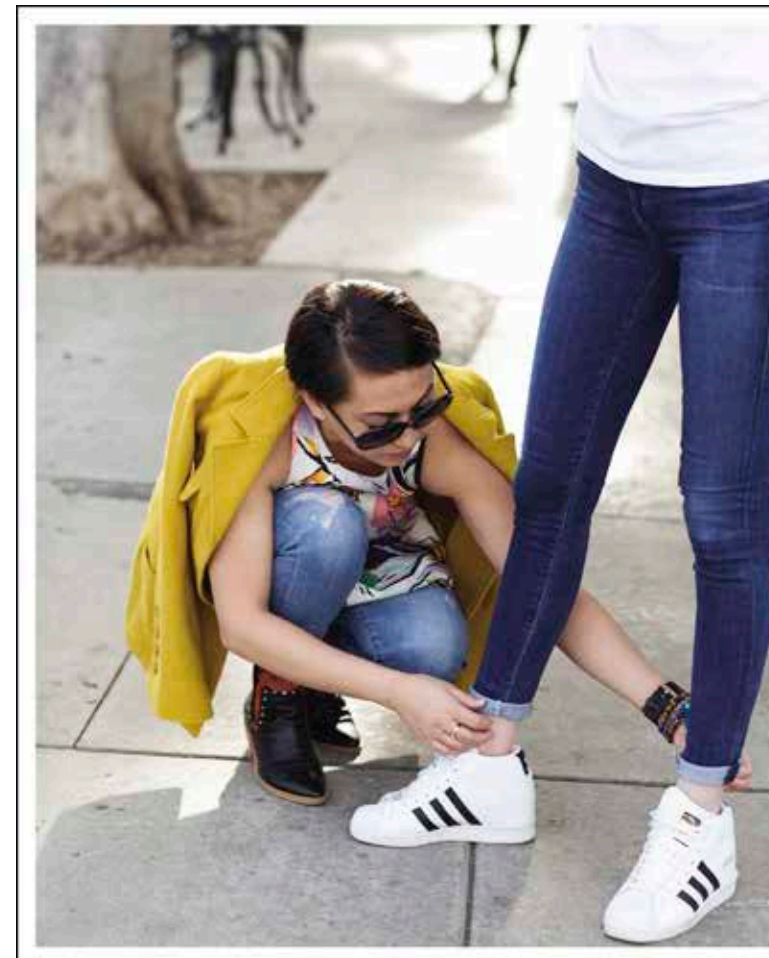


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▶▶ partner spotlight  
By Lauren Young  
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# ROTH

JOHN

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*A Shining Light in the Community*

“I had always dreamed of owning my own business,” says John Rot, president of Hortons Home Lighting and Hortons Ace Hardware. “That idea began when I was a child as I watched my dad run his own business. I saw how he treated his employees, helped the community, provided growth opportunities, and led by example. I wanted to do the same thing when I grew up.”

After graduating from the University of Illinois, he joined Arthur Andersen in a corporate role. While there, John developed his leadership skills until the opportunity arose to take ownership of Hortons; the chance to continue the legacy of an established local business was too good to pass up.

For more than 120 years, Hortons Home Lighting has served Chicagoland from its locations in La Grange and Orland Park. In its over 10,000 square feet of showroom space, Hortons displays more than 5,000 premier fixtures that reflect all styles—from the latest trends to the classic styles. At both locations, John staffs expert lighting consultants who are certified by the American Lighting Association, as well as friendly customer service teams to assist customers.

“From building a home with new lighting to remodeling a current home, and from interiors to landscaping, we can

help with all aspects of lighting a home,” says John. “We are in the business of solving problems and helping people create their perfect home.”

When online shopping became a demand, the Hortons team adapted their services to the buying preferences of e-commerce while remaining true to, and emphasizing, their strengths as relationship-builders. Many consumers find inspiration online and then visit Hortons’s stores to see the fixtures in person. More often than not, visitors choose to purchase their items at the store because of Hortons’s high level of service and competitive prices.

“Being a small, family-owned brick-and-mortar business in 2021 means that you are always competing against online stores and ‘big box’ retail,” says John. “Between our pricing, inventory, and expertise, we have to stay at the top of our game at all times.”

To John, serving the community doesn’t just mean providing great products and affordable prices. He takes the responsibility of supporting local people and causes seriously. ●●●





**WE CAN HELP WITH ALL ASPECTS OF LIGHTING A HOME. WE ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF SOLVING PROBLEMS AND HELPING PEOPLE CREATE THEIR PERFECT HOME."**

... In 2001, for example, Hortons employee Pam Herts was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was only thirty-one. Her story inspired the creation of the H Foundation, a nonprofit founded by Hortons that's dedicated to funding cancer research. Each year, the H Foundation holds the Goombay Bash fundraiser at Navy Pier. Nearly every dollar raised is donated to Northwestern University's Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University.

"We've raised more than ten million dollars through the H Foundation to make a difference in the fight against cancer," John says. "For me, it is about leaving a legacy in your community and an impact on its people: It is about creating more than you take and giving back."

"Every guest that walks through the doors becomes part of our Hortons family," John adds. "It's so humbling to me to hear the stories of how customers have been shopping at Hortons for all these years. I want us to be around for future generations too."

To reach the expert consultants at Hortons Home Lighting and to see their impressive inventory for yourself, call the Hortons team at 708-352-2110, or visit their website [www.HortonsHome.com](http://www.HortonsHome.com).

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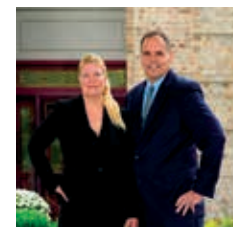
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# MICHELE MARKS

REALTOR® feature  
By Lauren Young  
Photos by Katherin Frankovic



## FINDING MEANING THROUGH REAL ESTATE

“Being a REALTOR® is much more than a paycheck to me,” says Michele Marks. “From my own experiences, I know that home is the place where you feel comfortable, protected, understood, at peace, and loved; it’s your happy place.”

“We do more than sell houses,” she adds. “We are the beacon that guides people home.”

Michele’s happy place was originally Winthrop, Massachusetts, a small coastal town near Boston. Following a few years of college and ten years living in New Hampshire, she moved to Naperville in 2006. Over the next six years, she mostly stayed at home to concentrate on raising her two children.

“I got married very young and went right from my mom and dad’s house into my own married household,” says Michele. “When you’re raising two kids, there is no instruction manual, so it’s learn-as-you-go.”

After her divorce in 2012, Michele found herself in need of a way to support herself and children, Madison and Matthew. She’d thought about real estate as a possible career for years and had a great conversation with a REALTOR® neighbor about it when she lived in New Hampshire. With the urgency of her divorce, she realized it was time to embark on a real estate career and take it seriously.

“I’m very sociable and determined, and I love to meet new people,” says Michele. “My neighbor was an agent and said I would be good at it. That stuck with me. Real estate was a great way to transition into a new life without the need for a college degree or any experience. I found a lot of freedom in real estate.”

But her newfound freedom came with early challenges. Michele’s first days as a REALTOR® were “sink or swim” in the truest sense, but thanks to her innate determination, drive, and dedication, along with supportive family and friends, she was able to persevere.

“When I first obtained my real estate license, my divorce was still in process, my house was under contract, and I had no idea where I would be living next,” says Michele. “It was a defining moment and realization that my life was headed down a new path and there must be a good reason for it. That positivity powered me through.”

Michele has come a long way since those rocky early days, nine years ago. Her over seventy-five-million-dollar career sales volume includes the eight million dollars she pulled in 2020. She’s been recognized as a member of Coldwell Banker’s Sterling Society five times, it’s Diamond Society three times, and for the first time in 2021, its Platinum Club. Michele was also named as one of *Chicago Agent* magazine’s “Who’s Who” in 2020. Even with her achievements, though, Michele prides herself most on being a calming influence for her clients during an often stressful process.

“I find value in being the voice of reason and in talking clients off the ledge during the very emotional real estate roller-coaster ride,” says Michele. “My clients often tell me about their positive experience and the feeling of safety they felt during their entire transaction.”

•••  
 Beyond impacting the lives of her clients, Michele also prioritizes giving back to those in need. She contributes actively to the Coldwell Banker Charitable Foundation—an organization that supports over thirty local housing charities. She also participates in Feed My Starving Children's events because of its mission to bring nutrition to kids around the world.

“I have proudly held two client appreciation food-packing events with Feed My Starving Children,” says Michele. “It’s also been a fun way to get together in one place with several of my business partners, such as my primary lender, attorney, inspectors, photographers, and their employees.”

“I find value in being the voice of reason and in talking clients off the ledge during the very emotional real estate roller coaster ride. My clients often tell me about their positive experience and the feeling of safety they felt during their entire transaction.”

A self-proclaimed “outdoors person,” Michele uses any excuse to be outside. She loves to golf, bike, walk, kayak, hike, glamp, and motorcycle around Naperville, and to spend time on her balcony. When the weather turns colder, you can find her sitting around her cozy fire with friends or taking an occasional ski day on a sunny winter day. And she takes a thankful attitude wherever she goes.

“Every day I wake up grateful for the roof over my head, the comforts I can afford, the thriving business I have, and my health to make it all happen,” she says. “More importantly, I’m grateful for the people I get to meet and work with, and the family and friends that have believed in, loved, and supported me over the years.”



Michele uses any excuse to be outside and loves to ride her motorcycle around Naperville



Michele skiing with her father.



Michele enjoying a golfing trip with friends.



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# Virtual JAM SESSIONS



DUPAGE  
**RP REAL PRODUCERS.**

**Jam Session #8** **f LIVE**  
An organic conversation about DuPage real estate



DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live  
\*The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page (technology permitting).  
**Tuesday July 13th 9:15 am CST**



## events

*Top REALTORS® and Preferred Partners Engaging Virtually*

As an organization, we are fully aware of the need to creatively connect, inspire, elevate, and add value to both our REALTORS® and Preferred Partners. As a response, we have continued 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 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  
**RP REAL PRODUCERS.**

**Jam Session #9** **f LIVE**  
An organic conversation about DuPage real estate



DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live  
\*The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page (technology permitting).  
**Tuesday August 3rd 9:15 am CST**

DUPAGE  
**RP REAL PRODUCERS.**

**Jam Session #10** **f LIVE**  
An organic conversation about DuPage real estate



DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live  
\*The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page (technology permitting).  
**Tuesday September 28th 9:15AM CST**



We have received great feedback about these events, so we are continuing to schedule them through the end of the year! Want to join one? Let us know by emailing us at [andy.burton@realproducersmag.com](mailto:andy.burton@realproducersmag.com).

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▶ cover story  
By Lauren Young  
Photos by Katherin Frankovic

# ALEXA MIMI WAGNER

**REALTOR®**  
Reboot:  
Second Career  
Repositions This  
Former Teacher  
for Success

“I feel like it was my destiny to be in real estate, since I come from a family of successful REALTORS®,” says Alexa Mimi Wagner of RE/MAX Professionals Select in Naperville. “My mother, two aunts, and one cousin have all had thirty-year careers in the industry.” ...

••• Alexa was born in Washington, D.C., and moved to Naperville when she was ten years old. Her father was originally from Chicago, and after working in the Secret Service, he wanted to retire in his hometown. Along with an admiration for her father's strong drive, she also looked up to her aunts and mother—she saw them as the successful women entrepreneurs they were in the 1970s and '80s.

But like many REALTORS®, Alexa didn't start out in real estate. After earning an undergraduate degree from Purdue University, Alexa became a middle school teacher in District 204 in Naperville. Next, she obtained a master's degree from National Louis University and taught sixth grade for fifteen years. But then things changed; in 2008, Alexa went through a divorce and some difficult financial circumstances. "It was a rough time for me, but I was determined to turn things around," Alexa says. "After my divorce, I basically started from scratch, on my own."

**“MANY PEOPLE SEE THE SUCCESS AND RESULTS, BUT THEY DON'T SEE WHAT HURDLES WERE SCALED TO GET THERE. I AM ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO IS ALWAYS STRIVING AND NEVER SATISFIED WITH THE STATUS QUO.”**



Real estate was always in the back of Alexa's mind as a career option because of the childhood influence of so many REALTOR® family members. She had also built her own home and loved the process. So with encouragement from friends and family, Alexa decided to make the career change.

"With amazing support and my own good sense of humor, I was determined to make a real estate career pay off," she says. "But entering into real estate during the economic and market downturn of 2008 was a challenge indeed. The first year I think I paid my broker more than I made. But with each new year, armed with knowledge from my mentor, and now close friend, Jen Conte, I just kept trying to absorb as much as I could from top agents and hustled hard every day. Having former students who had me assist them in buying their first homes helped build my skills and database. It is my belief that nothing bad can happen to you when you work hard." •••

...

“It took a lot of tenacity and perseverance to build a brand and recession-proof business that could last for many years to come.”

During her thirteen years as a REALTOR®, Alexa has been recognized with RE/MAX’s Platinum Club, Chairman Club, Hall of Fame, and Lifetime Achievement awards. For the last five years, she has been among the Top 10 and Top 100 agents for RE/MAX in Northern Illinois. In 2018, she was the number-one RE/MAX agent of Naperville in total volume. She’s a member of the Million Dollar Guild, and has been featured in *Top Agent Magazine* twice in her career.

Outside of her day-to-day business, Alexa prioritizes giving back to the local community. Through RE/MAX, she is an avid supporter of Children’s Miracle Network, with whom they are affiliated. A portion of her earned commission and fundraising events throughout the year are donated to Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago.

In her downtime, Alexa and her fiancé, Brett, can be found tailgating and cheering on the Chicago Bears, going to concerts, and enjoying downtown Naperville. They also prioritize time to make memories with his four kids, her “bonus” kids, and three grandchildren. Alexa also loves to pamper



Alexa with her fiancé, Brett Fessler.

her stubborn bulldog, Ruby, who “always has her nails painted even when I don’t.” And when Alexa needs a calming activity, you’ll often find her digging in the dirt in her yard, planting flowers. Each year, she picks a color theme for her pots and planting beds.

Even after all these years in real estate, Alexa is still motivated by future success while reflecting on how far she’s come.

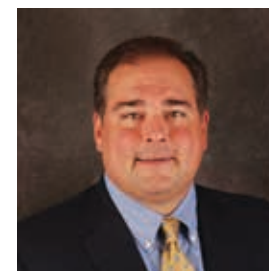
“Many people see the success and results, but they don’t see what hurdles were scaled to get there,” she says. “I am one of those people who is always striving and never satisfied with the status quo. I am energized by continuously refining and streamlining my systems. The most joy for me in this business comes from truly being a trusted advisor, a problem solver, and a levity provider for my clients whom I am lucky enough to serve. Real estate is my passion, and hard work will always be a part of who I am.”



Alexa’s bulldog, Ruby.



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# Team Baker REALTORS®: Celebrating their 1,000th Closing with a \$1,000 Donation

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To celebrate Team Baker REALTORS®'s upcoming real estate milestone—their 1,000th closing—owner Paul Baker announced they would donate \$1,000 to a charity of the closing client's choice.

As fate would have it, that client was not only their 1,000th closing—he was also their first.

In 2008, Matt Dziedzic wanted to buy his first home, a condo in Forest Park. He was friends with the Baker family and knew Paul had just obtained his real estate license. Matt decided to become Paul's first client.

"Paul is one of the most honest, hard-working people I know. Even as a new agent, he got me a great deal on my condo," said Matt. "After I married, my wife and I worked with him to buy our first home in Downers Grove. When we outgrew that one, we knew it was Paul and his team we'd go to for our next."

In 2021, Team Baker helped Matt, his wife, Colleen, and their two children, Matthew

and Emma, find their dream home and celebrated their 1,000th closing in the process.

As part of the milestone, Paul wanted to give back to his clients and community by donating \$1,000 to the charity of their choice. The Dziedzics selected HCS Family Services, a Hinsdale non-profit that provides emergency food for people in need in southeast DuPage County and far western Cook County.

"Our community has given so much to us over the years it just seemed natural to give back," said Paul Baker. "We are so happy to be able to support HCS and the important work they are doing."

Through food pantries in Hinsdale and Willowbrook, HCS serves more than 800 people a week offering a variety of nutritious foods to families

facing hunger. In addition, they provide diapers, paper goods, and personal care items. For every dollar donated, HCS is able to buy eight dollars in groceries.

"While DuPage County is one of the wealthiest counties in Illinois, it's also the second largest food-insecure population in the state," said HCS Executive Director Wendy Michalski. "The donation from Team Baker and the Dziedzics really made an impact on our ability to buy items our neighbors need."

Team Baker is part of Platinum Partners REALTORS®. The Baker team includes Paul Baker, Jodee Baker, Audrey Albright, Kayla Corrigan, Amy Hausman, and Stephen Koloszi.

For more information visit [www.teambaker-pprhomes.com](http://www.teambaker-pprhomes.com).



# FALL EVENT

HOSTED BY  
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Thank you to everyone who came out and joined us for our *DuPage Real Producers* fall fest at Solemn Oath Brewery last month. Photos from the event will be shared in the December issue.



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A special shout out to Camden Law Office, LLC for their support in making the event top-notch.

We cannot wait for the next event this coming winter 2022!



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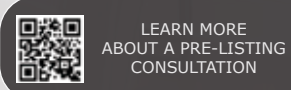
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