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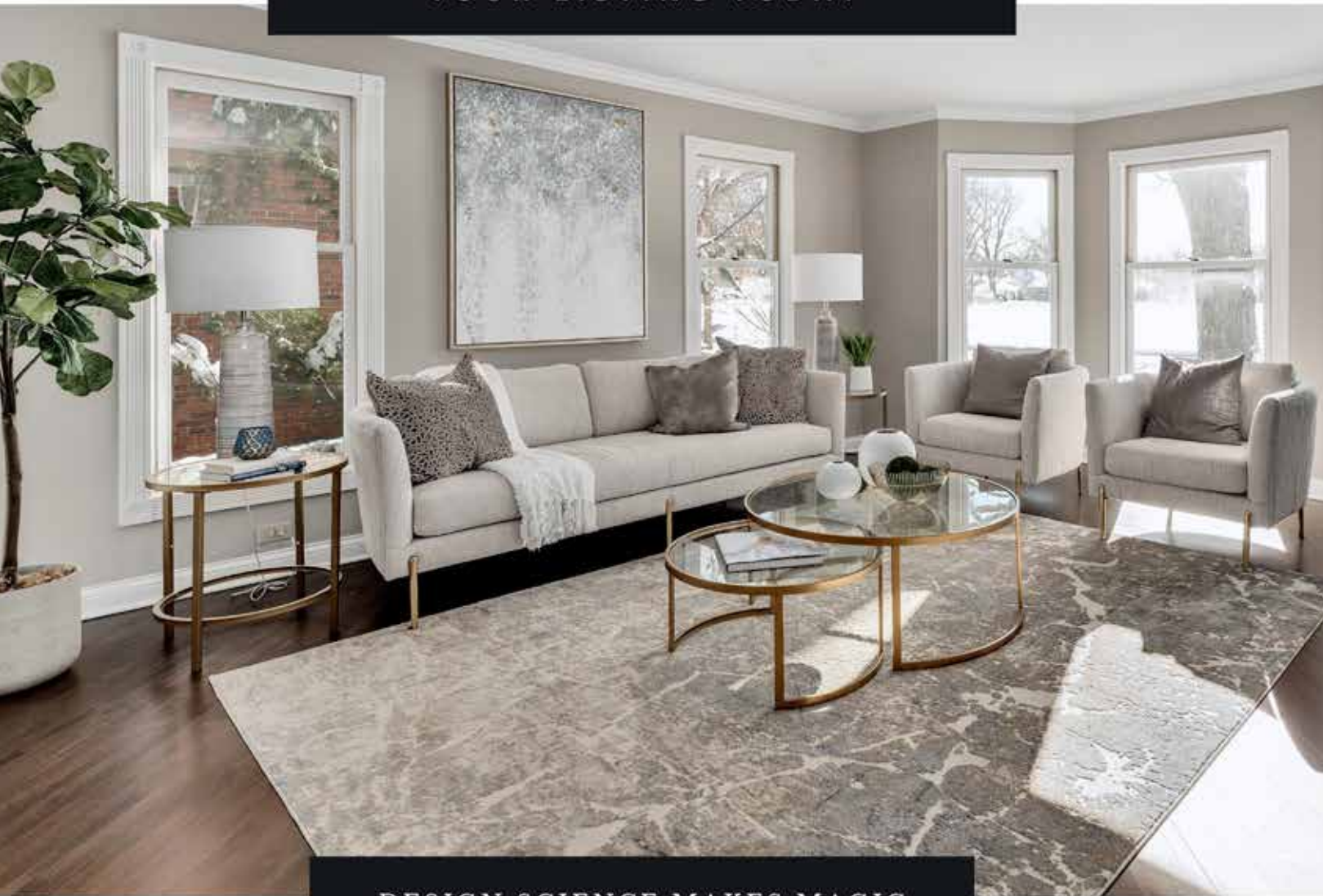
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PUBLISHER'S note



My son just started preschool which means 75 percent of my children are in school full time. I never thought the day would come! Teachers have been put through the wringer over the past two school years. As I think about all of the changes that our education system has had to endure, I am now more appreciative of school teachers than ever before. We can almost all agree that teachers are underpaid for the amount of work they do and the unnecessary things they put up with outside of their job description.

I have always wondered what it would look like if teachers were incentivized like REALTORS®. What would their “commission structure” look like? I know that is hard to translate and we are not comparing apples to apples, but it does spark curiosity in my

mind. The point is that teachers deserve an enormous amount of grace and gratitude in my humble opinion.

I’ve had countless mentors who have shaped my life who have not been financially compensated to the degree in which they deserve. People who give freely of their time to help take someone else’s game to the next level are usually indifferent about being put on a pedestal.

This month, I encourage you to be intentional about thanking someone who has not been adequately compensated for having a positive impact on your life.



Andy Burton
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Virtual JAM SESSIONS



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JAM SESSION #5 **f LIVE**

An intergalactic conversation about DuPage real estate

ALICE CHIN **EVA BURNS** **LEE ERNST** **WENDY PAWLAK** **TINA MARIE MATEJA**

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*The feed will stream live from Andy Burton's Facebook page (technology permitting).

TUESDAY MAY 4TH 9:15 AM CST

DuPage...I am your host. **ANDY BURTON**

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. 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!



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

DUPAGE RP REAL PRODUCERS.

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

Maureen Rooney, Samantha Bauman, Gail Niernmeyer, Kris Maranda, Jackie Angiello, Chase Michels, Diana Ivan, Diane Coyle, Nathan Stillwell, Pete Rodriguez, Janella Iacino, Wojtek Niemiak, Gary Giovannelli, Michael Patti, Tia Duderstadt, Margaret Gehr

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Thursday April 8th 9:15 am CST

DuPage Real Producers invites you to tune in via Facebook Live
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Tuesday May 18th 9:15 am CST



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

DENEEN

Ruffolo

By Lauren Young
Photos by AbiV Photography

A Designer's Eye for Real Estate

"I was dragged to open houses my whole life," says Deneen Ruffolo of Realty Executives Midwest in Darien. "In my family, checking out homes was the typical Sunday thing to do."

Before moving to Darien at the age of 6, Deneen grew up in Alsip with her parents and two siblings. As a child, she grew close to her grandmother, spending time with her while her parents worked hard to support the family.

"I remember that my parents worked many hours and sometimes held more than one job at a time," says Deneen. "Yet I can remember them as always [being] available to give others a helping hand."



Deneen with her husband, Greg.

"I always thought nursing would be my career," she adds. "Because I thought that was the best way to help people. Giving to others was modeled by my grandmother and parents from the very beginning of my childhood."

Deneen pursued her nursing degree at College of DuPage, but after she and her husband, Greg, got married, they purchased their first home in Naperville while Greg worked two jobs and finished college. Their first child, Cassi, was born just before Deneen's twenty-first birthday. It was right around that time Deneen began redecorating homes for friends and family to bring in extra income.

"When you are a young married person and you don't have a whole lot of money, you figure out how to decorate your house with what you have," says Deneen. "Everyone kept telling me that I had a talent, so I helped them create draperies and decorate their house. Neighbors and friends began asking me for more help and it grew from there."

Deneen began styling window treatments and blinds, but seeing her own success, she

soon launched a full-service decorating company called DR Window Decor. Over the years, she developed partnerships with vendors and worked with architects and contractors to plan renovations. With her gained real estate experience, Deneen also helped Greg set up his own home-builders business, G Michael Construction. After many years of successfully managing her own company, she began looking for a new opportunity. When Deneen's youngest child, Michael, left for college, she ramped up her search for a fresh challenge to fill her time.

"While running my decorating business, I earned several trips with Hunter Douglas and considered myself pretty successful," says Deneen. "But I was working out of my home office and did not have anyone to bounce off ideas with."

"My husband was going through a job change that was leading him to a bank that would lend to multi-family property owners and investors," she adds. "He wanted to gain more real estate knowledge and asked if I wanted to go take classes with him."

Real estate was nothing new to the Ruffolos. Deneen's mother and aunt were agents, Greg's mother worked in the industry, and one of their closest friends for over thirty-five years, Jana Pinc, was a REALTOR® and the managing broker/owner at Realty Executive Midwest (REM). . . .



...

Upon completing their training in 2010, they visited Jana at her office, licenses in hand. “She didn’t know we were coming that day or that we had gotten our licenses,” says Deneen. “She was thrilled that we had decided to join forces, and we’ve worked at that office with her ever since.”

“The REM office welcomed us with open arms,” she says. “We have felt right at home since day one.”

Deneen always thought nursing was the best career to help people, but she’s found the same mission and passion as a REALTOR®.

“My goal is to treat my customers like family and aid them in making one of the most important decisions of their life,” says Deneen.

Along with recognition for a career volume of over \$73 million and a 2020 volume of \$11 million, Deneen has received much recognition for her connection with clients, as well as other accolades, including: 2020 Diamond Award (top 2 percent)—Mainstreet; 2020 Top Executive Award—Great Lakes Region; 2020 Top Producer Award—Realty Executives Midwest; 2020 Dollar Volume Closed—Great Lakes Region Realty Executives; 2020 Darien Lions Humanitarian Award; 2018 Top Listings [per] Dollar Volume—Great Lakes Region; and the 2018 Top Producer—Realty Executives Midwest.

When Deneen is not helping others as a REALTOR®, she still loves to remodel and redecorate, and she and her family enjoy making meals for big dinners together.



“We love having crazy, loud family meals together because, well, is there any other kind?” jokes Deneen. “The boys love to grill and smoke food, so we do get spoiled pretty much all year long.”

Spending time by the water and playing a round of golf are Deneen’s favorite ways to relax. The whole family—Deneen and Greg, Cassi and her family, Michael and his family—plans a yearly vacation where they can relax at the beach and by the pool, play golf, be outdoors, and run around with the four grandkids.

Deneen also helps people by giving back to her community. She has been involved with the Darien Lions Club for many years. Projects include collecting money on Candy Day for the Needy Family Food Basket project. She is also active with organizations

that focus on collecting toys for kids in need, such as Toys for Tots, Media Advertising Club of Chicago, and Cancer Smashers.

Deneen never dreamed she’d reach this level of success in her career. She recently achieved one of the goals she set for herself this year: she’s recently received her Illinois managing broker license. Her next goal for this year? To open up a satellite office in Florida.

“I just try to work hard and continue to give back,” says Deneen. “Good things do happen to good people all over the world, but I consider myself blessed.”

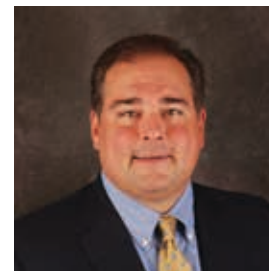


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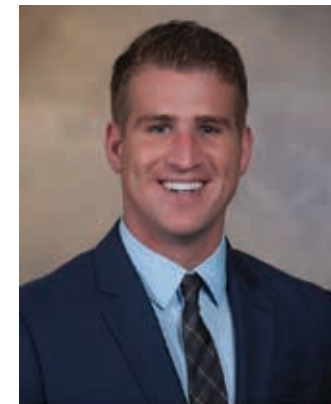


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Kim DALASKEY



» cover story

By Lauren Young
Photos by Katherin Frankovic

Finding Her Passion



The architecture of homes has always fascinated me,” says Kim Dalaskey, REALTOR® and current owner of Naperville’s Monarque Group with John Greene REALTOR®. “I grew up going to open houses with my mom on the weekends. We’d comb the newspaper for the latest listings.”

Aside from this early exposure to her future passion, Kim credits both her mother and father for teaching her the importance of putting others first—lessons that continue to impact her focus on service.

“My parents gave me all the tools and direction to succeed in life, while taking the time to give back and help others in need,” she adds. “I’m consistently impressed by their humble nature and dedication to their careers, friends, and our family.”

During Kim’s childhood, her father left the corporate world to become a youth pastor and make an impact in the community. Many years later, she would follow a similar path, leaving the corporate world to make an impact working in her local community.

“It was a huge risk for my father to leave his high-level, steady career,” says Kim. “But I really look up to him and to my mother, both of whom have backgrounds in nonprofit work.”



Kim with Karen Marposon, the founder of the Monarque Group.
Photo credit: Pfeiffer Photography

Kim graduated from Illinois State University with a bachelor of science degree just in time to enter a job market in the midst of the 2008 recession.

“It wasn’t easy to find a job, let alone something I was truly passionate about,” she says. “I chose a career path at a Fortune 500 company so that I could earn an income and gain experience while deciding where I truly wanted to be in life.”

During this time, Kim would frequently drive by signs in her neighborhood promoting top local broker Karen Marposon, the founder of the Monarque Group. It made her consider her own future possibilities; following in her father’s footsteps, Kim left her corporate job to pursue her passion. After earning her real estate license, she ended up working at Karen Marposon’s office, eventually taking over as owner. ●●●

Kim with her team (starting at the bottom left):
First row: Karen Marposon, Strategic Development Advisor; Kim Dalaskey, Principal Broker
Second row: Lisa Bruce, Broker; Julie Doss, Broker
Third row: Kristin Meadows, Broker; Karen Fakroddin, Broker; Kristine Myers, Operations Manager; Jill Shipley, Marketing Manager



Photo credit: Pfeiffer Photography

“Professionally, I have looked up to Karen as a true mentor,” says Kim. “She paved the way and foundation for me and our entire team. She is a vault of knowledge—from local history, to builders and properties, to negotiation tactics, to how to navigate complex transactions. Since I have

taken ownership of our team, it is a tremendous advantage to still have her as an advisor and resource.”

In the last two years, Kim’s team has produced over \$100 million in sales volume. This year, they are on track to exceed their prior years’ annual

volume by over 12 percent and are one of the highest achieving teams in the area. They earned Top Team in Naperville for volume in 2019 and 2020, according to InfoSparks (MRED). In 2021, Real Trends (in partnership with The Wall Street Journal), ranked them number 23 in volume for medium-sized teams in Illinois. And they are consistently found on *Chicago Agent Magazine’s* Top 20 Agents list for DuPage County by volume.

Kim is a certified luxury home marketing specialist, a member of the Million Dollar Guild, and holds

“Our combined skill sets, strengths, and passion for best-in-class service is how our brand has maintained its reputation...”



festivals, and visiting Michigan and Wisconsin lakes and beaches.

Looking ahead, Kim is committed to maintaining and advancing the success that Monarque was founded upon, as well as to continuing to evolve to meet the adapting needs of the clients in her community.

“My goals are to leverage the skills and efficiencies of our team structure, taking full advantage of our team members’ diverse backgrounds, which include careers in local county government; secondary, higher, and special education; the travel industry; entrepreneurship; therapeutic yoga instruction; and corporate finance,” says Kim. “Our combined skill sets, strengths, and passion for best-in-class service is how our brand has maintained its reputation—all while staying current with the fast-paced market and latest tools to offer the best service for our clients.”

several other certifications and designations including PSA (Pricing Strategy Advisor).

Kim and her team make it a goal to serve the community around them. Among other efforts, they sponsor Families Helping Families, and this summer they were a presenting sponsor of the first-ever Naperville Salute,

an event where all proceeds support Naperville Responds for Veterans.

When Kim is not managing her real estate business, she enjoys working out at Orangetheory Fitness and running 5Ks and half-marathons. Her husband, Rob, and young children, Will and Paige, enjoy joining Kim at nearby parks, exploring local





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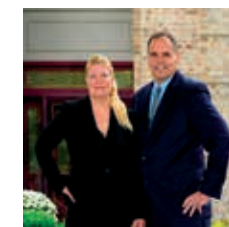
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Laura Bruno



AN OVERACHIEVER WITH REAL ESTATE FEVER

Laura Bruno, of the Bruno-Ghigi Team in Naperville, has always been an “overachiever.” She says she gets it from her mother, who demonstrated a vigorous work ethic and positive attitude while raising her four children.

“My mother had a difficult marriage and practically raised us on her own while simultaneously working to keep the family business together,” says Laura. “She went to night school to become a nurse, and I really looked up to her for her smarts, self-sufficiency, and perseverance against all odds.”



Laura enjoying the water during a scuba diving trip.

After growing up in Florida, Laura attended Kent State University, pursuing a degree in biology with the aim of becoming a marine biologist.

“I worked and paid for college on my own, but could not afford the expense of a graduate degree,” she says. “I decided to switch to occupational therapy [OT] so that I could work part-time and live at home to save for tuition.” Laura’s first job after graduation was as a registered occupational therapist in Chicago, running a traumatic brain injury unit at a rehab center.

Living up to her “overachiever” status, Laura got engaged to her husband, Greg, after their third date, which all took place in the same week. They were married five months later, and they had three children in three and a half years. When they were expecting their first child, Laura and Greg moved from the Gold Coast to Naperville.

“I devoted my time to raising our children until my youngest was in middle school,” she explains. “At that point, I started the process to renew my OT license, but found that medicine, particularly rehab, had changed drastically.”

Laura did not like the change in focus, which was away from personal attention and toward quicker patient processing, so she started considering other career options. By then, Laura and Greg were successfully buying, renovating, and flipping homes. Greg had his broker’s license and Laura decided to follow suit. She took over home listings so Greg could focus on



•••

renovations. Eventually, she took on her own clients, starting with friends and family.

“I found that I really enjoyed working with clients, and I was actually pretty good at it,” she said. “Many of the skills I learned as an occupational therapist were transferable to being a helpful REALTOR®.”

“In OT we are trained to take large tasks and break them down to measurable and achievable goals,” she adds. “We’re made to be experts at coaching our clients and working with many different personalities in stressful situations, and we are also trained in data analysis.”

Those skills have translated into success. In 2020 alone, the

Bruno-Ghigli Team’s total volume was over \$32 million.

During her twenty years, Laura has received awards and recognition from many sources. In addition to being named one of the Notable Residential Real Estate Brokers by *Crain’s Chicago Business* (2019), and one of America’s Best Real Estate Professionals (top 1 percent nationwide) by Real Trends (2019), she has won awards from Baird & Warner since 2011, notably: Top 1 percent in Title Volume and Units, Top 1 percent in Mortgage Sales and Units, and Top 1 percent in Sales and Units.

When Laura is not managing her office, she enjoys spending time with her husband, three children, and three grandchildren. Together,

they love to play board games, like Settlers of Catan, and hosting family meals. Greg and Laura travel extensively. Recently, they visited Glacier National Park in Montana where they took in spectacular views while hiking, whitewater rafting, and biking.

Laura is an overachiever even in her leisure time. She’s an avid scuba diver and experiences her deepest feeling of Zen at 70 feet underwater.



Laura and her family.



MY BIGGEST PASSION AT THIS STAGE OF MY CAREER IS PASSING ON MY KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE TO THE NEXT GENERATION...”

She is also a third-degree blackbelt in TaeKwonDo and was a two-time Illinois State sparring champion while in her 40s.

As Laura looks forward, she refocuses on the most rewarding parts of her work. “We get to have the honor of helping people find their home. [They are, and therefore, we are] not buying or selling a house, but a *home*—the neighborhood they raise their family in, the school their children attend, the community they live and grow in.

It is a tremendous responsibility and we take it seriously.”

In 2017, Laura’s son-in-law, Bill Ghigli, joined her practice. She has enjoyed watching him grow from a new agent into a seasoned professional. “My biggest passion at this stage of my career is passing on my knowledge and experience to the next generation,” she says. “To know that my business is staying with our family is a blessing.”



Laura with one of her grandsons.



Laura with Bill Ghigli.

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COMPETITIVE FOR CLIENTS

By Lauren Young
Photos by Katherin Frankovic

on the rise



Bill and his family.
Photo credit: Tim Gauger

Bill Ghighi and his older brother were born and raised in Oglesby, Illinois, near Starved Rock State Park. From the time he was 2 years old, Bill and his siblings competed in sports—against each other and kids in the neighborhood.

“My parents encouraged me into sports, and because I have a big brother, I

had no other choice but to become extremely competitive,” he says.

Through high school, Bill excelled at baseball and basketball. He continued to play basketball in college while he studied business and finance. After graduation, he became a high school teacher and basketball coach. During those years, Bill’s future

mother-in-law, REALTOR® Laura Bruno, began recruiting him to become a fellow agent. In 2015, he started to consider her advice.

“For me, there was always an interest in real estate,” he says. “My great aunt was a REALTOR® in my hometown. But it wasn’t until Laura asked me to join her team that I took it seriously.”



“The risk of doing it alone was scary,” he adds. “I’m a pretty risk-averse person, so it took a few years for me to ultimately take the leap.” In 2017, the day before his first child was born, Bill passed his REALTOR® exam.

His work as a REALTOR® has surprised Bill in two ways. “I thought coaching would satisfy my competitive drive, but performing for my clients, negotiating contracts, and being able to push myself to new sales limits has done that so much more,” he affirms. Bill also found that his teaching and coaching experience help him with the planning and execution of the buying and selling process.

“Breaking the processes into steps and communicating continuously along the way is something I think clients enjoy about working with Laura and me,” says Bill. “I’ve learned so much from her over the years, and she has helped me put my own spin on things.”

Since the start of their partnership, the Bruno-Ghighi Team in Naperville, Bill and Laura have made growth a key priority, both in their personal development and community influence. They have added team members Ginny, Noelle, and Erin to their group, and the Bruno-Ghighi Team’s volume exceeded \$32 million last year alone.

For Bill, the ability to have a flexible schedule was one of the most attractive features of a career in real estate. Now that he has three children under the age of 5—Brock, Baker, and new baby, Kailey—that freedom is even more important. Bill and his wife, Kate, will celebrate their sixth anniversary this October, and they love spending time with each other, their kids, and catching up on favorite Netflix shows. In their free time, they are active at their local church.

Bill holds out hope that one day Kate will join the team, too. “I’ve been



Bill with mother-in-law and business partner, Laura Bruno.



Bill with his two older boys.

“*I am passionate about continuing to **GROW** and **LEARN** everything I can..”*”



Bill's three children: Brock, Baker, and new baby, Kailey.



encouraging my wife to join our team once our kids are in school,” he laughs. “Real estate has given my family opportunities that [a career in] teaching wouldn’t have been able to do, and it drives me every day to work hard.”

Looking forward, Bill thinks the same flexibility offered by real estate will be required of its agents to adapt to the changing markets. That belief drives him to give his best to the other agents, attorneys, lenders, closers, clients, and administrators he works with throughout the process so they can be as nimble as possible.

“I wish I had a crystal ball to know how things will continuously evolve,”

says Bill. “Even with the unknowns of the future, I’m always trying new marketing strategies and thinking about adding to the team. I love collaborating with others and being in a team atmosphere. I look for agents who might be a good fit, so that we can grow together in the workplace,” he adds.

“I am passionate about continuing to grow and learn everything I can about how to be a great agent. I want the clients I work with to walk away thinking that they chose the right team,” he adds. “Assisting clients with the process of buying or selling a home is such a joy, and being able to remove some stress while they do so is important to me as well.”

▶▶ partner spotlight

By Lauren Young
Photos by Katherin Frankovic



MARGARET GEHR & KATHY LOBKOVICH

CO-OWNERS OF CHICAGOLAND HOME STAGING

EVER ON THE CUTTING EDGE

The innovative team at Chicagoland Home Staging (CHS) has long received public recognition for their work. Frequently acknowledged for excellence in industry leadership, client care, and staging design, this year alone, CHS has been nominated for Best of Home Staging by the International Association of Home Staging Professionals; and Margaret Gehr, CHS's founder and co-owner, was nominated for the Real Estate Staging Association's "Most Influential People" list.

"As a company, we are always honored when we're recognized by our peers," says Margaret Gehr. "The more our industry educates others about the power of staging, the more REALTORS® and home sellers can benefit: they'll be able to sell their properties quicker and for more money."

That mission of REALTOR® education has been ingrained in CHS from the beginning. In fact, Margaret has been key in the development of the Real Estate Staging Association in

Illinois: She was not only one of its earliest members, but was also the founding president of the Chicago chapter. Currently, she serves on the National Executive Committee with the goal of advancing the standards within the staging industry.

Where most staging companies have just one or two designers, CHS has expanded its team to fifteen professionals. They bring a combined sixty years of interior design experience to the table. To better meet the needs



Margaret & Kathy with their team.



...

of their REALTOR® partners, CHS has four areas of service, each with its own unique focus. This innovative approach to the business allows CHS to provide tailored attention and specialized service to agents and sellers.

“We have a team of consultation specialists that works with agents to prepare occupied homes for sale,” explains co-owner Kathy Lobkovich. “We also have designers that stage vacant properties. They are assisted by our logistics team, which moves and manages our 14,500 square-foot warehouse of staging inventory. Our development team focuses primarily on developing long-term relationships with REALTORS® as an extension of their team and marketing efforts.”

The company’s newest service is their recently launched “Chicagoland

“**WE ALWAYS WANT TO STAY AHEAD OF WHERE INTERIOR DESIGN AND FURNITURE TRENDS ARE SHIFTING...**”
-MARGARET

Home.” Frequently, REALTORS® and homeowners like CHS’s designs so much that they request to purchase furnishings and decor from a staged home. Through this service, REALTORS®, clients, and the public

can shop CHS’s favorite furniture pieces as well as the latest decor used in their designs. It’s just another means through which the company can provide the customer experience that it’s known for in terms of both its high-quality service and its discerning eye in product.

“We are always striving to create better results for our REALTOR® partners,” Kathy adds. “We always want them to know that they can feel confident in hiring us.”

Another big part of CHS’s strategy is to make regular trips to interior design events and furniture markets around the country. During the last eighteen months, many of these events were cancelled, but now that in-person shows are relaunching, the team has been able to attend again this year.

“We always want to stay ahead of where interior design and furniture trends are shifting,” says Margaret. “It’s important that we regularly update our inventory to maintain the latest looks that luxury buyers expect. We’ve found that no one wants to pay top dollar for a house that feels dated.”

One of the biggest of these events is the biannual Las Vegas Market. Just

like car manufacturers unveil new products at the Chicago Auto Show each year, hundreds of home-furnishing vendors unveil new products and the latest trends at their shows. Before the public sees the new releases, tastemakers at these shows give designers a sneak peek at the “next big things.”

“When we attend and buy from these events it helps us bring our clients

higher quality pieces, which allows us to provide our clients with a finished product that distinguishes their home from any other in the area—it sets them apart from similar listings,” says Kathy. “A higher caliber of goods produces a more polished look and conveys an increased home value, letting us better serve the real estate market.”

CHS is proud to be recognized as being on the forefront of the industry by its peers, but their mission continues to be to help their REALTOR® partners excel in their businesses and achieve their goals.



Marnie adjusting a lamp.



Two stagers prepping in the warehouse.

To reach the team at Chicagoland Home Staging to learn more about their services, visit www.chicagolandhomestaging.com or view their portfolio at [@chicagolandhomestaging](https://www.instagram.com/chicagolandhomestaging).

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