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Cover photo courtesy of Michelle Reed Photography.

RP

If you are interested in contributing or nominating REALTORS® for certain stories, please email us at swfl@realproducersmag.com.

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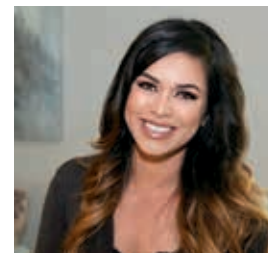
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Nominate a REALTOR® you'd like to see featured in this magazine by emailing swfl@realproducersmag.com.

FAQ ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE

By **Andrew Regenhard**, Publisher



Real Producers is celebrating the launch of our Fort Myers-specific magazine this month! If you just made the 2021 Top 500 producers in Fort Myers 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!

subject line "Nomination: (Name of Nominee)" and explain why you are nominating them to be featured. It could be they have an amazing story that needs to be told — perhaps they overcame extreme obstacles, they are an exceptional leader, they 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 photographers to schedule a photo shoot.

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 receives this magazine?

A: The top 500 agents in Fort Myers. We pulled the MLS numbers (by volume) from Jan. 1, 2021, to Dec. 31, 2021, in the Fort Myers area, cut the list off at number 500, and our new 2022 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 \$8.6 million in 2021, 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 because 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 swfl@realproducersmag.com with the

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 andrew.regenhard@realproducersmag.com.



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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



Dear Fort Myers REALTORS® and Preferred Partners,

Since this publication is so new in Fort Myers and many of you have just started receiving it (congratulations again — that means you made approximately the top 0.5% of agents in the Fort Myers area!), if you have any questions about either the magazine or our events or have someone you know (including yourself) who you think we should feature, please feel free to reach out to me. My door is always open!

I know some of you were able to make it down to Naples for the big *Naples Real Producers* quarterly event at the Bentley Naples dealership at the end of June. Thank you to those who came — it was another amazing, signature *Real Producers* event, and it was so great seeing you guys. Now, we're super excited to be in the planning stage for our very first Fort Myers-dedicated event — the

big launch party — coming up soon. We can't wait to bring everyone in the Fort Myers Top 500 community together to celebrate not only the launch of this new publication but also everyone's fantastic performance in the last year that got them into this top echelon of Realtors in the area. We'll be sure to keep you posted on the details as the event comes together. Keep your eye on your inbox (and even your snail mailbox!) for your exclusive invitation.

As the summer selling season winds down, I hope you all will be able to take a break and enjoy some downtime with your friends and families. Everyone's had such a crazy, amazing season — it's super important to find that balance and slow down enough to enjoy the fruits of your labor. So I hope you'll take some time for you, some time to recharge, maybe do some traveling and just really be able to enjoy everything you've been working so hard for.

Very respectfully yours,

Andrew Regenhard
Owner/Publisher
Fort Myers Real Producers
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2021

BY THE NUMBERS

HERE'S WHAT FORT MYERS'* TOP 500 AGENTS SOLD...

19,462



TOTAL TRANSACTIONS



\$8.2B

SALES VOLUME

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*Information is based on residential sales in 2021 in Lee County by the top 500 agents by sales volume in Lee County.



CHARLIE RUCK

In It to Serve



...

Charlie Ruck (center) with teammates Payton Scarbrough (left) and Maite Silva (right).
(Photo by LaCasaTour)



...

By taking a service-first attitude, Charlie Ruck’s real estate business has doubled every year he’s been in business. In 2020, he partnered with Trinity Commercial Group’s founder, Dan O’Berski, along with Nate Johnson and Tom Potter of the luxury home builder Potter Homes to found the brokerage Potter Trinity.

Potter Trinity focuses on providing premium performance and customer peace of mind. As principal of Potter Trinity, Charlie’s goal is simple: To serve.

“The brokerage’s goal is to serve people well, and that’s it,” he says. “My only vision — and I think the partners would agree here — is to serve our clients as well as we can. I know that’s a cliché phrase, but that’s it for me. We certainly have sales goals, and my coach, Kerri Herrity, would be



Photo by LaCasaTour

unhappy if I didn’t mention those, but they are not the primary focus. We are here to serve people well.”

One of Charlie’s main focuses is land acquisition for Potter Homes’ future Florida developments. Potter Trinity is growing; the brokerage added an operations director last year and recently hired an experienced lead buyer’s agent. Charlie also works closely with ARES Business Development Coaching and considers Coach Kerri an extension of the team.

“I’m a firm believer in calculated risk, and my faith is the cornerstone of my life. I had faith that the way this whole thing was orchestrated was not just a conversation about starting a brokerage. It was much more than that. Professionally, it has been a little daunting, but also incredibly humbling and motivating,” Charlie says.

To understand how Charlie has achieved such success, we step back in time to understand his roots.

In the Beginning

Growing up in Fort Myers, Charlie Ruck had the chance to witness some of the most expensive homes in Southwest Florida being built. His father ran Ruck Brothers Brick and was not only the company’s owner but their lead salesman.

“My dad supplied much, if not all, of the natural stone and brick for the luxury development in Port Royal. As a kid, getting to see \$20+ million homes — which was record-breaking at the time — emerge from the dirt was fascinating and formative,” Charlie reflects. “It was incredible.”

Ruck Brothers Brick was the top masonry, stone and granite supplier from Tampa to Miami, and Charlie’s father was directly involved in much of the development of



Southwest Florida. Charlie regularly visited job sites alongside his father, forming the foundation for a future career in real estate.

Helicopter Dreams

Charlie loved the construction world, but his childhood dream was to fly helicopters in the Marine Corps. After graduating from Florida State University, he was

commissioned as a Marine Corps officer and went on to earn his Wings of Gold flying the CH-53E Super Stallion.

Charlie served in the Marines for six and a half years before returning home to Fort Myers, where he landed work in IT consulting. His consulting work would form the



...

“

The vision for the brokerage has a lot of room for expansion, but the goal isn't to be the biggest brokerage.

The goal is to serve well.



Photo by LaCasaTour



Charlie Ruck with wife Kim and son Jackson. (Photo by Crystal Tillman)

next piece of the foundation for his real estate business.

“In the world of consulting, I learned how to ask the right questions — secondary and tertiary questions to get to true need and motivation,” Charlie explains.

After two years in consulting, Charlie had a realization. While he liked the work, it wasn't the lifestyle he desired. With hopes of having a child soon, he wanted more flexibility in his schedule. That's when he began to consider a career in real estate.

“I was either in a cubicle or traveling, and as my wife and I started talking about starting a family, it wasn't the life I wanted for my wife and soon-to-be child. I wanted more direct flexibility and input in my life.”

In January 2019, Charlie was licensed and began his real estate career.

Looking Ahead

Charlie's family was his primary driver in getting into the real estate business, and they continue to be his priority. He and his wife, Kim, recently celebrated their 10th

wedding anniversary. Their son, Jackson, is now 3.

“Part of the drive is so I could start a family and be the best husband and dad I can. While I was in the Marine Corps, we moved often, and Kim's teaching career was constantly sacrificed. My career in real estate has afforded her the opportunity to focus on what is most important to her for once — Jackson and growing her own business.”

Charlie also enjoys woodworking, flying and just about anything outdoors. He is a board member for the nonprofit Pickup the Ball, a sports outreach program for young men in Southwest Florida.

As Charlie reflects on his career path, he is grateful for the ability to serve his clients, his family, and the community of Southwest Florida. He's looking forward to many more years of growth and service.

“The vision for the brokerage has a lot of room for expansion, but the goal isn't to be the biggest brokerage. The goal is to serve well.”

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YOU WERE MADE TO GROW

Brokerage Change & YOUR CAREER

As much as we don't want to change brokerages, there is no one-size-fits-all for our entire career. We should annually evaluate the company's value against our *next steps & future needs*. The best time to consider a change is just before the 4th quarter because the SWFL season really begins in October.



THREE CRUCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Examine reputation carefully.

We shouldn't assume any broker or owner is worthy just because their resume or social media looks good, or they're with a well-known brand. Your reputation is directly aligned with theirs in the industry. Your money is also going into their pocket. In essence, you're hiring them for a serious job. A brand may have a stellar reputation in one city, but may not in your city. Most are franchises, individually owned and operated. Talk with agents who have worked with that broker before. If the broker is heavily competing or has changed companies frequently, that may be a red flag. Ultimately, the culture of the leader = culture of the pack. Take the time to do valuable homework here.

2. Negotiate upfront.

Negotiations for everything you need should be made in advance and put in writing in your ICA, including permission to take your listings with you when you leave. Get clear on your specific needs for the next few years of GROWTH. Do you need help building a team or expanding to another city? Do you need more office space or a luxury average price point? Pin it down and find out exactly how the broker will fill that gap. Don't move solely for leads. Most agents who do become quickly disenchanted.

3. Consider system autonomy.

Most brokerages offer internal systems — lead, CRM, and transaction systems — that require serious training. Proprietary systems to a particular company are challenging because you cannot take them with you on your next move, and information you enter may become brokerage property. Although you can typically take your database in print or export it to CSV form, if you've used a proprietary CRM, you have to start over with a new system. Also, the brokerage may now have your customer information. Another reason to consider broker reputation.

“Would you trust your child with someone you didn't really know or check out thoroughly? Your business is your baby. Treat it that way.”

Coach Kerri is an award-winning entrepreneur and coach who develops real estate industry leaders in SWFL and Nashville.

She's the business strategist behind many agents, teams, and brokerages, coaching more than 1,100 business owners throughout her career.



Agents I coach love their brokers. They are supported and led well. Yet, owning a profitable business is hard work and weighted responsibility. We can't stay put at our current brokerage just because we think change will be difficult. As long as a transition is organized and managed well, it can be simple and designed to trigger GROWTH.

Tip from the Pros: Be humble and leave the door open.
Sometimes a market shift or other unanticipated change may pull you back through it.

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» partner spotlight

David Ciccarello & Sarah Wittman

PRIVATE CLIENT TITLE & ESCROW

Quality Over Quantity

By Zachary Cohen | Photos by Sun Services SW Photography

In 2017, David Ciccarello and Sarah Wittman worked side by side at a law firm in Fort Myers. David, an attorney, had been practicing since 2009, while Sarah joined the firm as the marketing and branding director.

At the time, David was practicing business and real estate law but was not actively doing title work or real estate closings. Sarah had long held an interest in real estate — she had acquired her sales associate license years prior — but up until 2017, she was focused on marketing for the law firm.

Then, an opportunity arose. The departure of an attorney and paralegal who occasionally handled real estate closings left the firm with open transactions only days from closing. David and Sarah stepped in to pick up the pieces.

“There were closings on the books... We didn’t want to let these people down. So David, with his experience in real estate law, and me as a REALTOR®, said, ‘How do we get these people closed?’ And that’s how it all began.”

The Birth of a New Vision

David and Sarah proved to be a solid team. With David’s real estate law experience and Sarah’s real estate and customer service background, they were well-equipped to handle real estate closings and title work.





out the most efficient way to do closings as such a small team. We valued communication and wanted to be the change that the title industry deserved.”

“The fact that I’m an attorney and Sarah has both her real estate broker’s and title agent’s license is huge as well,” David says. “We are extremely knowledgeable in what we do and have no problems addressing any issues or questions our clients may have.”

Private Client Title & Escrow’s name is a reflection of their business. They devote a generous amount of time to each file, providing high-end, concierge-type service with a focus on quality over quantity.

“As an attorney, I have represented buyers and sellers going through these transactions and had the luxury of seeing other firms and title companies’ processes and what their service level is. We are far above anything I’ve seen,” David says. “We spend the time on our files to get everything flawless and to make sure everyone is 100% happy and well-informed along the way. Because we invest

“We fell in love with it and decided to create a real estate division within the firm,” Sarah explains.

Private Client Title & Escrow

By 2020, David and Sarah had become well-versed in title work and real estate closings. In November of that year, they co-founded Private Client Title & Escrow.

“We started the business from a different place than many title companies,” Sarah explains. “We didn’t have antiquated service standards or bad habits... We started from scratch and had to figure



**WE ARE EXTREMELY KNOWLEDGEABLE IN
WHAT WE DO AND HAVE NO PROBLEMS
ADDRESSING ANY ISSUES OR QUESTIONS
OUR CLIENTS MAY HAVE.**

that extra time, we have to be discerning about the caliber of transactions we accept.”

The concierge model applies to all aspects of Private Client’s business. That means their real estate partners get high-level service too.

“That’s a big part of it,” Sarah says, “knowing they can pick up the phone, text, call or email after hours. We understand the real estate industry doesn’t work 9 to 5.”

Sarah developed a love for customer service during her years in hospitality, and she continues to be relentlessly client-focused.

“Customer service is a huge part of who I am ... to make sure people are taken care of. And today, it’s a pillar of our company,” she says.

Now in their second full year of business with Private Client Title & Escrow, David and Sarah are looking to expand throughout the region. Their goal is to bring their concierge model and real estate expertise to discerning customers and agents throughout Southwest Florida.

**For more information, please visit
www.privateclienttitle.com.**



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David Ciccarello and Sarah Wittman, co-founders of Private Client Title & Escrow.





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cover story

By Zachary Cohen
Photos by Michelle Reed Photography

TERRY MELL

20 Years
and Counting



When Terry Mell worked in car sales, he displayed many of the same characteristics as successful real estate agents. He put client needs first. He built long-term relationships. He acted with integrity.

This approach led Terry to over a decade of success in the auto industry. It's also what led him to his eventual start in real estate. In 2002, he was a sales manager for a local Toyota dealership. One of his customers was Jeff Miloff, the owner of the Miloff Aubuchon Realty Group.

"For years, he bought cars from me. We built a friendship, and he tried to recruit me to get into real estate a few different times over the years. He knew I was good at the car business and thought I'd make a great agent," Terry reflects.

Terry had declined Jeff's offer multiple times, but in 2002, his life situation led him to reconsider. He had two young children (ages 1 and 3 at the time) and desired a better work-life balance.

"I had a five-day span when I didn't even see my kids. They were sleeping when I went to work and sleeping when I came home. I finally said, 'This isn't the life for me anymore. I want to give real estate a shot.'"

In 2002, Terry joined Miloff Aubuchon Realty Group, and he never left.

Through the Years

Over the past 20 years, Terry's real estate business has evolved tremendously. He started his career in new construction, working new home sales exclusively. He eventually began to transition towards more and more general real estate.



IN 2021, TERRY MELL CLOSED 51 TRANSACTIONS FOR JUST SHY OF \$40 MILLION. HE AND A PARTNER ALSO LAUNCHED A TITLE COMPANY IN EARLY 2021.



Terry enjoys taking his girlfriend Zoe and his goldendoodle Calvin out on his Pathfinder 2500.



“

Terry's goal of finding work that allowed him to achieve a better work-life balance has been a success. Although his kids are now grown and on their own, he was able to be there for them through their childhood and teenage years. He coached sports teams, made it home for dinner, and had time for vacations.

Today, Terry runs a small real estate team that includes his licensed assistant, Sherry Sierra, and another agent, Joe Parker.

“Now, being 20 years into it, I have a solid customer base. A majority of my business comes from referrals and repeat customers. I don't spend time sitting open houses trying to find customers. And I've learned if you take care of your clients, treat them the way they want to be treated, they'll send you business.”

In 2021, Terry closed 51 transactions for just shy of \$40 million. He and a partner also launched a title company in early 2021.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY: NUMBER ONE IS MAKING SURE YOU ARE LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR CLIENT'S BEST INTERESTS AS THE TOP PRIORITY, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER IT TURNS INTO A COMMISSION OR NOT. ”





Lessons Learned

Today, the real estate business is much different than when Terry started. He has committed himself to continued education to stay up with current trends and client needs.

“It’s completely different from when I started,” Terry says. “Back then, yes, we had the Multiple Listings Service, but that was about it. Consumers didn’t have online options to search for properties. So today, people are a lot more savvy than they used to be. They want information immediately.”

Terry has learned a few important lessons in his real estate journey. He believes in

being a client advocate, a community expert and a trusted advisor.

“What I’ve learned along the way: Number one is making sure you are looking out for your client’s best interests as the top priority, regardless of whether it turns into a commission or not. This is a people business. It’s about taking care of people. If you do that, the rewards will come in the form of referrals and repeat customers that, in turn, make your job easier.

“Then, the next most important thing is to learn the area you are working

in. We have a lot of waterfront property. Know the canal systems. Know the bridge heights. I try to encourage younger REALTORS® to learn the home values in just about every market segment. When you meet a customer, you should be able to talk about all these different things without hesitation or having to do additional research. Knowledge builds consumer confidence in you, which will make them want to work with you. The more you can learn about everything related to the real estate business, the better.”



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