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*Details on page 44*

### AGENT FEATURES:

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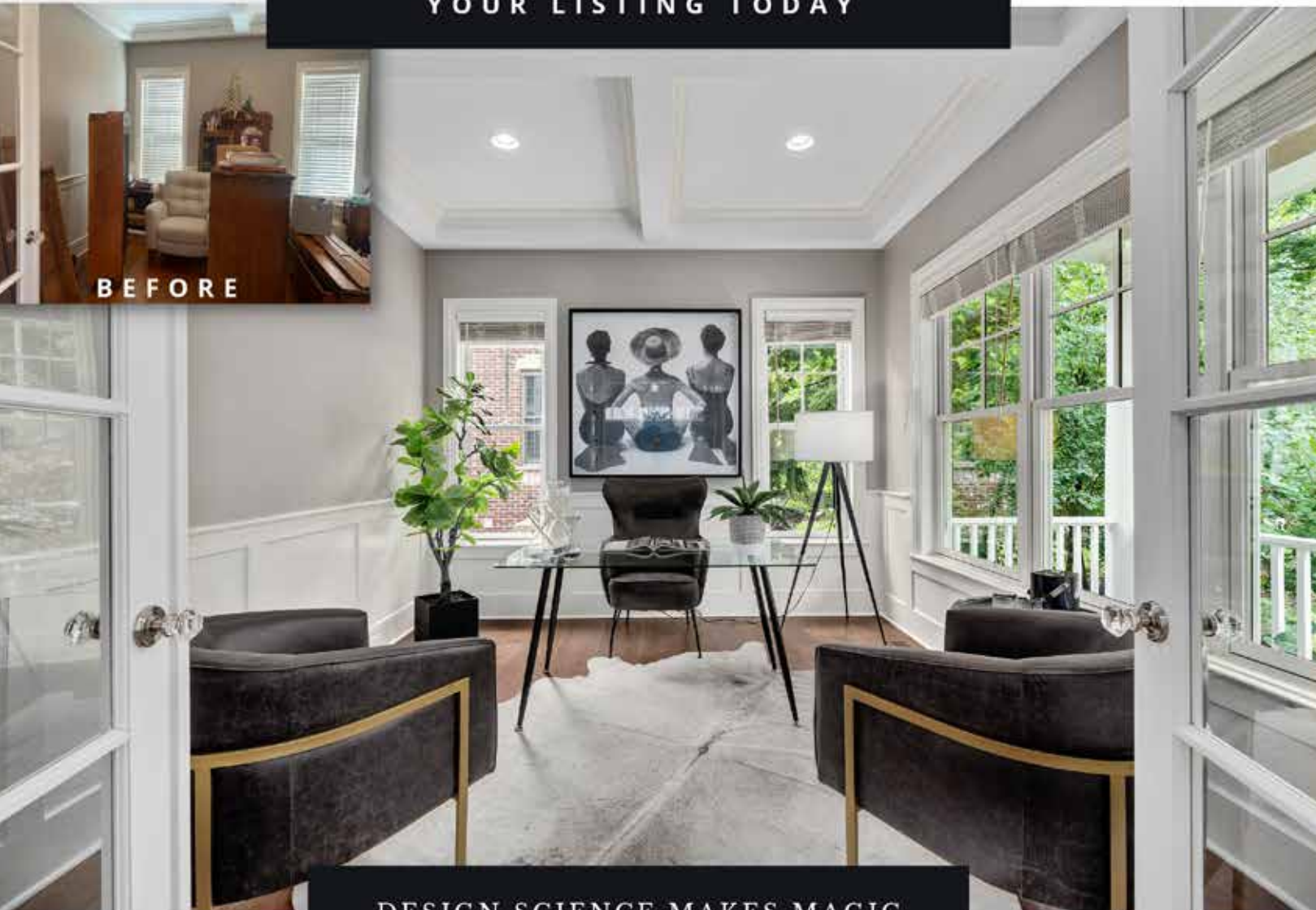
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### ▶ publisher's note



## Happy New Year! WE ARE GROWING!

We are GROWING! And no, we are not pregnant with our fifth child, if that's what you were thinking. An opportunity presented itself at the end of 2021 to acquire *North Shore Real Producers*. I tend to resist change, especially when it comes to workflow. Creating systems and habits that produce consistent results and add value to people's lives is in my wheelhouse. My default setting is, "If it ain't broke, then don't fix it."

Then I was reminded of the quote by Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Unless we progress, we regress." This statement rings true in the professional world and almost every facet of life. If we don't make a conscious effort to better ourselves, we will degrade. After some prayer, counsel, and chewing on the words of Eisenhower, the decision was clear. We had a steady growth in Chicago and DuPage during the COVID era, proving we possess the infrastructure and systems to do this sufficiently.

I am proud to say that my wife Emily and I are the new owners of *North Shore Real Producers*! We wanted to make it public to our existing community in DuPage. We're thrilled about the opportunity and can't wait to start cultivating more connections and exploring the synergies between our three markets in 2022. We hope to see you all at our winter event next month at Santo Cielo in Naperville on Wednesday, February 16th at 10 AM (details can be found on page 44)!



Andy Burton  
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# Cathy Litoborski



## ► agent feature

By Lauren Young  
Photos by Katherin Frankovic

## RIDING THE RAILS TO SUCCESS IS ABOUT HELPING OTHERS GET ABOARD

Signs of her interest in real estate began at a young age for REALTOR® Cathy Litoborski of Realty Executives Elite in Lemont, Illinois. Her fascination with Frank Lloyd Wright architecture, for example, emerged in childhood and has become a lifelong passion.

Cathy grew up with her two siblings in a three-bedroom bungalow purchased by her parents in 1969 for \$21,000. Her parents worked for established railroad companies, Santa Fe Railroad and Amtrak, throughout their lives. All three children had careers in the railroad industry, too, learning many valuable lessons along the way.

“My parents instilled a strong work ethic in all us children during our upbringing,” says Cathy. “They taught us to always do the right thing, with integrity and honesty, while also following our hearts.”

In high school, she met and began dating her husband, Bob, who was a freshman at Northern Illinois University at the time.

“It was pretty much love at first sight,” says Cathy. “We dated for seven years and have been married for thirty-four. He is still the love of my life and my biggest supporter and has the affectionate title of real estate adviser.”

Cathy then earned her associate’s degree in business while working full-time and starting a family. Continuing in the family tradition, she went on to work in the treasury department at the Chicago and North Western Railroad. After thirteen years there, she considered changing her career to her other life passion: real estate.

When Cathy was twenty-one, she purchased her first property: a condo in

Four Lakes Village in Lisle. During the buying process, she found a love for attending open houses. Even after the condo purchase was complete, she continued to go to home viewings, particularly ones with unique architectural details and character.

In her first months as a REALTOR®, Cathy learned to juggle many priorities to meet the needs of both her new clients and her family. Thanks to the support of her husband and colleagues, it didn’t take long for her to find success.

“In 1993, a coworker told me she was going to get her real estate license, and I thought it was a great idea,” says Cathy. “I was always interested in real estate, and I am passionate about assisting people with their biggest investment. I also liked the flexibility of the job while I was raising a young family.”



Cathy rocking out in Nashville with her family!



Cathy and her husband, Bob.



“In the early days, I quickly created many friendships and developed meaningful relationships I never expected,” she says. “Many of my clients over the years have become lifelong friends.”

“It amazes me how many people I have met through the years,” she adds. “I now run into someone I know almost everywhere I go.”

Over nearly thirty years as a REALTOR®, Cathy has garnered a career volume of over \$120 million, and over \$18 million at the end of 2021. She has received Platinum Awards for Top 1% in Transactions and Top 1% in Sales from the Mainstreet Organization of

REALTORS® (2020); was ranked the #1 Solo Listing Agent (2018) and won the #1 spot in dollar volume per closed transactions in the Realty Executives Great Lakes Region (2017). From 2013 to 2017, she won numerous Platinum and Gold Awards for sales volume.

After her clients and family, Cathy prioritizes giving back to her local community. She donates fifty dollars for every home she sells in Lemont to the Lemont Food Pantry. She also supports the Hope and Friendship Foundation, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Helping Hand Center, Lemont High School, and local churches. She also supports and assists in organizing the annual office

Christmas toy drive for the Pediatric Oncology Treasure Chest Foundation.

In her (limited) free time, Cathy enjoys reading, working out, doing yoga, jumping on her trampoline, taking long walks, and kayaking. She also loves to travel with her family and particularly enjoys going to Mexico and taking weekends in Michigan. She also traveled throughout the country to support her daughters when they played collegiate volleyball. Cathy happens to be a big sports enthusiast, too, and volleyball is one of her absolute favorite sports.

As Cathy reflects on her career as a REALTOR®, she notes all the people



who have been a part of the journey. “Real Estate has opened many doors for me, both personally and professionally,” she says. “The gratitude I feel when assisting clients is immeasurable. Success is helping people achieve their lifelong dream—whether it’s purchasing their first-time home or selling their family home and moving on to a new chapter of life. It’s not about me, but how many lives I can touch and help along the way.”

“I knew during the pandemic that I was needed more than ever to help my clients navigate this challenging and difficult time,” she adds. “It made us all stronger, and we have all grown from that experience.”

Cathy continues to educate herself on new market trends and obtain additional real estate designations (her current designations include CRS, SRES, ABR, and CNE, among others) to provide value to her clients. She surrounds herself with a strong team of marketing experts, graphic designers, photographers, mortgage lenders, real estate attorneys, and home stagers. “My goal is to make buying or selling a home as stress-free as possible,” says Cathy.



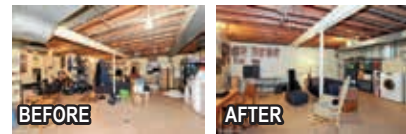
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business  
By Michael LaFido

# BREAKING INTO AND DEFINING LUXURY REAL ESTATE

As an agent, it is difficult to break into the luxury real estate market. As a luxury agent today, I wish someone would have shared the information below with me when I was first starting out vs. having to find it out on my own twelve years into the business.

Many agents believe they have to be licensed for *X* number of years before they can sell luxury real estate, but that is false. Many agents believe they have to be affiliated with a certain brokerage to be able to consistently sell luxury homes. That is also false. Many agents believe they have to drive a luxurious car or live in a high-end home to sell luxury homes. Those ideas are false as well.

What *is* true is that luxury sellers rarely give agents who are inexperienced in luxury home sales the opportunity to even meet with them until you can show them that you have successfully sold similar homes in that area. You have to build their trust and be likeable. As Keld Jensen noted

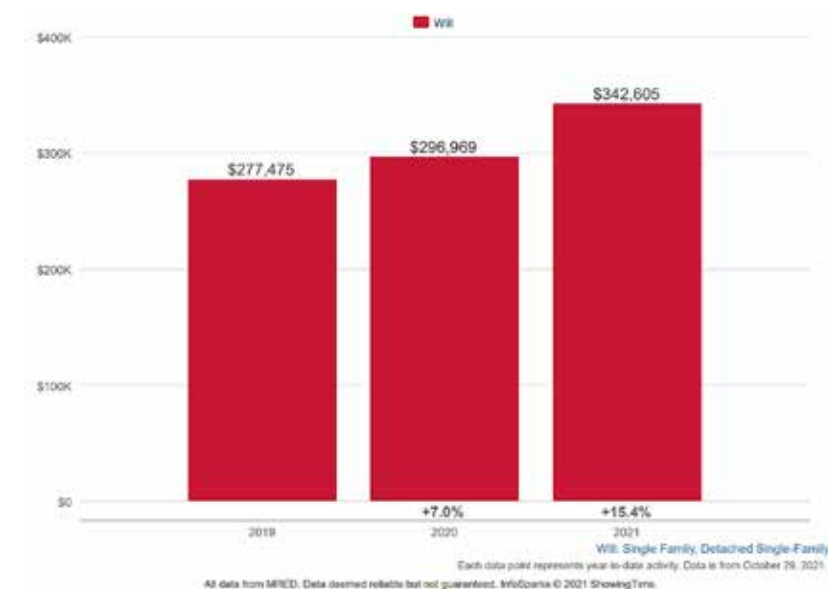
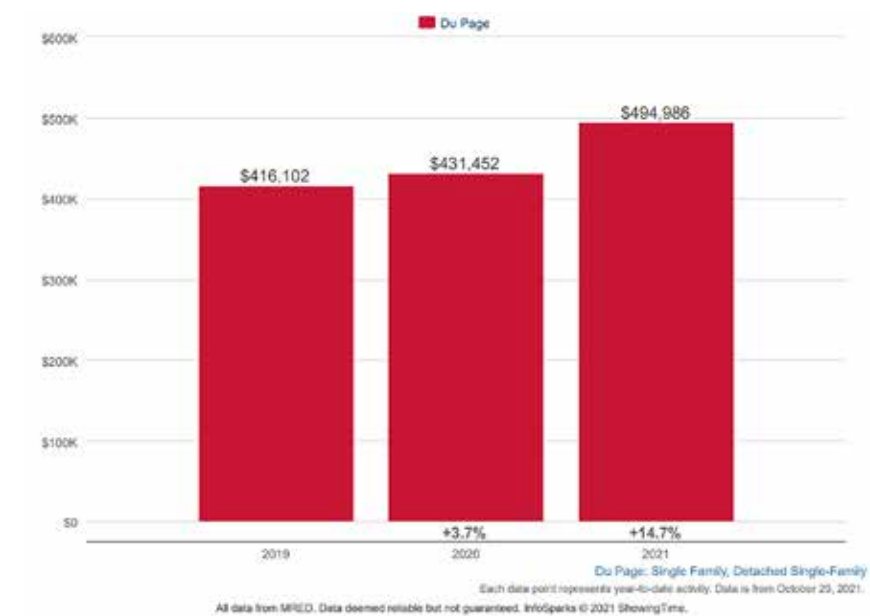
in his article for *Forbes*, psychologist Daniel Kahneman, a Noble Prize winner, discovered “People would rather do business with a person they like and trust *rather* than someone they don’t, even if the likeable person is offering a lower quality product or service at a higher price.”<sup>1</sup> So, be likeable.

If you’re just starting out, my advice is to attend other agents’ luxury-listing broker open houses. You will gain an understanding of the styles, materials, and construction involved, and you will gain confidence and more knowledge. I believe that when an agent is more knowledgeable, they will be more confident. When you are more confident, you will be more likely to work with high-end or luxury buyers. Once you make the first couple of sales, it’s easier to sustain business with those upper-price-point clients.

So what exactly is a luxury home? *Luxury* is constantly redefined in real estate, just as new sports cars and fashions appear and change how those markets define *slick* and what’s trendy today, for example. So how do we define luxury real estate? Some people classify it by the style of the house, or perhaps by its finishes, or by the product brands in the home. I know

different brokerages and different real estate firms define luxury real estate as homes that are listed/valued at \$1,000,000 and above, but for the purposes of this article, we’re going to define a luxury home as a home that costs, at least, three times more than the average market sale price. (We teach agents that there are four primary price points in most markets: starter, average, high-end, and luxury. I define high-end homes as homes that cost two times the average sales price for a given area.)

So, to offer a couple of examples of how to identify luxury homes in an area (see the corresponding graphs from MRED below): At the time of this writing, the market average sales price for a single-family home in DuPage County so far in 2021 is \$495k, so we’re going to define luxury homes in DuPage County as homes that are priced at \$1,485,000 and above. And the market average sale price in Will County so far in 2021 is \$343k, so then we’re going to define luxury homes in Will County as homes that are priced at \$1,029,000 and higher. MRED makes it easy for agents to find the average sales prices for towns, counties, single-family homes vs. townhouses, etc.



Every marketplace has luxury homes; it’s all relative, however, because when people think of luxury, they often think of McMansions or estate homes and that’s not always the case. To take action, you need to develop graphs and other visuals that can articulate the data for luxury and high-end real estate for/in your marketplace: Are you in a buyer’s market or a seller’s market? High-end and luxury homes start at what price point for your market? You need to know this information. You also need to align yourself with luxury affiliates and become a student of local and global luxury trends. Almost every ambitious agent in this business wants to break into the luxury market, so you need to set yourself apart by proving you have excellent market knowledge and proven plans to successfully help homeowners sell their homes. Now go prove to the luxury sellers in your market that you’ve got what it takes!

<sup>1</sup>Keld Jensen, “Intelligence is Overrated: What You Really Need to Succeed,” *Forbes*, April 12, 2012; accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/keldjensen/2012/04/12/intelligence-is-overrated-what-you-really-need-to-succeed/?sh=5a93ab2ab6d2>. See also, Rose McDermott, “Prospect Theory,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prospect-theory>.

## About the Author:

Michael LaFido is a real estate consultant and top-producing REALTOR® with over twenty years of experience in the real estate industry. Throughout his career, Michael learned the importance of high-caliber marketing versus “traditional marketing”, which has become pivotal to his success. As the founder of the Marketing Luxury Group, he assists other real estate agents, brokers, and affluent homeowners by providing top-tier services including consulting, lifestyle marketing, public relations, and coaching to help agents and owners sell their luxury homes.



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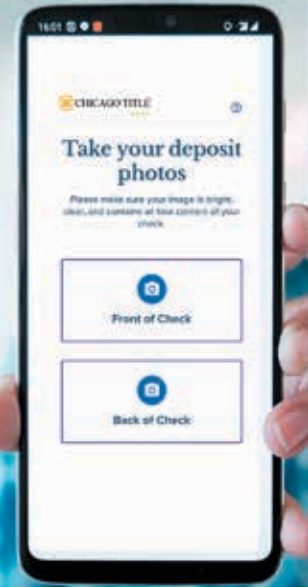


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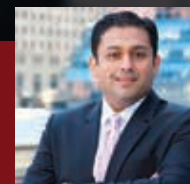
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By Lauren Young  
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# JILL & ROBERT PETRANEK

## TWO SALES PROS FIND A HOME IN REAL ESTATE

Real estate couple Jill and Robert Petranek of Coldwell Banker Realty in Downers Grove didn't plan on working together, and they certainly wouldn't have predicted being co-owners of a real estate team. But their many years in sales and business roles led the couple to where they are now: the owners and leaders of a thriving business.

Originally from the East Coast, Jill's family relocated to Illinois in 1980 for her father's job. Moving cross-country gave her firsthand and unique insight into what her future clients experience. Jill attended College of DuPage while working full-time as an administrative assistant for McDonald's Corporation and Argonne National Laboratory. Upon graduation, she held executive assistant roles for principals in the C-Suite of various Fortune 500 companies while also starting her own print stationery wholesale business.

"The sales function of that business came naturally for me," says Jill. "It was the initial 'spark' which made me consider a future path in sales and gave me the foundation for a job as a REALTOR®."

Robert, a seasoned sales professional in his own right, is a lifelong resident of DuPage County. His family's background in farming dates back to the 1800s, and when he was a

teenager he worked on the family farms near the town of Plattville in Kendall County, Illinois. After high school, Robert earned his undergraduate degree from Illinois State University and spent twenty-two years in ever increasing roles of responsibility in corporate sales and contract negotiations.

Though they attended the same high school, Robert and Jill were not well acquainted at the time. However, when they were reintroduced in 2005 in a chance business setting, a close relationship developed and within eighteen months, they were married.

In 2007, Jill began contemplating a career as a REALTOR®, but when the housing market crashed, she decided to delay that plan and continue her executive assistant role at a large retail real estate company. Her work there continued to fuel her interest in the industry. In 2013, encouraged by an executive at the company, she finally pursued and obtained her license.

As Jill stepped into her new career, she knew Robert's expertise would help her, but in those conversations they found something more.

"As I helped Jill practice client negotiation tactics based on my sales experience, it dawned on us that the obvious next step was to have a partnership in our own agency," says Robert. "In 2016, I got my license and joined Jill on her real estate journey."

Since then, their career volume has reached \$67 million; they brought in over \$10 million in 2020. Jill is a credentialed Pricing Strategy Advisor, a Certified Staging Consultant, and a Short Sale and Foreclosure Resource®. Robert is a credentialed Real Estate Negotiation Expert, an Accredited Commercial Practitioner, a Seniors Real Estate Specialist®, an Accredited Buyers Representative®, has obtained Strategic Account Management Accreditation, and has completed a negotiation course with Harvard Business School.

...



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They both also prioritize giving back to their community. “We want people to understand how ‘hyper-local’ the real estate business is: it has an effect on everything around it! And we believe it is important that we make the effort to be impactful outside of our occupation—in ways that strengthen the community where we operate our business. We reinvest.” shares Robert. “That is why we have been actively involved with funding and volunteering for critical township initiatives like the Seniors Advisory Council and Friends for Downers Grove Township Seniors.”

**“ The senior population is near and dear to our hearts. We feel this demographic is often not considered and lacks access to safe, practical, affordable housing options in many areas. We work to help folks find the best options and consider many things they may not have otherwise thought of, like zero-threshold shower access and adequate safe lighting. ”**



“Many of the programs we have raised funding for, such as the Township Center facility, have been realized—tangible results in what we consider a very worthwhile pursuit,” says Robert, who currently serves as board president of the Friends for Downers Grove Township Seniors 501(c)3, and sits on the Downers Grove Township Seniors advisory council. For his involvement in helping to complete the Township Center, Robert received the Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS® 2021–22 Good Neighbor award.

“The senior population is near and dear to our hearts,” says Jill. “We feel this demographic is often not considered and lacks access to safe, practical, affordable housing options in many areas. We work to help folks find the best options and consider many things they may not have otherwise thought of, like zero-threshold shower access and adequate safe lighting.”

The Petraneks find deeper purpose in being able to support families of seniors in the home sale process. These circumstances can often be overwhelming for seniors and their children or grandchildren.



“We provide personalized service throughout the sales process to aid our clients in any way we can as this is generally one of the biggest decisions of their lives, and it can get harder as people get older,” says Robert. “We help sort out the tasks and make them manageable. We help remove fear, uncertainty, and doubt by educating and advocating for our clients. We help them to make well-informed choices, navigate the process, and weigh their options to make the best choices in the situation.”

Connecting with people through real estate provides significant personal reward for the couple. A few years ago, they were able to help buyers purchase a new home for their daughter, who was going through a rough divorce, and her children. ...

...

“The clients shared a video with us on the day that the grandchildren were surprised with the new home,” remembers Robert. “The kids were overcome with tears of joy when they realized the house was their Christmas present. We were in tears, too.”

When Jill and Robert are not managing their real estate business, they enjoy making carnitas, barbecuing, gardening, entertaining small groups of friends, and traveling and exploring new places with their dog, Buddie (who also happens to think he’s one of their employees). Robert is a published author, a musician, an avid reader, and a trained marksman. Jill just can’t get enough of real estate: it’s her hobby as well as her career.

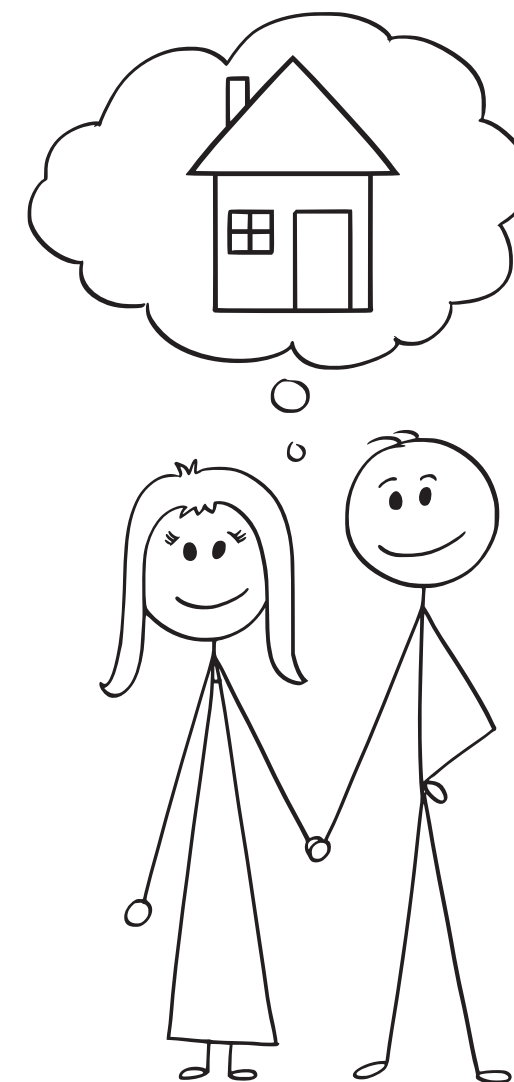
As they look to the future of their business and the industry, they are excited to build new partnerships with other REALTORS® and discover other markets.

“We’ve been working hard to identify and develop business relationships with agents who work in similar ways,” says Jill. “These partnerships have resulted in broader reach across the country where many of our clients are moving to and from—the exchange of knowledge helps us to serve all of them better. You can never stop learning, and this business is dynamic; it is always changing.”



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# Virtual JAM SESSIONS



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**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**

HOSTED BY ANDY BURTON

## 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 #10** **f LIVE**

An organic conversation about DuPage real estate



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**Tuesday September 28th 9:15AM CST**

HOSTED BY ANDY BURTON

DUPAGE  
**RP REAL PRODUCERS.**

**Jam Session #11** **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 November 16th 9:15 AM CST**

HOSTED BY ANDY BURTON



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

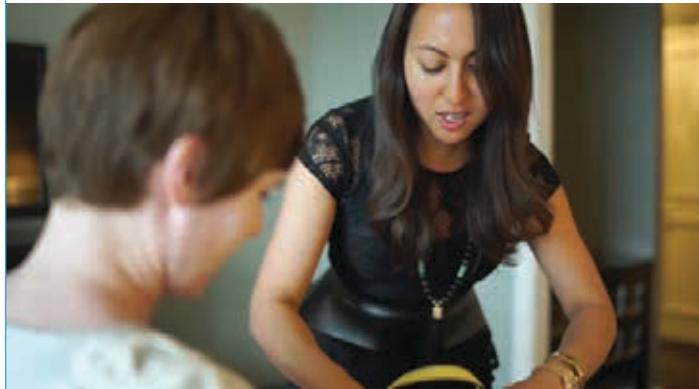
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**Q: How can hiring tristinstyling save people money?**

**A:** Clients love us for our ability to create new outfits by using pieces from their current wardrobe, combined with high end investment pieces, or fabulous inexpensive pieces to make a great outfit. While some stylists might find it challenging to work within a budget, I find it to be a lot of fun. I love to show clients how to find amazing pieces at unbelievable price points!

**Q: Why do people need tristinstyling when so many retailers offer styling services for free?**

**A:** While styling services in retail stores are nice to have access to, customers are limited to shopping only in that one store. Clients who want to create a cohesive wardrobe that is unique to their personal style choose to hire us for personal shopping audits because they benefit from learning how to expand their own wardrobe by shopping all the current trends available from all retailers.

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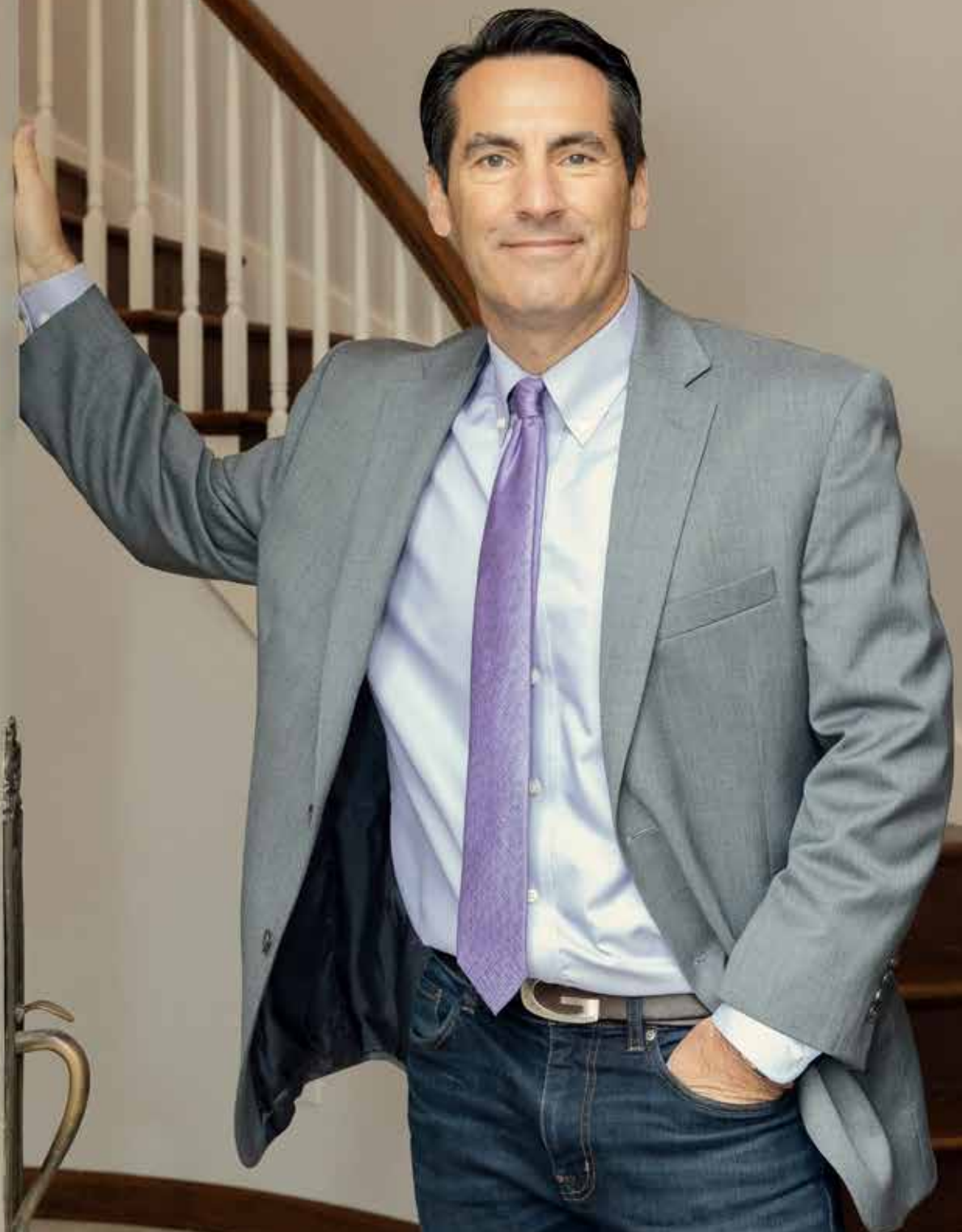
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# MICHAEL LAFIDO



►► cover story  
By Lauren Young  
Photos by Katherin Frankovic

## Former Football Coach Turned Real Estate Coach

**“When I was in high school, teachers would allow me to drive their cars home during study hall to wash and wax them,” says Michael LaFido, REALTOR® and founder of LUXE Group in Wheaton. “Obviously, I had to be trustworthy and pretty good at sales to get them on board with that.”**

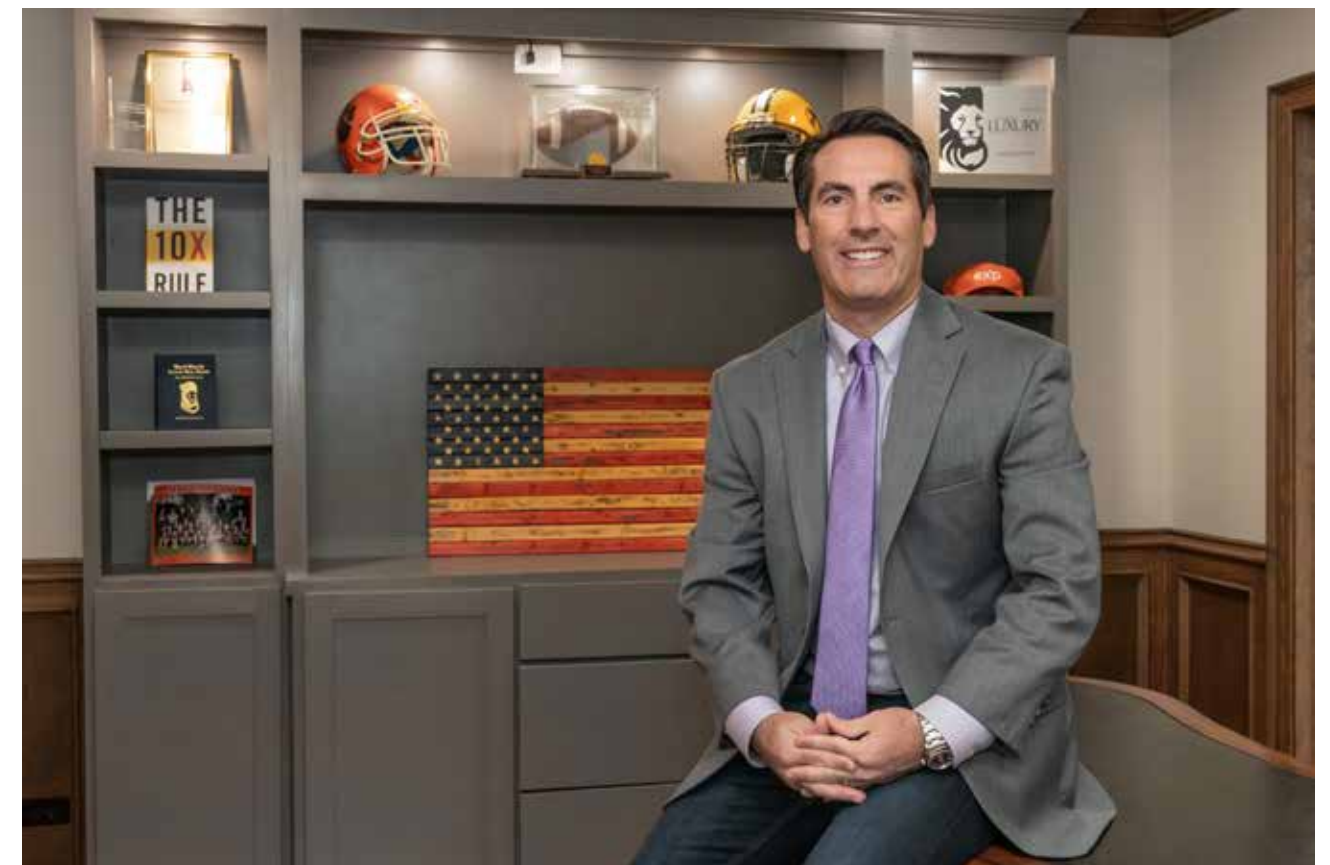
Growing up in Chicago’s western suburbs, Michael realized quite early that he had a knack for entrepreneurship, competition, and a capacity for hard work, and he was always involved in sports, especially football. After graduating from Wheaton Warrenville South High School, he went on to play for Northern Michigan University’s football team.

“Nothing was easy for me as a student or an athlete,” he says. “I always had to put in extra hours that others did not to get decent grades and to earn

a football scholarship. But those lessons helped shape me into the person I am today and have carried over to my successful businesses.”

Upon graduation, Michael went on to work as a high school teacher and football coach at Glenbard South High School in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. He also started his own deck and fence cleaning and staining business to earn some extra money during the summers. One of his clients, a real estate broker, mentioned that he would be a good real estate agent. Michael became a licensed agent just three months later.

“I thought it would be fun to add real estate to my experience,” says Michael. “I’ve always been an entrepreneur at heart, so becoming a REALTOR® was right in line with that.” ●●●



••• Since then, his entrepreneurial nature has helped him find a niche in luxury real estate, often working with celebrities and professional athletes. “Having high-profile clients has been fun,” says Michael. “Although, I could write a book on the number of [people who’ve claimed fortune but were actually] unqualified buyers and prospects who produced false stories or fake bank letters.”

In addition to helping clients looking to buy or sell high-end homes, Michael also consults other agents on how to increase their average sales price and trains them on the latest marketing practices to break into the luxury real estate market.

“Like any coach, I enjoy giving other REALTORS® the tools and resources they need to be successful,”

he says. “And to make them feel that they are important and can be champions in whatever they do.”

Michael has received praise for his work, both inside and outside the industry. In 2020 his sales volume topped \$28 million, and in 2021, his sales volume was over \$30 million. In 2019, he was named the MVP (Most Valued Partner)



Right: Michael with Anthony and Vince at a flag football game.



by Who's Who in Luxury Real Estate, and won International Property's Top Real Estate Marketing award. He is currently a finalist in four categories for Who's Who in Luxury Real Estate's 2021 awards. Michael has also authored three books on luxury real estate and has been featured on various media outlets for his expertise. •••





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# SCOTT A. partner spotlight By Lauren Young Photos by Katherin Frankovic

# BROWER

## WITH LAW OFFICE OF SCOTT A. BROWER

“We love what we do, even in the craziness of the last several years,” says Naperville-based real estate lawyer Scott Brower. “I never mind getting up and going to work. I’ve found something I truly enjoy doing, and that’s helping people.”

Scott grew up in Lansing, Michigan, before attending Olivet Nazarene University for undergrad and then law school at Northern Illinois

University College of Law. After graduation, Scott worked as a prosecutor in DuPage County for about five years. In 2003, he started his own practice and moved into criminal defense.

“I enjoyed trial work, but after a while, I just wasn’t satisfied with that career path,” says Scott. “I had always done a little real estate here and there, so my wife encouraged me to move into it full-time.” ●●●



Scott's team: Kathy O'Shea, Rada Hansen, Nicole Jones, and Pam Wawrzyniak

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Scott found that real estate representation allowed him to engage with clients on a much more personal level than he could before. He now handles all facets of residential real estate, from start to finish. One of his biggest thrills has been the opportunity to develop relationships, not just with clients, but also with agents, lenders, and other attorneys.

“I work with a lot of great attorneys who have helped me along the way,” he says. “Attorneys like Dan Collander, Paul Garver, Mike Angileri, and many more, have helped me and provided much-needed advice as my practice has grown.”

Success depends on trust and providing value to your customers. For Scott, one of the biggest challenges to date, and yet, one of the biggest chances to make a difference he’s found, has been growing with and adapting to the evolution of real estate in response to the pandemic.

**“HOPEFULLY, OUR OFFICE IS A CALMING INFLUENCE ON THOSE WHO ARE NERVOUS, AND THAT WE CAN ALL HAVE A GOOD LAUGH AT CLOSING. IF MY CLIENTS ARE HAPPY, THEN MY STAFF AND I HAVE DONE OUR JOBS.”**

“People stopped attending closings in person, and that has made things tough at times,” he says. “I feel it is very important, especially for attorneys on the buying side of a transaction, to be at a closing with the buyer in person. They need us there, especially when a problem arises, to have time to go through the documents.”

Since COVID-19 began to greatly limit parties being able to attend closings in person, Scott and his team have increased their communications with customers and partners, as clients, agents, and lenders always want to know where their deals stand, good or bad.



“It’s a major transaction for all those involved,” states Scott. “And I love the opportunity to make the process as smooth as possible with extra touch points.”

When Scott is not managing his law office, he loves spending time with his wife of twenty-six years, Jami, and his four grown daughters: Rylee, Bailey, Kenzie, and Krisha. Besides traveling with his family, he enjoys reading, pondering the stock market, and practicing his swing at Topgolf. He also loves to think about new ways to add excitement to real estate transactions.

“For me, this process should have some level of fun involved with it,” he says. “[Because] People should be excited about buying a new home or selling their home and moving on to a new chapter, but it can be stressful.”

“Hopefully, our office is a calming influence on those who are nervous, and that we can all have a good laugh at closing,” he adds. “If my clients are happy, then my staff and I have done our jobs.”

To reach Scott and to learn more about the services he and his team at the Law Office of Scott A. Brower provide their clients, visit his website [www.browerlawoffice.com](http://www.browerlawoffice.com) or call 630-753-0008.

# 2022



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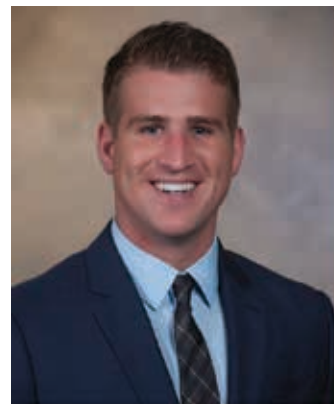
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