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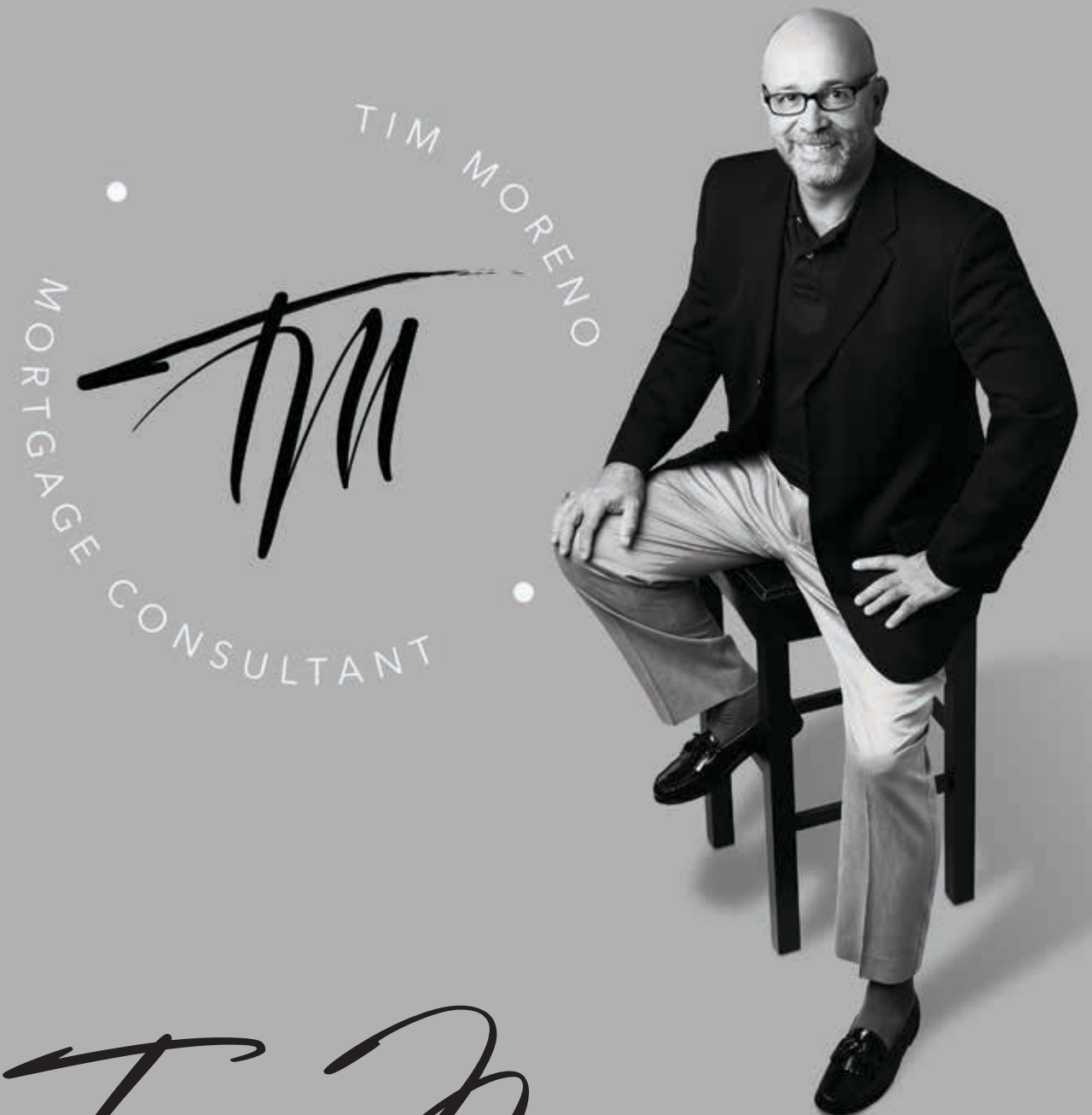
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# USA Mailhot

▶▶ cover story

THE LAUREL GROUP  
Written By Chris Menezes. Photography By Marissa Menezes







“

## GROWTH IS WHAT THE LAUREL GROUP DOES BEST.

We are branching out into different markets and creating a new structure for a partnership of top agents who share resources.



*“Lisa is constantly chasing improvement and growth. She lives by her own rules, is a bit impulsive, and is definitely a risk-taker. Once she makes her mind up about something, she puts her whole heart into it and is unstoppable in her determination.”*  
-Allison Collins, Lisa Mailhot’s sister.

It takes an incredible amount of determination to jump into a new career like real estate and make it, especially as a single mother with an 11-year-old kid, knowing nothing about the industry. This is exactly what Lisa Mailhot did just four years ago.

“I knew something needed to change for the health and success of our little family,” explains Lisa. “I was an exhausted business owner, managing a bar and grill, and decided I needed a life change.”

Lisa first entered the industry to flip homes for herself, as an investor, but she didn’t know a thing about flipping homes. She searched out every training, seminar, and networking group she could find, she flipped nine homes within a year. It wasn’t long before she obtained her real estate license and began helping family and friends with their real estate needs, she quickly realized she enjoyed selling homes for other people more than flipping them for herself.

“I love being able to consult and guide people with such a huge life decision,” Lisa admits. “Each person has a different set of reasons, challenges, desires, issues, etc. There is constant variety and challenge to every day, every client, and every situation. Dealing with people and being empathetic to what is important to them gives me an

opportunity to create an experience based on their individual needs during such a personal part of their life.”

Within just three years as a real estate agent, Lisa produced nearly \$40 million in sales and has already formed her own team—The Laurel Group—an untraditional team that has more of Lisa’s own innovative touch to it.

“Growth is what The Laurel Group does best,” Lisa says. “We are branching out into different markets and creating a new structure for a partnership of top agents who share resources. Kind of like a mastermind of agents rather than the traditional team model.”

Lisa’s ability to come into a situation and see it a bit differently comes from her own untraditional path into the







“

## I THINK I WAS INCREDIBLY BLESSED

to start in this industry as an investor. It opened my eyes up to a completely different part of the industry that most agents don't see.



business. Lisa grew up on a five-acre hobby farm in Banning, CA, which definitely shaped her values and work ethic. One of six kids, Lisa was homeschooled for a portion of her school years. She spread her wings as a young adult, however, and found

her independence when she moved to Oregon and Santa Cruz, on her own little adventure.

Lisa worked in the hospitality industry for years, which led her into buying a bar and grill. She always knew

she wanted something but wasn't sure what that was, until she found her way into real estate. "I think I was incredibly blessed to start in this industry as an investor. It opened my eyes up to a completely different part of the industry that most agents don't

see. I am able to look at problem-solving in a far more creative way and feel like I have an abundance of tools and resources to create winning solutions."

While Lisa credits her experience as an investor for giving her a certain

edge in the industry, she says the real turning point in her career occurred when she started a team. "Real estate can be a super lonely business with tons of competition and ego. I think having the community, support, and culture of a group

of like-minded individuals is a game-changer," Lisa admits.

"My short-term goals are to continue to streamline, systematize, and engineer our processes as a team to create an amazing experience for everyone involved. The long-term goal is to build a business that I am proud of, something that impacts lives in a positive way from our team, clients, community, and most importantly our own families."

When Lisa isn't working towards her goals, she enjoys being with her son, Julian, traveling, and experiencing new places together. She loves being in nature, hiking, yoga, and going to the beach or local markets.

Her true passion lies in real estate, where she can pursue her own growth personally and professionally and help others do the same. "I really do love what I do and I want so much to connect with other agents and help them grow and love what they do."



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## » preferred partner spotlight

Written By **Chris Menezes**. Photography By **Marissa Menezes**

# THE Bill Jawitz

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## GROUP

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*Dedicated, persistent, humble, and hardworking; Bill Jawitz has given this industry his all in order to be one of the top loan officers in the country, for over 30 years now. As a Senior Loan Officer and Area Manager for Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation (FIMC), and the leader of The Bill Jawitz Group, Bill has built his business on excellent communication and always putting his clients and referral partners first.*

“It’s all about my team. We are great communicators. We are honest, fair, always do what’s right for the client, and share our wealth of knowledge with clients and real estate agents for seamless and flawless transactions,” Bill emphasizes. “I have learned from many agents that their #1 pet peeve about loan officers is a lack of communication. We ask for permission to over-communicate during a transaction. We set clear expectations for all parties upfront and set the bar very high.”

“Every client to us is family,” he continues. “We take our responsibility very seriously and provide education and communication to be sure nothing goes unaddressed. We want this to be an enjoyable experience and smooth transaction every time, and we have proven that it can be!”

Much of who Bill is—his internal drive for excellence and serious mind—comes from growing up in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Raised by a single father, Bill learned about individuality, confidence, and being your own person. His years spent as an athlete also taught him the

importance of working within a team, and the benefits of relying on your teammates.

Bill’s life was turned upside down, however, when he was 14 years old, and his father passed away. “I moved in with a distant family member and basically was forced to grow up and make adult decisions that formed my life and made me who I am today. I could have gone down a very dark road but chose to get good grades and let my athletic ability guide my future. It was definitely the right move!” he says.

Bill graduated high school in 1984 and received a full-ride scholarship to Miami University, where he earned a degree in finance. Upon graduating in 1989, he met someone who was doing really well in the mortgage industry and decided to give it a shot. He never looked back.

“My development in the business these past 30+ years is largely due to the various coaches and mentors I have had in the industry since starting. Amazing originators shared their business models, coaches held me accountable for doing the things necessary to become a top loan officer in the country, my incredible CEO of Fairway, Steve Jacobson, gave me this opportunity to join such an amazing company, and our SVP, Sarah Middleton, introduced me to Steve,” Bill explains.

Beyond the people that helped develop him into the businessman he is today, however, is his team. “They are a huge part of ensuring everything is

# “

It’s all about my team. We are great communicators. We are honest, fair, always do what’s right for the client, and share our wealth of knowledge with clients and real estate agents for seamless and flawless transactions.





We take our responsibility very seriously and provide education and communication to be sure nothing goes unaddressed.

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running top-notch. Without them, I would not be successful,” Bill explains. “I appreciate each and every member of my team very much.”

While Bill has seen tremendous success in his career, he would count it all as a loss if he didn’t have a great family life or the ability to provide an amazing life for his wife, Samantha, and son, Kade. And while he enjoys spending time with his family,

when he isn’t working, Bill enjoys working out, golfing, traveling to Cabo, and going out with friends.

“Fairway Independent is the third-ranked privately-held mortgage banker in the U.S.!” Bill emphasizes. “We offer mortgage financing for purchasing and refinancing and are top in FHA and top in VA lending in the U.S. Our core values and the way we do business is all about the customer, not the loan officer.”





# WHAT I LEARNED IN 2021...



APRIL  
MANN

My loved ones and well-being come before anything else. When you put those things first, the rest follows! This year, I focused a lot on positivity and gratitude!

AARON  
STEL

2021 was a year of BIG changes for my team and me! We moved brokerages to eXp, moved offices, and grew a \$h\*tload. I've learned that strategic partnerships are more important than ever and that change is inevitable if you want to continue to evolve in this business!



ASHLEY  
COOPER

A work-life balance doesn't exist, and that's okay! There's a constant pull that causes us to not give 100% to each area of our lives 100% of the time, but I have found that prioritizing my time allows me to focus on what's important and cuts out what's not.



STEPHENIE  
DEBONIS

Luc and I have always lived with the logic of putting family first, and this was reaffirmed for us when we lost both of our mothers three days apart. We were reminded how short and precious life is and have been prioritizing our kids more than ever, which we never thought possible!



MEGANN  
CENTENO

In 2021 I learned that if you stay focused and keep your eyes on the prize (or your goals) nothing can get in the way of your success. There were many obstacles thrown our way and many opportunities to get distracted but if you stay focused and continue to work hard, you can overcome anything.





# JENNEL OLDENDORF

Lean into JOY! We have been bombarded with negativity and heaviness over the last two years. Practicing gratitude for the smallest things helps shift and refocus on all the good and wonderful there is. I will always choose joy over fear in any circumstance. It is a way of being, a beautiful choice that I make daily.



# LINDSEY COLON

This year has taught me to trust the process and to let the contract run its course!



# NIKITA MCWELLS

In 2021, I learned so many things, both personally and professionally. My biggest lesson learned was to stop complaining and start being grateful for every single day because tomorrow isn't promised. I'm grateful for good health, happy children, and a growing business.



# PACO LICEA

What I learned in 2021 is that people are dying for human connection. That has always been central to what we do and means even more these days.



# RANA ALHILO

Pursue your dreams.  
Work on what fulfills you.  
Say what you think.  
Invest in your friendships.  
And literally be happy.



# DAVID DODSON

Biggest takeaway from 2021 is to be consistent. Not being consistent will not deliver desired results.







## HEATHER LANGLEY

2021 was a year about growth for me and I learned two important lessons. First, it's OK to slow down. For the first time, I was learning what it meant to relax and even discovered that I enjoy some Netflix shows like Morning Show and Ted Lasso, with my husband by my side. Secondly, I learned it's okay to ask for help, something I've always struggled with. Due to Covid, the kids were now home from school and I didn't know how we were going to juggle two full-time working parents and homeschooling three kids at home. We called our favorite tutor and the grandparents, and they were eager to help. It was incredible to see the relationship grow between all of them. If I hadn't had to ask for help, our kids would've missed out on deepening those relationships during that time. It was incredible to see how slowing down and asking for help can benefit everyone all around, and I don't want to lose those gifts.



## RYAN MCKEE

2021 has been a year of gratitude and valuing relationships. I have learned to be more regimented and impactful with how I spend my time and energy. Time management, balance, and efficiency are primary focuses.

## NANCY WANES

2021 was a year of new beginnings and moving onward. I manifested this year with absolutely no notion of failure. Imagine how big you could dream if you knew you couldn't fail.



## TESSA WILKERSON

One thing I've learned in 2021 is the power of delegating to my business partner and team. I can say it's truly helped take my business to the next level and provide better service for my clients, which is something I'm always striving to improve. Second, on a personal level in 2021, I've learned, and I continue to learn, that business will always be there, but the time you spend with family is something you can never replace. Work will always be there, but your family might not be.





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# Veronica Susana Uriarte



*Sisters-in-law Veronica and Susana Uriarte have always had big dreams and have worked hard to bring them to fruition...from growing up in Mexico (separately) to pursuing their passions and then finding and creating magic together in real estate.*

## **Veronica**

Veronica was the first to enter real estate in 2005. Although she was born in California, her parents moved back to Mexico when she was 6 years old. Growing up in a small town in Northern Mexico, Veronica was pressured to follow the customs of her culture at a young age but always resisted.

“I remember having to argue with my dad for him to allow me to continue my education after elementary school. He didn’t want me to go to junior/high school, it wasn’t a thing girls do in our small town in Mexico. They got married and had kids instead. It’s crazy to think I have never followed the rules of tradition, but have always been naturally drawn to grow—no one ever told me I needed to be someone better, or get a certain job or earn a certain income. It was always a feeling I had deep inside, that I was

made for more. It’s hard to explain. It’s a very strong feeling that comes from me, my creator, my soul.”

Veronica followed that feeling back to California when she was 21, knowing no English. She enrolled in ESL and then into Pasadena City College, where she studied Communication and found she had a natural talent for marketing, creating videos, and teaching—all qualities she uses today with her team.

Veronica had several jobs while in college, including restaurant server, cashier, and police cadet. She was introduced to real estate in 2005 by her cousin, Paulina, who had a friend that was opening up a RE/MAX and encouraged her to become an agent. After meeting with Paulina’s friend, Veronica got her license. “He really sold me the dream of this business,” she says.

## **Susana**

Susana’s dream when entering real estate was to be able to follow her own aspirations while still being a mother and having the responsibility of a family. Her biggest inspiration for this dream was her



...

mother, a widow by age 27, with four kids to manage. Up until her husband's passing, she had never held a job.

"She never knew how she was gonna get it done, she just did," Susana says. "She taught me that nothing is impossible, to work hard and achieve my dreams. I've always wanted to make her proud, to show her that her sacrifices and efforts to raise her four girls weren't in vain. Growing up, I always told myself, 'I don't know how I'm going to win. I just know I'm not going to lose.'"

Susana was 13 years old when she started working summer jobs. In high school, she got a job at the mall but instantly wanted more. At 18, she was hired at Bank of America as a Teller, and within five months, she was promoted to Personal Banker, where she developed a passion for helping her clients achieve their financial and personal goals.

After marrying Veronica's brother and having her four girls, Susana stayed home for a few years to raise her kids. While she loved being a stay-at-home wife and mom, she felt something was missing. That's when Veronica, who was well into her real estate career, offered her a position as her transaction coordinator.

"I took the job and also started training to be a real estate agent," Susana explains. "I am very thankful for Veronica, she truly taught me all the fundamentals in real estate."

Susana worked with Veronica for a couple of years and then parted ways to work with a successful team leader in the industry. While she learned a lot from him, she felt she still wasn't serving her real purpose in the business.

"It wasn't until 2015 when my friend in the industry (and boss at the time), encouraged me to become a full-time

REALTOR®. When I finally did, I knew this was the job for me, my true calling, I absolutely loved getting to know my clients, their needs, their expectations from me and ultimately helping them achieve the American dream. That rewarding, warm feeling I get when delivering keys is unexplainable," Susana explains.

#### Together

Susana and Veronica reunited this past year as partners and formed their team with eXp Realty. They are both incredibly passionate about growing their team with quality agents and eventually plan to expand into other counties and states. "I want to make our office a positive

“I want to make our office a positive and motivational environment, very family-oriented. I want our agents to succeed and max out their potential.”



and motivational environment, very family-oriented. I want our agents to succeed and max out their potential," Susana says.

In addition to growing their team, Veronica and Susana are passionate about their involvement with Prosperity Homes and made a

goal to build a home for a family in Ensenada, Mexico. "When we went there recently, we visited orphanages and it was so sad. It's the reason I love Prosperity Homes so much because they are working on providing a community that can support the growth of their people. Meaning we're also teaching them how to be business

owners, to grow their own food, etc., a way out of poverty," Veronica explains.

As Veronica and Susana keep dreaming big, they will continue to achieve some amazing things.





► rising star

# SARAH

## A Y A L A

**With deep love and connection to her hometown of Riverside, it's obvious that Sarah Ayala truly cares about her community and the people she helps to find homes here. She has a kindness that is contagious and a work ethic that is unyielding, especially if the feat seems impossible or if she was told it couldn't be done. And it's those two traits (and then some) that have enabled her to thrive today as a top-producing agent.**

Sarah attributes much of who she is to growing up in the Wood Streets of Riverside, where her parents bought their first home when she was three years old. "My parents instilled in us a strong family bond and a strong bond to our home. And with a really

strong connection to Riverside, they taught us all to make this community we call home the best it can be, and to truly love it," Sarah says.

Always friendly and willing to talk (even to strangers as a kid), Sarah showed signs of interest in real estate success at an early age. Her mother was a real estate agent and began encouraging her to get her license when she was in high school. And when she went off to college, to California State University San Bernardino, her mom kept telling her to get her license...so she did.

Although Sarah obtained her license in college, she continued to focus on school and earned her degree

in Human Resources Management, becoming the first woman in her family to graduate from college.

"Being the first woman in my family, on both sides, to graduate college was HUGE for my family, and for me. Seeing my parents cry on my graduation day was a defining moment for me. My grandparents were immigrants to this country. The things they have gone through and have sacrificed for a better life for their kids and future grandkids are unbelievable. I am so proud that I can make them proud by achieving."

Sarah was working in the wholesale auto industry as an account manager for high-end auto brands after college

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*I 10,000% believe that there is a creative solution for everything and that it is very important to work together as a team for our clients, and work with only kindness.*

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and wasn't really enjoying her job. So, she decided to take a leap of faith and jump into real estate full-time, which was easier said than done, as she struggled immensely through her first year. Her success required a lot of hustle and definitely was not accomplished overnight.

"I was dead broke the first year, closing maybe four transactions? I moved back in with my parents, and there were times I couldn't pay my bills. I cried way more than I would like to admit. I lost friends because I was so embarrassed by my financial situation and didn't/couldn't go out! I worked so hard, put blinders on, and just kept planting seeds. The first time I handed keys to my very first clients, I got in my car and cried happy tears. I knew I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing."

Some of Sarah's first clients were her sorority sisters, past connections, and lifelong friends. Much of her success was achieved through social media

and setting a schedule and sticking to it. She puts a large amount of focus on Instagram and TikTok, and will happily admit that she's accomplished it all without ever having paid a dime. It has all come organically through creating videos and having authentic posts. Just this last year, twelve of her clients have found her on social media.

In addition to social media, Sarah has poured herself into her community. She has been on the board of Riverside Neighborhood Partnership for three years and was recognized as a Neighborhood Hero for her work with the local garden community and putting together videos for them.

When Sarah isn't busy helping her clients and working in the community, she loves being with her family, her Yellow Labrador Retriever, Tuna, and her boyfriend, James Monks. She is a huge music lover and concertgoer and has a large vinyl collection and an even larger band t-shirt collection. She also has a love for classic movies and is a huge Harry Potter fan.

As Sarah continues building her business, she is looking forward to obtaining her broker's license (which she is currently doing now) and is looking forward to mentoring new agents.

"I 10,000% believe that there is a creative solution for everything and that it is very important to work together as a team for our clients, and work with only kindness," Sarah says. "Everything happens for a reason, one door closes, 10 more open. And everything happens the way it is supposed to!"

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*My parents instilled in us a strong family bond and a strong bond to our home. And with a really strong connection to Riverside, they taught us all to make this community we call home the best it can be, and to truly love it*

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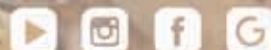
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