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Cover photo courtesy of Mary Beth Koeth.

RP

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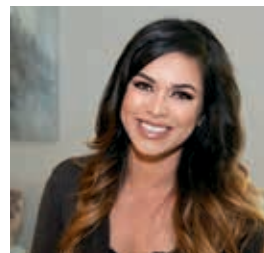
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Nominate a REALTOR® you'd like to see featured in this magazine by emailing swfl@realproducersmag.com.

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, 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 January 1, 2021, to December 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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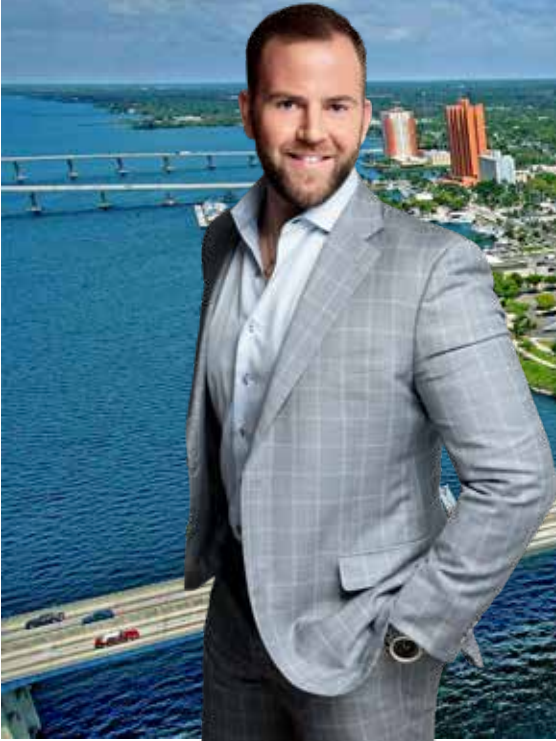
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Thanks to the businesses within these pages, our Area Directors, and readers like you, we're able to break the chains of this horrible reality.

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► publisher's note **Welcome to Fort Myers Real Producers!**



Providing a Platform to Celebrate and Unite the Top Real Estate Agents in the Fort Myers Area!

Welcome to the *Fort Myers Real Producers* community! If you're receiving this publication, you are in the top 500-producing agents in the Greater Fort Myers area. Some of you may have been with us for the last two years as part of the Top 500 in the *SWFL Real Producers* community. We saw such tremendous growth over the past couple of years that we are super excited to be launching this sister publication, *Fort Myers Real Producers*, this month!

It is my honor to serve you and celebrate everything that makes you an outstanding part of the Fort Myers real estate community. In the years to come, I hope to get to know you on a personal level and hear your stories of success. I look forward to celebrating you at our events, providing tools to help you grow your business, and representing your passion for excellence in this dynamic industry in the publication.

A few notes about *Fort Myers Real Producers*:

Content: This is all about you, the Fort Myers real estate community. We will do personal and unique stories on members in this community, giving you a platform to inspire others. As we grow, we will add fresh content specifically geared to the Top 500 producers in Lee County.

Events: Along with the monthly publication, we will host a variety of social events where we get you, the best of the best, together at upscale local venues to network, mastermind, have a good time, and strengthen our Fort Myers real estate community. If you've attended any of our *SWFL Real Producers* events in the last couple of years, you know what amazing gatherings they are! We'll now be bringing the excitement to Fort Myers ... and we can't wait! We will communicate

information about these private events through the publication, by email, and on social media.

I'd like to personally thank all of our business sponsors who are partnering with us, as well as the dozens of REALTORS® I've already met with who are helping bring *Fort Myers Real Producers* to life. I would also like to thank my team, who jumped on board this journey with me and bring passion to what we do every single day.

I look forward to getting to know you all — and seeing you at the big *Fort Myers Real Producers* launch party coming up soon!

Very respectfully yours,

Andrew Regenhard
Owner/Publisher
Fort Myers Real Producers
(239) 290-0692
andrew.regenhard@realproducersmag.com



YOU WERE MADE TO GROW

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You're standing in the ideal property, and those dreaded words fall from the buyer's lips like a Charlie Brown cartoon: "We think we're going to wait." Wonk. Wonk. Wonk. As a powerful real estate business owner, you confidently reply, "Got it. What's stopping you?" To which they use a possible smoke screen: "The economy, the market, a potential recession."



- **Discover** – Find out specifically how long they plan to own the new property. Providing they are planning to hold the property longer than a couple of years, we continue.
- **Discern** – Is it the fear of buying high, followed by a market drop that's the problem? Or would an economic recession alter financial conditions in their lives – like business or stock losses – that would make maintaining ownership of the property difficult? If the buyer is simply concerned about property value (which most are), we're in position to move the ball forward.
- **Thought change** – It's important to ask the customer for permission before sharing information with them. Why? Because we're about to share facts that contradict their current thinking. Permission avoids conflict. With their blessing, we can step into control by sharing the following market history.

“Economists have a 2023 recession potential pinpointed at 50%. It's a coin flip right now. Historically, recessions have averaged 12 months, from start to finish, with the tangible effects lasting about 24 months.

Given that history, we are talking about short-term economic turbulence, not a depression. So, knowing there's a 50/50 chance we might be headed for a little rough air, and knowing you're not going to do anything with this property but use and enjoy it for the next several years, how does a temporary economic dip really affect this decision?”

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.



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My clients hear from me constantly to ask more questions, get the truth, and bring the factual market with them to all situations. Market and historical facts become like neutral Switzerland! Without them, you're often of one frame of mind, and your customer of another. We simply present the facts and let them reason out, opinions aside. With this form of selling, there's no win/lose. It's just discover/decide. —Coach Kerri

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▶▶ featured agent

By Zachary Cohen
Photos by Darren Miles



JIM CARZO

KEEPING IT REAL

Although he is originally from Central New York, Jim Carzo has been a Florida resident for nearly 26 years. After falling in love with the Florida lifestyle and the Southwest Coast, he moved to Bonita Springs and bought a new home in Palmira Golf & Country Club in 2005.

“I was living in Central Florida in Maitland, outside of Orlando,” Jim reflects. “A relative had purchased a second home in Naples, and after visiting, I said to myself, ‘What are you doing in Central Florida? It’s brutally hot here. You have to move to the West Coast where there is always a breeze.’ Needless to say, I fell in love with the area.”

At the time, Jim was running his own online retail business. But until 2013, he had never considered selling real estate. When Jim’s relative decided to sell his home in Naples, he asked Jim to show it for him.

“Keep in mind, I was not a REALTOR®,” Jim reminds us. “But I met the couple, showed them the house, and I found it to be a natural fit for me. That got me started, and being a lifelong salesperson, along with having a degree from Syracuse University, helped me in my pursuit.”

Jim was also lucky enough to live next door to one of the top Realtors in Naples. Seeing her success gave him the motivation to move forward.

“I thought, ‘This is something I have to try; it comes easy to me.’”

Finding His Groove

Real estate is a constant challenge, especially in these turbulent times.

“To be successful is to be determined. Following through. Getting up every morning and going to the office,” Jim says. “I get up, get dressed, and get out. I stay positive.”

...

“

I'm the real deal. I am going to let you know exactly how it is. I am very candid and to the point, and I've found that works well for me.

...

Jim developed this work ethic in his time at IBM, where customer service was paramount.

“Customer service was pounded into me. I went to class after class, year after year. I was taught to focus on the details and that the client is my number 1 priority. This has been instilled in me,” Jim explains.

Today, Jim is a solo agent at John R. Wood Properties with an experienced support staff. He has built

a reputation for being honest and transparent, and he believes that is the primary reason for his success. 2021 was his best year to date.

“I have a reputation for being a straight shooter, and that's really enabled me to be one of the top Realtors in my area. Many of my clients are experienced. They've bought or sold four, five, six, a dozen properties. Most come to me in their later years. They are very good at judging character and have seen it all.

...



Jim Carzo is an independent agent with John R. Wood Properties.



One of Jim Carzo's favorite ways to unwind is to ride his Harley over the Sanibel Causeway on Sunday mornings as the sun comes up.

...

If you let them know from the start you're all-in, giving them 100 percent 24/7, you'll gain their confidence and trust," Jim says, "I'm the real deal. I am going to let you know exactly how it is. I am very candid and to the point, and I've found that works well for me."

One Eye on the Future

Outside real estate, Jim enjoys staying active. He's into golf, fitness, and is an

avid runner and cyclist. A friend of his introduced him to meditation, which he describes as an interesting new challenge. His true peace is often found while riding his Harley along the coast.

"I get on the Harley early Sunday mornings and cruise over the Sanibel Causeway as the sun is coming up. Breakfast at my favorite restaurant and a ride around the Island ... that does it for me."

It seems that, both personally and professionally, Jim has found himself in a sweet spot in life. He envisions enhancing his lifestyle and staying in real estate for years to come.

"I plan on being an agent for a while, mainly because I enjoy it and it is rewarding. When I work with clients, a relationship is formed and, many times, as a result, my clients become my friends."

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The Maxwell Team at CrossCountry Mortgage

►► partner spotlight

By Zachary Cohen
Photos by Michelle Reed



Lauren Maxwell with (from left to right) daughter Montana, grandbaby Phoenix, son Hunter, and daughter Alexis.



Take Nothing for Granted

As successful as Lauren Maxwell is today, she also knows what it is like to struggle. She understands what it takes to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

One fateful morning in 2007, Lauren Maxwell arrived at her office to a shocking message: In the wake of the economic collapse, the mortgage company she worked for was being closed down.

“It took me 20 minutes to realize, ‘Oh my god, the company is really shut down. The whole world crumbled in front of my face,’” Lauren remembers.

By this time, Lauren had already been in the mortgage business for 20 years. Year after year, her success grew.

“But in 2007, that came to an end literally overnight. Everything I built, I lost.”

...



“You just keep on going... It was never even a thought I would give up. It came apart, but I wasn’t going to quit. I had to support my kids. There was never an option.”

Lauren Maxwell and her husband, Daniel Kowal.

Lauren lost 90 percent of her income. The stock market crashed. She couldn’t afford to pay the monthly payments on the seven investment properties she owned, and with the market in freefall, she couldn’t rent them, either. Lauren was a single mom at the time, and with two young kids at home, she was faced with a stark new reality.

In a time of such great challenge, Lauren showed her true colors. She picked up the pieces and rebuilt everything she had spent the prior two decades developing — and with even more success. She displayed impressive perseverance and dedication.

“I had to start from scratch. But little by little, it gradually happened, and today, I do five times the amount I ever did back then,” Lauren says. “You just keep on going... It was never even a thought I would give up. It came apart, but I wasn’t going to quit. I had to support my kids. There was never an option.”

Fifteen years later, Lauren is once again an industry leader. She is the Executive Vice President at CrossCountry Mortgage and leads the Maxwell Mortgage Team. The same level of perseverance and dedication that she displayed in 2007 shines through in her work today.

We sat down with Lauren to hear more of the wisdom she’s gained in her 35 years in the mortgage business.

...
**Q & A WITH
LAUREN
MAXWELL**

Fort Myers Real Producers: You've been in Florida for a long time, but you grew up in Massachusetts, right? Tell us about that.

Lauren: I grew up in Framingham, MA, and moved to Florida in October of 1988. In a quest for blue skies and year-round sunshine, I chose Naples. It felt like home to me right away. For me, it's all about the weather. I love waking up to a beautiful sunrise. Then, there are the people. Naples is an amazing place to raise a family. My husband, Daniel, and I have a blended family of six children. They range from 12 to 29. We have recently been blessed with a new grandson as well. We are both lucky to have each of our parents, who also live in Naples. Two of our sons and my father actually all work for me. We have met amazing friends who have become like family. So between our children, our parents, our friends, and the sun, what is there not to love about Naples?

Fort Myers Real Producers: What lessons did you learn after the 2007 collapse?

Lauren: I had to sell my house. I lost my home and had to short-sell seven others. So I learned to live below my means. I save 50 percent of everything I make, and it doesn't get touched. I don't buy things unless I can afford to pay cash. I don't have to work today. People say, 'You closed over 1,000 loans a year. You could slow down.' But I never take it for granted. Every deal is just as important. I still live that way today.

Fort Myers Real Producers: You've been in the mortgage business for an impressive 35 years. What advice would you give to your peers and partners in the real estate industry?

Lauren: Answer your phone, answer your emails, and be accountable. Don't ignore clients when you have obstacles. Share what is going on, and work together with your client and your team. One thing I

do when faced with adversity is to immediately look for solutions when we run into issues. We can always solve them! We are all busy. I have two assistants who help me with all phone calls. This is extremely important to be reachable. People are making the largest purchase of their lives. They would like to talk to a human being while they are in the midst of buying their home. Get excited along with them, and be in the moment. Make sure you have a team of like-minded people who really care about the clients. Buying a home is an exciting and scary time for your clients. We are there to make them feel good and confident that we can get their loan closed. REALTORS® and clients share with me that they are always impressed that they can always reach someone in my office. Hence, this may be why I close over a thousand loans a year. We are communicators — plain and simple! Next, when I go home after a very long day, I am all-in, and I spend quality time with my family while I have assistants who cover for me at work. I have people covering for me so that everyone feels important when I am not available. When I am at work, I am all-in.

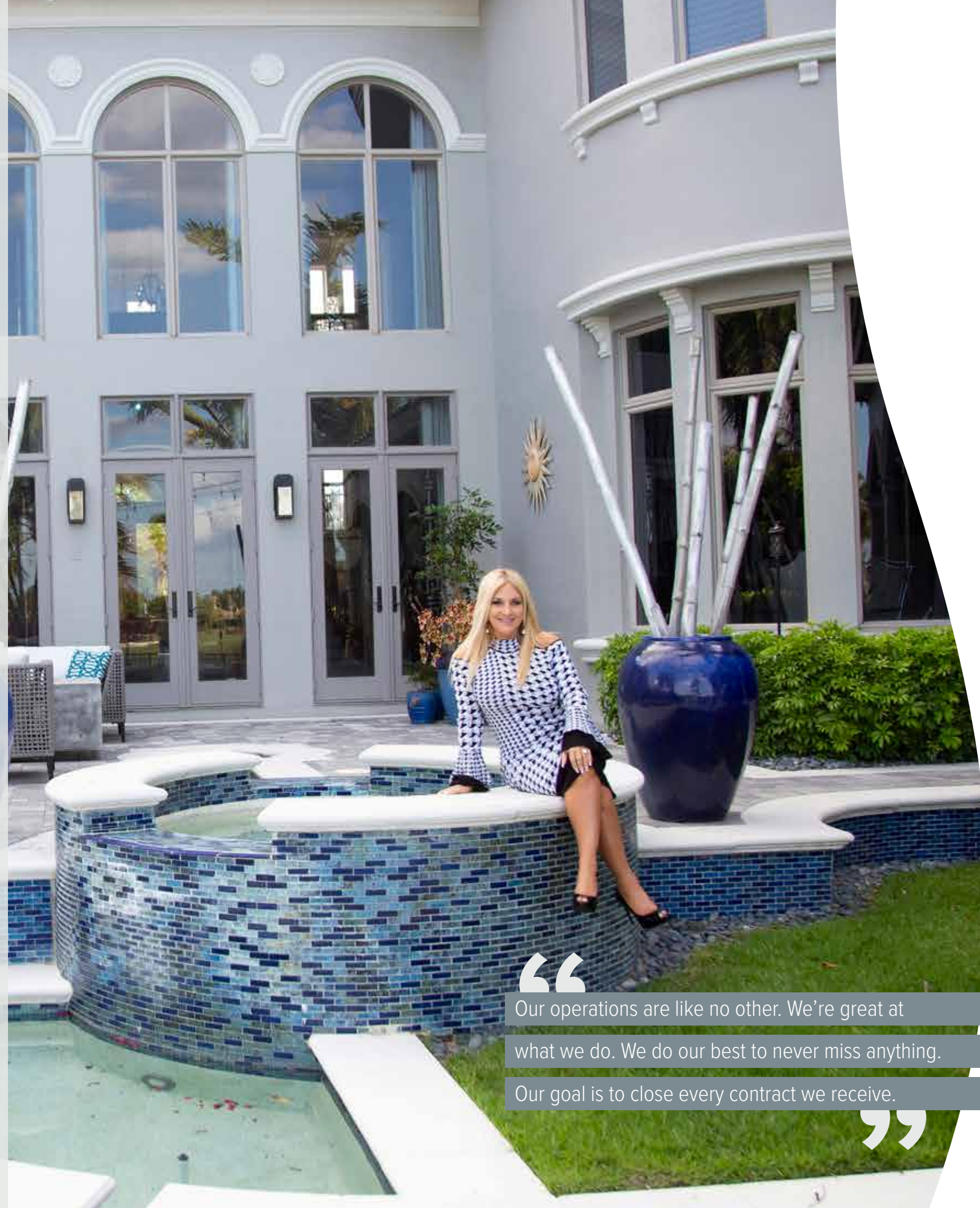
Fort Myers Real Producers: What does the future of the real estate market look like?

Lauren: If I knew that, I'd be a fortune teller. I live in the moment. I don't worry about the future because nobody can predict that. When COVID happened, I thought it would be a repeat of 2007, and I was prepared. However, it turned out to be the exact opposite. So we just don't know. When you have the business, appreciate it, work it, and be consistent. Be approachable. Be transparent.

Fort Myers Real Producers: Is there anything else we shouldn't miss about you?

Lauren: Lauren Maxwell — Lauren loves loans. You should never miss that. I believe we are the best, and the reason I believe that is we have a well-oiled machine. Our operations are like no other. We're great at what we do. We do our best to never miss anything. Our goal is to close every contract we receive. If you aren't currently working with our Maxwell Team, give us a try; you'll be glad you did!

For more information, visit www.MaxwellMortgageLoans.com.



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» cover story

By **Zachary Cohen**
Photo by LaCasaTour



“

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MIKE & ANDREW

A FAMILY AFFAIR

WE WANT TO HELP
PEOPLE GROW AS
SALESPEOPLE, GROW
AS PEOPLE, GROW
AS FAMILIES.

Two weeks into Mike Darda's real estate career, he attended a training seminar where he heard an impactful anecdote.

"He asked the crowd, 'Does anybody have a hundred-dollar bill?'" Mike remembers. "So someone passes one up. 'Does anybody have the keys to a Mercedes?' Someone passes their keys. 'Do any ladies have a really big diamond ring?' A lady passes up her ring. He said, 'Look... I have a hundred-dollar bill, the keys to a Mercedes, and a diamond ring in my hands. What did I do to get them? All I did was ask.'"

This lesson struck a chord in Mike. Something clicked. He understood that with enough perseverance, he could achieve anything he set out to.

Humble Beginnings

Mike was raised outside of Chicago with classical Midwestern values.



Photo by LaCasaTour

...



The Darda Group. (Photo by LaCasaTour)

- Work ethic, integrity, and perseverance were something of a birthright.

“My dad instilled in me the value of working hard... If I wanted to spend time with my dad, I had to go with him to work or get my hands dirty,” Mike remembers.

Mike began mowing lawns at 10 years old, and by 15, he landed his first job full time (he lied about his age). After school ended, he’d head to work until 9:00 p.m.

“It’s in my nature to give it my all,” he says.

At 19, Mike picked up his life and headed to Florida to pursue a business opportunity. As a teenager, he spent a ton of time working on cars, and he purchased an automotive business with his savings. Unfortunately, it wasn’t the right fit, so he sold his business, and at the recommendation of a relative, began a career in real estate.

The Early Years

Mike began his real estate career in 1988. At the small, independent brokerage he started with, he had the opportunity to learn from the veteran agents around him.

“I saw what everyone else was doing — or, more like, what they weren’t doing. With my Midwestern work ethic, I thought I could go out and make this happen.”

Mike hired a buyer’s agent and an assistant before the end of his first year in business. He closed 35 deals in year one; year after year, his business continued to evolve.

“I kept growing. Within 10 years, I was doing around 90 to 100 deals per year,” he notes.

A decade into his real estate career, Mike had achieved tremendous success, but, admittedly, he

was feeling burnt out. That’s when he began Mike Ferry’s sales training program, which helped him take his business to the next level and get more time back for his personal life.

“That’s when the business really started to take off. I learned about all the mistakes I was making. I was working too many hours doing unproductive activities. Once I got on a schedule and learned the scripts and skills, we started to make big leaps — 150 deals, 200 deals, 250 deals.”

A Family Affair

Mike’s son, Andrew, watched his father succeed in real estate for many years.

“He always involved me in the business. Back in the day, before cell phones were popular and there were these phones hardwired into the cars, he got one of those in the car to talk with clients. I would dial the numbers for him on the phone. When someone picked up, I’d hand him the phone real quick. I was the original hands-free for cars,” Andrew laughs.

Andrew knew he wanted to work in real estate by the time he was a teenager. At 20 years old, he got licensed and joined his dad full-time.

Andrew began his real estate career at a challenging time. In 2009, the bottom had just fallen out of the market, and he was left to build his career by picking up the pieces. The work ethic that his dad instilled in him became essential.

“I started from the bottom and had to work my way up,” he admits.

Andrew’s career has progressed marvelously. In 2021, he closed 101 deals personally, his best year to date.

The Darda Group

Mike and Andrew believe that teams are the future of the real estate business. They are building the Darda Group at Compass with the goal of becoming one of Florida’s most productive real estate teams.

“A thousand deals or more is not unusual in our industry anymore. That’s inspiring us to keep pushing the envelope,” Mike says. “We’re in growth mode right now.”

Today, the team consists of Mike, Andrew, seven buyer’s agents, and an administrative team. The team closed just under 400 deals for \$152 million in 2021. The Darda Group is built on four core values: hungry, humble, smart, and positive.



Andrew Darda joined his father, Mike, to found The Darda Group at Compass. (Photos by Mary Beth Koeth)

•••



Mike Darda with his wife, Capri (left); and Mike's son, Andrew Darda (right). (Photos by LaCasaTour)

...

“We hire to those values religiously, and that’s why we have a tight-knit group. We all pull in the same direction.”

Leaving a Legacy

As Mike and Andrew look ahead, their primary goal is to grow the team. Underneath this intention lies another, more personal aspiration.

“I’m in my mid-50s now and thinking, ‘How much longer am I going to do this?’ But I just want to see how big

this can get. How many people can we help buy or sell a home? How can we groom our team members and agents to really achieve their goals and dreams?” Mike asks.

“Somewhere out there, there is another agent doing less than 15, 20, 30 deals a year that may have higher aspirations but not know how to get there,” Andrew adds. “We want to help people grow as salespeople, grow as people, grow as families. We want

to help them with that. We want to do for others what I got to experience myself. I think that’s a legacy worth leaving behind.”

FUN FACT:

Mike and Andrew are both avid boaters. This father-son duo does more than just work together; they are passionate about Southwest Florida’s boating lifestyle.



Photo by Mary Beth Koeth



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Stocking the Home Bar

A useful thing many of us have learned from a years-long global pandemic is how to *make do* — and even enjoy ourselves — with what we have at home. The familiar social act of grabbing a drink with friends was off-limits for months, leaving cocktail lovers ample time to hone their at-home mixology skills. Planning to show off your drink-mixing prowess this summer? Here are a few suggestions for stocking the home bar...

First, consider the drink-making occasions you have coming up to guide your selections. Do you need a versatile collection of spirits such that the most popular bar drinks can be whipped up with ease? Or are you mainly planning for intimate gatherings, focusing on favored drinks you want to perfect or a particular spirit you wish to explore?

Generally, according to most mixology experts, a well-rounded home bar should include at least one bottle of each core liquor:

- **Vodka:** Most home bartenders will benefit from having two bottles of

this indispensable spirit on hand — one budget-friendly bottle for mixing tall drinks, like bloody Marys, and a top-shelf bottle for smooth sippers like martinis.

- **Rum:** Two bottles of rum — one light and one dark — will make concocting summery daiquiris, mojitos, and mai tais a breeze.
- **Gin:** A high-quality bottle of dry gin is essential for beloved cocktails like the gin and tonic and dry martini.
- **Tequila:** Sweet summer sunshine and good tequila go hand in hand ... in a delightful margarita. A nice bottle of blanco (or silver) tequila is the best choice for your home bar.
- **Whiskey:** A premium bourbon and a blended whiskey are excellent options for both sipping and classic cocktails like an old fashioned.

EXTRAS:

- Brandy: Once considered a core spirit, brandy is the star in classic cocktails such as the sidecar and brandy alexander.
- Various liqueurs (choose one or many, depending on your preferences): amaretto, coffee, orange, Irish cream, vermouth
- Fruit juices, such as lemon, lime, orange, cranberry, and pineapple
- Sodas, such as club soda, tonic water, ginger ale, cola, and diet cola
- Citrus garnishes (twists, wheels, slices), such as lemon, lime, or orange
- Bitters
- Simple syrup

Cheers to cold drinks and sunshine this summer!



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