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BENDING BACKWARDS  
FOR CLIENTS

**AGENT FEATURE:**

SLAV POLINSKI

**ON THE RISE:**

BRANDON BLANKENSHIP

**PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:**

VANESSA CICI FRY  
FRY GROUP, LLC

Winter Event Photos

See Page 40

MARCH 2022

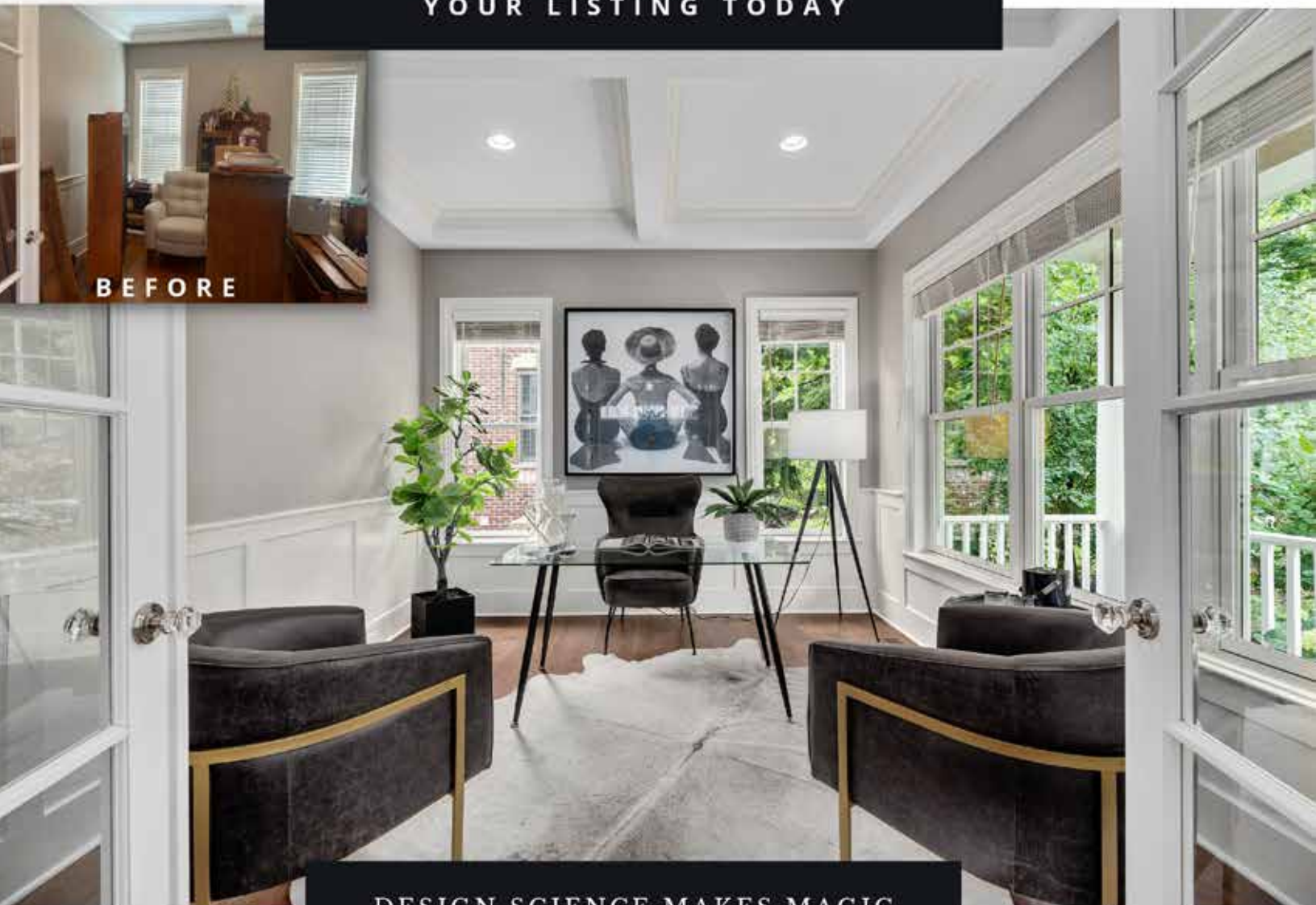


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*Publisher*



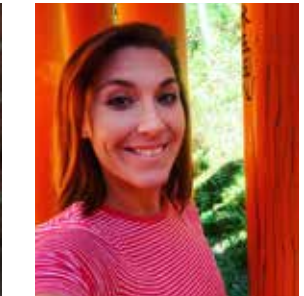
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# PUBLISHER'S NOTE



These past two months have been the busiest months of my entire life; from planning and executing three Real Producers events for our respective markets, to having our four-year-old quarantined for two weeks due to a COVID exposure in his class. We are all dealing with wrenches being thrown in our schedules. It is difficult to plan things. Sometimes I feel like I am wasting my time when I try to focus and take a concept from my mind to fruition.

Although there have been more speed bumps lately that stand in the way to accomplish goals, I realized that placing thought and energy into orchestrating interactions with quality individuals

is extremely worth it. I feel that it is almost necessary to live a fulfilled life. I witnessed this at our winter event last month and was overjoyed with the connections made and the positive feedback we received. Thank you to those who reached out to me personally and to our staff to say that you appreciate what we do every month.

That being said, we had a blast at our winter event and hope you enjoy the photos on page 40! A big shout out to Bill Pendley with Caliber Home Loans for sponsoring the event at Santo Cielo. We are excited about what the rest of 2022 will bring. Be on the lookout for details for our spring event!



Andy Burton  
Publisher, *DuPage Real Producers*  
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# Virtual JAM SESSIONS



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**Jam Session #9** **f LIVE**  
An organic conversation about DuPage real estate



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\*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!



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**Jam Session #10** **f LIVE**  
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We have received great feedback about these events, so we are continuing to schedule them. Want to join one? Let us know by emailing us at [andy.burton@realproducersmag.com](mailto:andy.burton@realproducersmag.com).

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# POLINSKI

## FORMER UPS VET DELIVERS REAL ESTATE RESULTS

**“When I began my real estate business, I had zero sales experience and no idea how to run a business of my own,” says Slav Polinski of @properties in Downers Grove. “At that point, my wife, Laurie, had owned her own virtual assistant business for several years, so I leaned on her. She was, and is, a huge asset for me.”**

“I really had to step out of my comfort zone to achieve new and better things,” he reflects. “Seeing my wife’s courage to leave the corporate world and start her own business gave me the inspiration to believe it was possible for me, too. Laurie has been an important part of my real estate journey from the beginning.”

Slav was born in Poland and moved with his family to the United States in 1965. “I admire my parents’ courage for leaving their home country to begin a new life,” he says.

For more than three decades, starting at just eighteen, Slav worked at UPS—he started as a dock worker, then became a dock supervisor, a package delivery driver, and, finally, a semi-truck driver. In 2008, he had his first of several spinal surgeries, a result of the wear and tear on his body from his years of moving heavy parcels. Over the next few years, he had neck and spine fusions followed by physical therapy five days a week. After his last surgery, he was forced to retire from UPS.

“Unfortunately, I did not have enough years for a full pension, so I began looking into my options for the future,” he explains.

While recovering from his surgeries, he began studying public speaking, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing. He attended several training camps and hired business coaches to help find a new career direction. Slav also joined the Toastmasters International to help him become comfortable speaking in front of people. He eventually became the president of the Downers Grove chapter, as well as a member of the Windy City Professional Speakers Toastmasters chapter.



Slav with his wife, Laurie.

One of Laurie’s clients at the time was Liz Chalberg, a top-producing REALTOR® in Downers Grove. To apply what he was learning in his digital marketing classes, Slav began lending his help to Liz, picking up his own real estate lessons along the way. In 2013, Slav decided to leap into real estate full-time. Early on, without his own experience as an agent to lean on, he relied on all he’d learned while at UPS.

“When I was in my twenties working as a UPS delivery driver, I began to understand the importance of being kind to people,” he says. “Everyone wants to be treated like they matter. Having an attitude of service leads to success in any industry.”

Over his nine years as a REALTOR®, he’s also gained invaluable insights from mentors like Liz Chalberg and other top agents.

“Reaching out to other agents for mentoring has been crucial,” he says. “I once took a successful agent in another market out to lunch. He was kind enough to give me tips for over three hours. Most agents are open to sharing their expertise if you just ask.” ●●●





Slav with the planning committee for Rotary GroveFest.

Looking to the future, Slav is optimistic about the promising trajectory of his business. “Our goal is to continue to grow and assist more buyers and sellers,” says Slav. “To me, success is more than the amount of money you make. It’s about being happy with yourself and your life. As they say, if you love what you do, you’ll never have to work a day in your life.”

...

Even though he believes it may sound cliché, Slav still emphasizes his passion for providing exceptional customer service. He is a very proud recipient of the World Class Customer Service award from Chamber630, and he never fails to keep in mind the significance of a home sale or new purchase to each client.

“I never refer to our client’s purchases or sales as transactions [because] they are much more than that,” he says. “They are dreams, accomplishments, and memories.”



**“I REALLY HAD TO STEP OUT OF MY COMFORT ZONE TO ACHIEVE NEW AND BETTER THINGS.”**

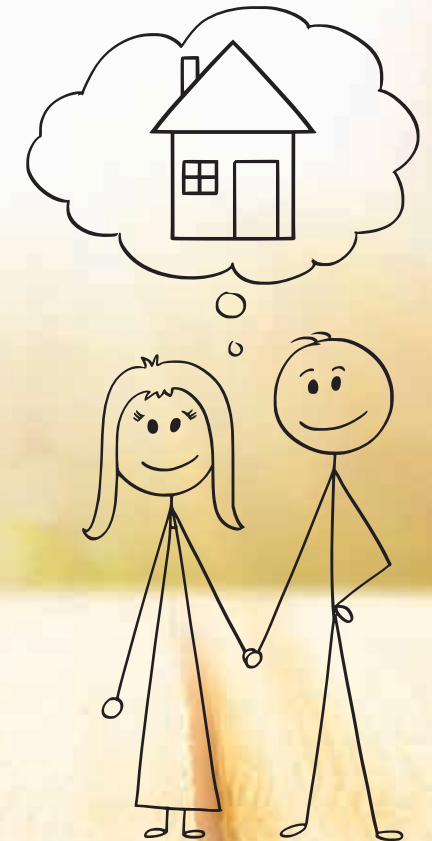
A lifelong Downers Grove resident, Slav makes it a point to support local organizations. He has been a member of the Rotary Club of Downers Grove for ten years. Through that group and its annual fundraiser, Rotary GroveFest, he is able to help the community and many nonprofits in the area. The proceeds also provide school scholarships for high school students based on service projects. Slav, a past president of the club, currently serves on its board and is a member of the planning committee for the Rotary GroveFest.

When he’s not managing his business, Slav enjoys photography—he especially enjoys taking pictures of downtown Downers Grove. He and Laurie are always on the lookout for a new restaurant with great nachos. Regular family dinners include their daughter, Danielle; their son, Christopher, and his wife, Stephanie; and their two grandchildren, Charlie and Nora. Trips to the zoo and the arboretum, and visits to their five-acre Wisconsin home for some family fun are also favorite ways for Slav and his family to wind down.



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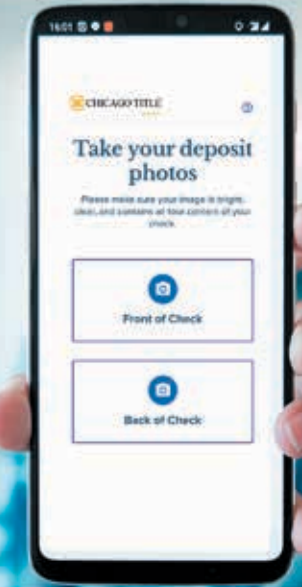
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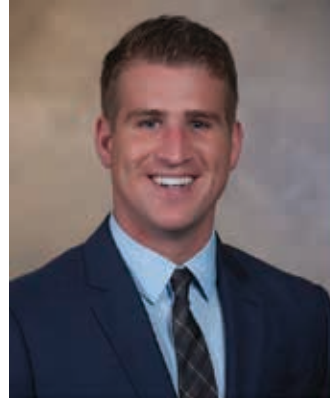


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# SARAH

# LEONARD

» cover story  
By **Lauren Young**  
Photos by **Abi Voigtmann**

## BENDING OVER BACKWARDS FOR CLIENTS

“My parents signed me up for tumbling lessons when I was five years old to help burn off all my energy,” says REALTOR® Sarah Leonard, owner of a thriving RE/MAX Suburban team, the Sarah Leonard Team. “I did that competitively at a young age, and not only has my energy level never slowed down, but that was when I started to cultivate the mindset of challenging myself to always be better than the day before.”

As Sarah and her sisters grew up, their family moved farther into the western suburbs every few years to get away from the hustle and bustle of urban Chicago life. Sarah’s father built their homes and her mother managed a realty office, which gave Sarah exposure to home design and real estate at a young age.

“We ended up living on five acres—with four-wheelers, horses, a pool, and gardens with six-foot-tall sunflowers,” she says. “I had a wonderful childhood, and I was also very fortunate to find my ideal career so easily.”

After graduation, Sarah attended a local community college while working full-time in various real estate jobs. From loan processing to administrative work, she wanted to learn the ins and outs of every facet of the industry. ...



“RIGHT NOW,  
GROWTH IS  
THE NAME OF  
THE GAME.”

“I worked every job there was in real estate before getting my license,” says Sarah. “From marketing to coordinating to helping open a RE/MAX office to learning the accounting side of things, I was involved in all aspects. I was very lucky to have all the experiences that I did.”

On her twenty-first birthday, Sarah earned her real estate license. Thanks to that boundless energy, she ended up putting in ninety hours a week during her first five to six years.

“Being so young, I had to be an expert to show my worth, and I felt like I had to outwork everyone else,” she explains. “Back then, I was just reacting to all that was happening every day. I had to learn to be extremely proactive so I could avoid working twenty hours a day.”

Many hours, fifteen years, and over 5,000 homes sold later, Sarah has earned many accolades in her career. Her office is ranked the number one medium-sized RE/MAX team in Illinois and the eighth in the U.S. She’s been inducted into RE/MAX’s



Sarah with her two-year-old son, Easton, and their 200-pound Mastiff.



Circle of Legends, Hall of Fame, Chairman’s Club, Executive Club, and 100% Club. Even with all the awards, she says she’d point to the relationships she’s built as the most rewarding part of her job and career.

“I love my clients, staff, and the relationship [I have] with my sister, Christie, who manages the office,” says Sarah. “They are all amazing, each and every one of them. I am beyond blessed.”

Together, Sarah and her team emphasize volunteering with charities in their community. These include the local food pantry, Habitat for Humanity, Hands of Hope, and Fellowship Housing, among other organizations. In the winter months, they also host an annual coat drive event for the area.

When Sarah is not managing her business, she loves spending time with her two-year-old son, Easton, and their 200-pound mastiff; as well as her friends and her large, extended family: two sisters, a brother, and five nieces and nephews. She also enjoys going for walks through downtown Geneva and frequenting her favorite local shops and

restaurants, and she relies on daily workouts to burn off some her never-ending energy.

As Sarah looks forward, she sees there’s room for her team to grow, both in size and sales.

“Right now, growth is the name of the game,” she says. “We need to hire good people to help continue to serve the customers we have coming in. I love taking a year’s worth of work and figuring out how to do better and learn for the year to come—from employees to agents to learning to new technology. In my opinion, you should always be growing and learning.”

“I love meeting people; I am a very curious person and love truly getting to know people and their story and figuring out how I can help them make this process they’re going through easier based on their situation. I love that I get to do this every day.”







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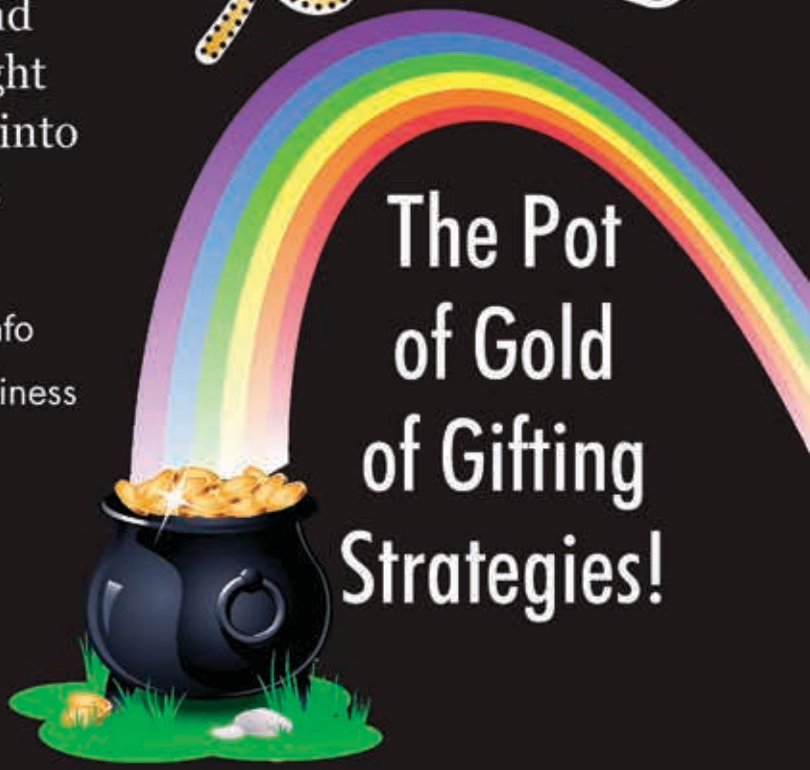
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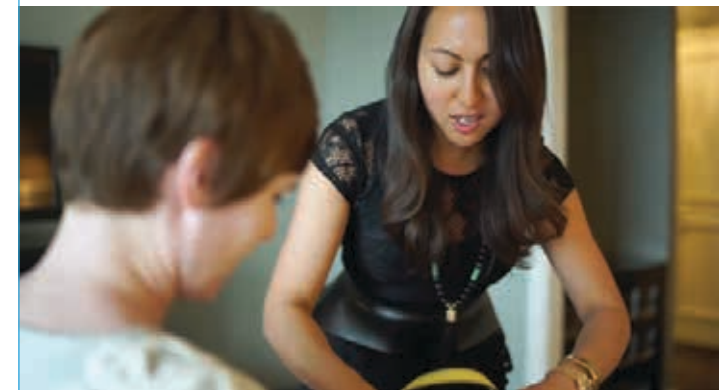
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**Q: How can hiring tristinstyling save people money?**

**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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LET'S GET SOCIAL





# BRANDON BLANKENSHIP

▶ on the rise  
By Lauren Young  
Photos by KDE Photography

*On the Hustle to Serve*

**“This isn’t an easy profession by any means,” says Brandon Blankenship of Keller Williams Premiere Properties of Glen Ellyn. “But just being optimistic and always leading with value and honesty has helped me so much in my career so far.”**

Brandon’s parents moved to Glen Ellyn when he was growing up. His father, Guy, is from Thailand and his mother, Yoli, is from the Philippines. Their journey was a real example of achieving the American Dream for Brandon and his siblings.

“They came here to the United States with not too much,” states Brandon. “They have given my siblings and I more than we have ever needed though, and they instilled my work ethic in me ever since I was young.”

Starting his first job at age sixteen, Brandon exercised his work-ethic muscle in customer service jobs in various industries. He attended College of DuPage before transferring and graduating from Northern Illinois University, exploring different future career options along the way.

“I really never knew what I actually wanted to do after I graduated,” says Brandon. “But I knew one day I would figure it out.”

Immediately following graduation, Brandon moved to California. He bounced around to different jobs while brainstorming ideas for launching his own business. One day, a close family friend who just happened to be a REALTOR®, mentioned he should think about real estate. Brandon dove in headfirst. ...



Brandon with his nephews, Alex and Niko.





...

"I became a REALTOR® because I was very into the potential of what being a REALTOR® could lead to in terms of providing for my family and giving back to others, and that the job was challenging and not 'a commodity.' I've always had a servant mindset, and I always worked hard in anything I did. I've always been pretty entrepreneurial too, always trying to trade things with my classmates—different erasers and pencil grips, trading cards, even shoes," explains Brandon.

**"I always try to get advice from the top producers and veterans on how they built their businesses. I enjoy trying to figure out how I can apply their work to growing my business."**

"I started my real estate career right before the pandemic hit, and then it shut down California pretty hard," he says. "Around this time, I saw on social media that some of the people I went to school with were starting to purchase homes in the Chicago area, and it made me realize I could be the guy to help them."

Brandon moved back to Glen Ellyn on Christmas Eve of 2020, and quickly found opportunities to help many of his friends and family with real estate. His business grew from there. During his first year in Illinois, his sales topped \$6.5 million. But the most rewarding part, he's found, has been rekindling old relationships.

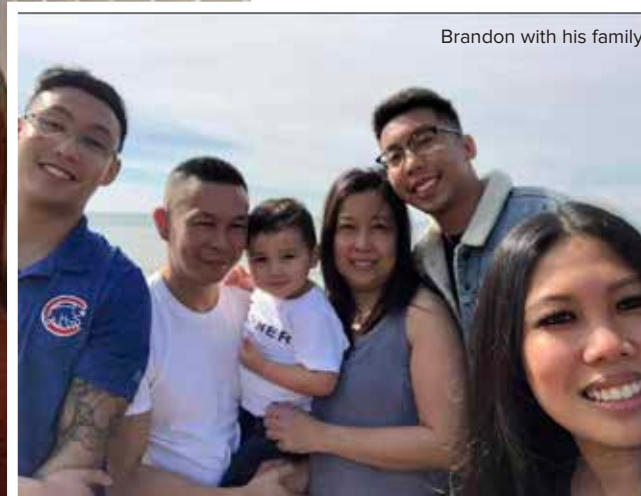


"Being able to be back in Glen Ellyn and earn the opportunity to serve my old classmates, my family, and my friends makes me so happy. It also makes me happy that I am able to continuously pour value by being an advocate for them when it comes to real estate, and just really learning who they are and being a part of their lives," says Brandon. "I also love the hustling aspect. There's always something that I can do, and just being a part of one of, if not, the biggest transactions of their lives is an honor."

In addition to helping his friends, family, and clients, Brandon also makes it his goal to give back through many community organizations, and he is thankful for the existing relationships Keller Williams has with charities.

When Brandon is not giving back or managing his business, he's watching sports (He is a huge Chicago Bulls fan!) or he's out trying different area food spots and breweries. "I'd like to consider myself a foodie," says Brandon. "The Chicago suburbs are a great place for delicious food and discovering different things to share with colleagues and clients!"

Brandon also loves to spend time with his family: his parents; his two siblings, Rayzel and Terrance; and his nephews, Alex and Niko. They have been key supporters of his career growth and exploration.



Brandon with his family.

As Brandon looks forward, he understands the need to learn from others on how to break through to the next level of service for his clients.

"I always try to get advice from the top producers and veterans on how they built their businesses," says Brandon. "I enjoy trying to figure out how I can apply their work to growing my business."

"Cindy Windeler has done so much to help me be where I am after just one year," he adds. "Whenever a coach, mentor, or someone I look up to tells me something I could do to get better, I'm going to do it."

One thing is for sure: Brandon Blankenship is on the hustle.





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▶ partner spotlight  
By Lauren Young  
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# VANESSA CICI FRY

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**AT THE  
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SURROUND  
YOURSELF WITH  
THE BEST TO  
GIVE YOUR BEST**

“When I started my business in 2007, I would sit in my office waiting for the phone to ring, but it didn’t,” remembers Vanessa Cici Fry of Fry Group, LLC in Downers Grove. “The market was a disaster, and that required me to build the business using a very personal approach.”

“Thankfully, the phone does ring now; I will never forget the agents who gave me that first chance. I am also blessed to have a powerful set of women who work with me and understand my commitment to customer service,” she continues. “I am grateful to do something I love every day. There is no ‘slam dunk’ transaction. Every deal takes work, and every day I work with some of the best in this industry—staff, brokers, colleagues. Who can say that?”

Vanessa was born in Chicago, but spent her childhood in Oak Brook. Emil and Angela, Vanessa’s father and mother, were her role models growing up. Married for fifty years, her father was a career salesman for Baxter Healthcare while her mother stayed at home to raise Vanessa and her brother.

“My father received every top sales award there was,” says Vanessa. “But my mother was the woman behind his success. She has always been an amazing partner. She could have been anything in life, but she chose the hardest job: to be a mom.”

Vanessa attended Nazareth Academy and Augustana College before earning her law degree from the University of Illinois Chicago Law School. While in school, she worked at Nordstrom where she gained valuable sales and service training that influences her customer service every day. Today, her real estate-focused firm closes transactions for residential, commercial, and new development customers and partners.

“I value the relationships we’ve built with clients, but also with other attorneys, REALTORS®, lenders, and title companies,” says Vanessa. “Being in real estate isn’t just a job, it is honestly a way of life. Those of us that have chosen this life have an amazing bond.”

Vanessa’s early industry mentors instilled in her an attitude of perseverance and dedication. Her self-identified “feisty side” certainly helps push through contract negotiations for her clients.

“In third grade I talked so much I had to sit in class with a cardboard box around my desk so I wouldn’t bother the other kids,” she laughs. “But talking is the primary skill of successful negotiations, so it has carried me through!”



Vanessa with her team: (Left to right) Claudia Morgante, Eileen Stein, Vanessa Fry, Danica Weyer, and Jennifer Walsh.



...

When Vanessa is not managing her business, she enjoys spending time with her two “crazy” teenage sons: Christopher is a junior at Benet Academy, and Matthew is a freshman at Downers Grove North.

“These boys are, hands down, my favorite people on the planet,” says Vanessa. “We love to watch movies together, travel, visit restaurants, and just hang out. It’s good for my soul.”

Aside from her sons, Vanessa finds empowerment with her circle of friends: women with great internal power.

“Whether it’s with my childhood bestie, my college crew, my law school wild girls, my ‘mom tribe,’ or my industry circle, there is no better time than belly laughing with my ladies,” she affirms.

She also says she’s a sucker for bar food like nachos, hot wings, and jalapeño poppers. In the city, her favorite place to have dinner is Mastro’s. Her cousin is the general manager there, and Vanessa is in love with their butter cake.

On the more serious side, Vanessa goes out of her way to support her local community. She is actively involved at her sons’ schools, and she supports and promotes the work of Reclaim13, an organization whose mission is to reclaim children who are victims of sexual exploitation.

Since her firm’s quiet beginnings and through to the current unprecedented times, Vanessa is always motivated to bring her best work each day. Because her name is on the door, she holds herself to the highest standards of customer care and satisfaction.

“We view the real estate transaction as a process for helping people buy and sell their most valued assets,” says Vanessa. “They are already



Vanessa with her two sons: Christopher and Matthew.

“SUCCESS IS BEING WELL-RESPECTED IN YOUR FIELD, AND THAT IS MY GOAL. THAT, AND TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET A DEAL ACROSS THE TABLE.”

emotional, so it’s up to us to bring stability to get that deal to the closing table.”

Aside from making clients happy, bonding with REALTORS® and other real estate pros gives

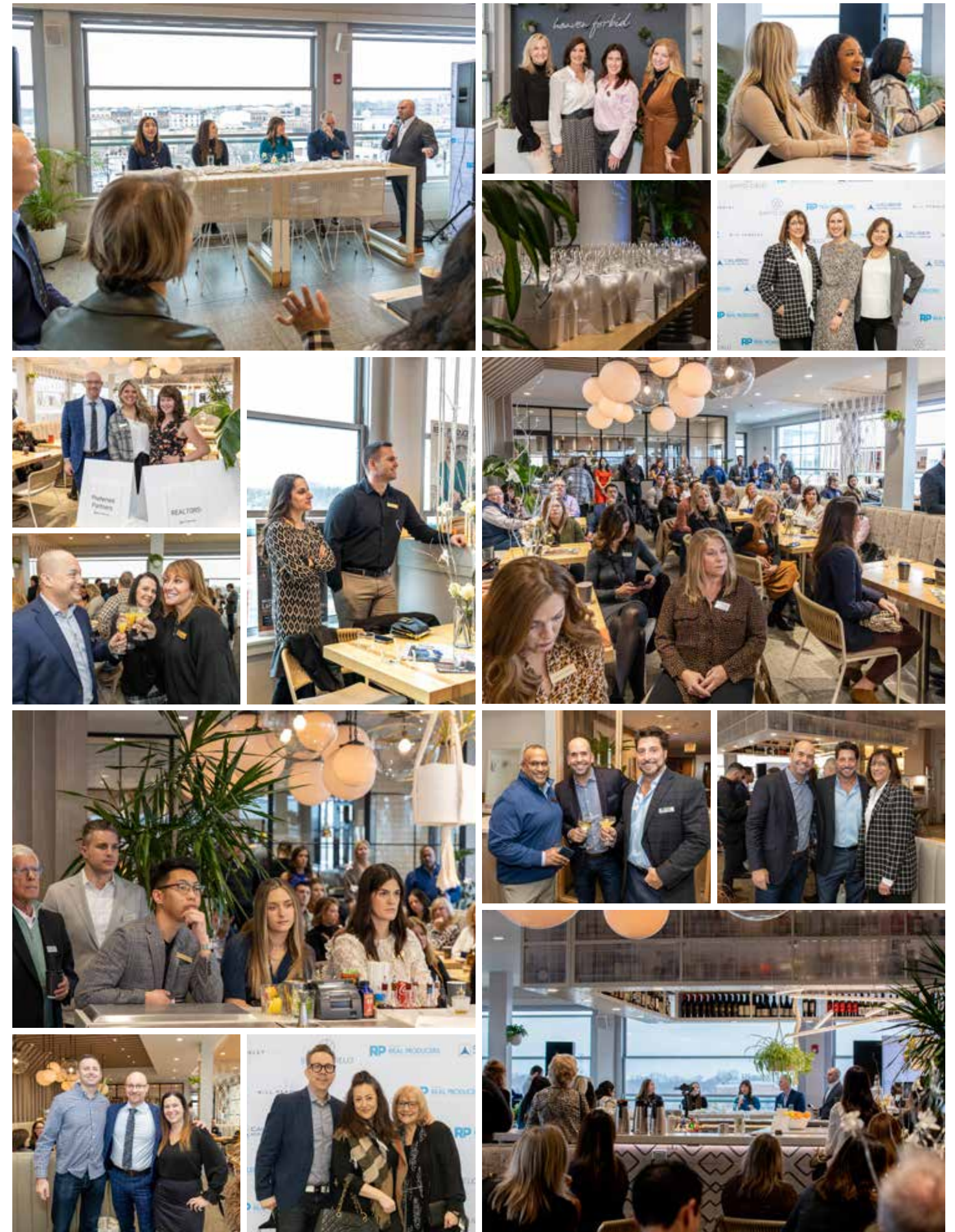
her the extra energy boost that’s sometimes needed to complete difficult transactions.

“Connecting with all the REALTORS® in my field keeps me excited about what is next,” she says. “Success is being well-respected in your field, and that is my goal. That, and to do whatever it takes to get a deal across the table.”

To learn more about the services the Fry Group, LLC provides its clients, you can email Vanessa at [Vanessa@frylawgroup.com](mailto:Vanessa@frylawgroup.com) or call their office at 630-563-5383.







▶ events

# WINTER EVENT

DuPage Real Producers Panel and Winter Social sponsored by Bill Pendley with Caliber Home Loans  
 Hosted by Santo Cielo Photos by KDE Photography and AbiV Photography



**WE WERE THRILLED TO HOST OUR FIRST DUPAGE REAL PRODUCERS PANEL AND WINTER SOCIAL! THE DIALOGUE THE ALL-STAR PANEL OF REAL ESTATE EXPERTS, KIM DALASKEY, DAWN MCKENNA, ALICE CHIN, AND MIKE MCCURRY SHARED WAS OUTSTANDING. THANK YOU J MAGGIO FOR MODERATING THE MORNING.**

shout out to Bill Pendley and Caliber Home Loans for helping to make this all happen.

We are grateful to everyone who joined us, provided raffle prizes, and helped make it an unforgettable event. We look forward to seeing you again in spring for the next event. Enjoy the photos!

Following the panel, we hope you all had a the opportunity to connect while enjoying the hospitality at Santo Cielo. A huge







Oriana Van Someren won Apple AirPods and AirTags from Bill Pendley with Caliber Home Loans.



Carelys Hepburn won an Xbox from Scott Brower with Law Offices of Scott A. Brower.



# RAFFLE Winners

We are extremely grateful to our Preferred Partners who never disappoint with great prizes at all the events! Check out the winners from the Winter Event at Santo Cielo.



Mala Gandhi won an Apple Watch from Ryan Horvath with Chicago Title Insurance Company.



Lori Johanneson won a GoPro from Kevin Camden with Camden Law Office.











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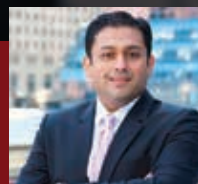
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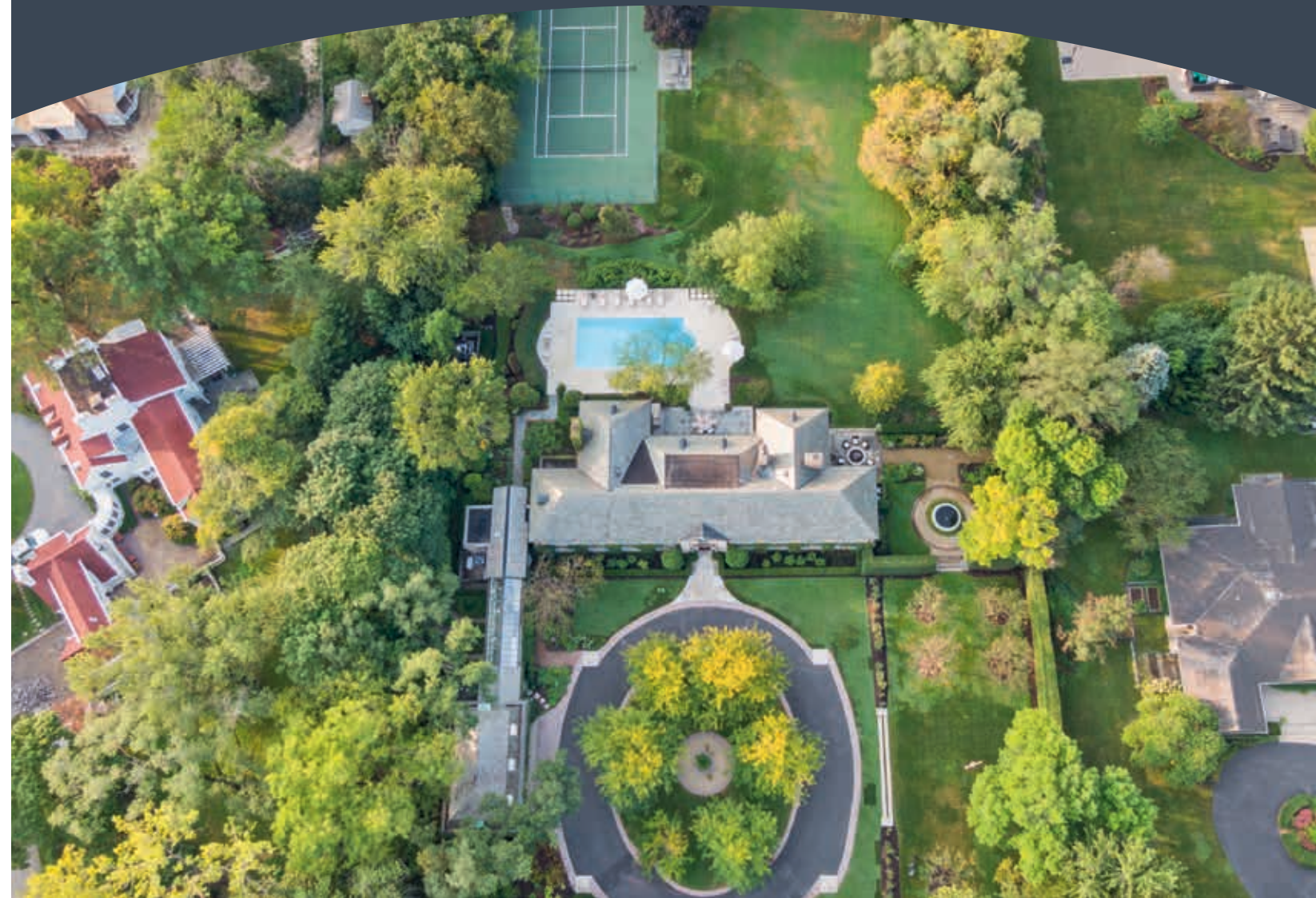
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