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MEET THE BUFFALO

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publishers note

Welcome Lindsay Kuntz to our Team!



Dear *Buffalo Real Producers* Community,

As we reflect on the incredible journey of our first full year in business, we are filled with gratitude and excitement. Thank you to all the dedicated realtors and preferred partners who have made *Buffalo Real Producers* magazine a resounding success. Your support has been instrumental in our growth and achievements.

The overwhelming success we've experienced in Buffalo has inspired us to expand our reach. We are thrilled to announce the upcoming launch of *Real Producers* in Rochester in early 2024. This expansion is a testament to the vibrant real estate communities in both cities, and we look forward to creating a platform that celebrates the achievements and stories of real estate professionals in Rochester.

To meet the growing demands and to enhance our capabilities, we are delighted to welcome Lindsay Kuntz as our Assistant Publisher and Communications Director. Lindsay brings a wealth of experience and expertise to our team, and we are confident that her contributions will further elevate the quality of our magazine.

A little bit about Lindsay and who she is:

Lindsay Kuntz is a dedicated and passionate individual who has transitioned from a successful career in Customs Brokerage to become a loving Stay at Home Mom. With several years of experience in the Customs industry, Lindsay has honed her skills in international trade and regulations, ensuring the smooth flow of goods across borders.

Today, Lindsay's primary focus is on raising and educating her two young children. She plays an active role in homeschooling her six-year-old daughter, providing a nurturing and enriching learning environment that fosters creativity and intellectual growth. Her six-month-old son also benefits from her unwavering care and attention.

Outside of her family life, Lindsay finds joy in her various hobbies. Homesteading has become a significant part of her lifestyle, as she dives into canning, gardening, and learns about sustainable living.

Her party planning hobby showcases her creativity, attention to detail, and knack for making celebrations truly special. From birthdays to weddings and other social gatherings, Lindsay's events are a reflection of her commitment to ensuring that everyone has a fantastic time.

Lindsay is a firm believer in community and service. She contributes her time and expertise to her church and local homeschool co-op, where she serves as a music teacher's assistant. This role not only allows her to share her love for music but also fosters a sense of camaraderie among homeschooling families in her area.

Above all, Lindsay cherishes her time spent with her family. Whether it's through her homeschooling efforts, homesteading activities, party planning or serving her community, her primary motivation is to create a nurturing and loving environment for her children. Her multi-faceted life paints a vibrant portrait of a woman who is dedicated to her family and passionate about enriching the lives of those around her.

As we embark on the exciting journey of 2024, we have a calendar filled with engaging events and special edition issues. We value the input of our community, and to ensure that our offerings align with your preferences, we will be sending out surveys and polls to the top 300 realtors. Your feedback is invaluable, and we encourage you to actively participate in shaping the content and events for the upcoming year.

Let us reiterate that *Buffalo Real Producers* is not a "pay to play" platform for realtors. Every realtor featured in our magazine is nominated by their peers, and this process is entirely free. We empower the top realtors to nominate those they believe deserve recognition, fostering a genuine celebration of the heart and human side of the real estate industry in Buffalo.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our preferred partners. They play a crucial role in making our mission a reality, and we express our sincere appreciation for their ongoing commitment.

As we raise our glasses to the successes of the past and the exciting opportunities ahead, we extend our heartfelt thanks to each member of the *Buffalo Real Producers* community. Here's to another year of celebrating the best in Buffalo real estate!

Cheers,
David Schaub
Publisher
Buffalo Real Producers Magazine

Pictured Above: Lindsay Kuntz, Our Communications Director



► REALTOR® spotlight

Article by: David Cornwell
Photography by: Adore Studio

Chrystal MANZARE

In a way, Howard Hanna Realtor Chrystal Manzare owes her success to one really bad agent.

“My husband and I had a bad experience with an agent years ago and I always felt we were misinformed in the process,” she says. “Unfortunately, we lacked the knowledge to know we were misinformed.”

“In the process, no one took the time to explain what our options were,” she says. “I knew I could do a better job and that most people were like us—they need someone trustworthy with knowledge to help them when purchasing what will likely be the biggest asset in their lives.”

And she was right. The top agent for four consecutive years at Howard Hanna’s Crossroads office in Amherst, Chrystal has closed on almost 400 properties over her eight years as an agent. She’s also has been one of the Buffalo Niagara Association of Realtors Top 100 agents in 2021 and 2022. Chrystal has consistently been in the top 3 percent of Howard Hanna agents, too.

The largest family-owned and operated independent broker in the country, Howard Hanna has hundreds of offices across 11 states, with more than 12,000 sales associates and staff.

“I think I’m a very genuine person and think people sense that about me,” she says. “I care deeply about my clients. And hundreds of closings have given me lots of experience in all types of transactions.”

While Chrystal loves working with all her clients, she particularly enjoys working with seniors. “I think seniors

have so much more to offer, but in general they’re forgotten by a lot of people,” she says.

To help make sure they’re not forgotten, she’s volunteered through the City of North Tonawanda Senior Citizens office in a program for the past 10 years to drive seniors once a week for shopping, appointments and other needs.

It’s the same gratitude she gets from seniors and others she helps that is also one of the main rewards of her job.

“The gratitude people express once their transaction closes is so touching,” she says. “There’s nothing better than knowing I’ve helped them find a home they’re happy with.”

“I really want to make sure that people feel they made the right choice when they purchase or sell their home,” she says. “I love selling any kind of property as long as the client is happy with their choice. I never, ever want buyers to just settle with something, especially in this market.”

Born and raised in North Tonawanda, Chrystal graduated from Buffalo State University with a Bachelor of Social Science Degree.

She met her husband of 23 years, Christian, on a blind date set up by a mutual friend. Four children and two grandsons later, it’s pretty evident that their friend’s hunch was correct.

With their two sons, Ayden and Presten, still at home, Raygen away at Brockport and the couple’s older child, Madysen, living nearby, there are frequent family get-togethers. And they’ve grown a bit bigger over

the past several years with the addition of Madysen's children, their grandchildren, Sawyer, 3 and Greysen, 2.

Her community close to her heart, Chrystal's long been active in North Tonawanda. Before real estate, she owned a daycare there and worked as a supervisor in the town's recreation department. She's also long been a community volunteer.

Volunteering to coach her children's sports has been a highlight of their childhood, she says, adding that whether it was boys' or girls' softball or soccer, those years with her children have created great family memories.

"Anything that comes up in the community, I try to volunteer for and help out with," she says. In addition to chauffeuring older residents, she's also helped with community health initiatives and volunteered to design and build a community playground.

It's a good life, she says, one she's particularly appreciative of her husband for helping make.

"My husband is the most supportive person. When I wanted to quit working and stay home with our kids, he just said 'Do it.' When I said I wanted to become a Realtor, he said 'Do it.'"

And last year when the couple again talked about a dream trip to the Galapagos Islands, her husband said "Book it."



More of a homebody than an international traveler, though, watching her kids play sports and the Buffalo Bills with her husband is about as exciting as she wants things to get. Presten, a junior at North Tonawanda High, plays varsity football there, while Raygen, a freshman at SUNY Brockport, plays on the college's rugby team.

"Personally I just want to enjoy all the small things in life with my family," she says of future plans. Professionally, she sees real estate as her future for a very long time, her integrity and authenticity sure to keep her busy.

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▶▶ REALTOR® team spotlight

Article by: David Cornwell | Photography by: Eagle 1 Photography

JOHN GATAS TEAM

“If you can dream, you can own,” says John Gatas, owner and team leader of the Gatas Real Estate Team at Keller Williams in Williamsville. And he and his team’s mission is to make all their clients’ dreams come true.

“We see a world where real estate ownership is a possibility for everyone,” John says. “We’re not selling homes, we are building communities and relationships one person and one family at a time.”

With \$60 million in sales since 2018, John and the Gatas Real Estate Team have been recognized in the top 100 area agents for three years. Out of an estimated 4,000 agents in the Buffalo market, that places the team in the top 1% of the market.

“But we’re not interested in being number 1 or being top 10,” John says of his team. “We are built on integrity, expertise and relationships first. We’re number 1 when a client says, ‘You just changed my life.’”

Other than John, his business partners in the Gatas Real Estate Team include Sara Wistner, executive assistant and Annette Kerl, lead sales and relationship builder.

Outside the office, he says Kerl, a native of Poland, is president of the Polish School in Buffalo, living in Lancaster with her two daughters and husband, who works for Homeland Security. And Sara, who lives with

her husband in Kenmore, should have an advanced degree in parenting, raising four children—one girl and three boys, including a set of twins.

Properties the team handles include residential, commercial, multifamily, new build construction, foreclosures and rehabs. And even though he’s the team leader, John says he never looks at team members as just “members.”

“You will always be supported and treated as a business partner, not a sales associate, not an employee, but a valued business partner,” he says. “My name may be on the banners and the logo, but my identity is more than banner and logo deep. It’s people deep.”

As its leader, John says his intent is to give his Gatas Real Estate Team business partners “full entry into having their own identity within our brand and having their voices heard.”

Added to his own support and mentoring of the team, he says, is that provided by Keller Williams franchise owner Anthony Butera.

“The Keller-Williams model simply works,” he says. “You learn the tools needed to efficiently and effectively run a real estate practice and much, much more.”

“Anthony has brought tremendous leadership and created an environment of high-level masterminding here,” John says. “He’s someone I’ve

come to greatly respect and learn from and someone whose wisdom I incorporate into our business.”

John says his own career in real estate wasn’t intentional but came at the suggestion of Realtor Al Ryer, a friend “who encouraged me because he said we shared similar traits that are client-centric. So I took a stab at it.”

With an established background in business and finance, it was a successful stab. Before becoming a Realtor, he had owned a laundry and dry cleaning business, worked as a credit manager for Dunlop Tire and as a loan officer and customer service representative for the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Office of Disaster Assistance.

After getting his license and working for a few other brokerages, John joined Keller Williams in 2013.

Proud son of two immigrant parents from Lebanon, his parents, Peter and Antoinette Gatas, celebrated 56 years of marriage this September. A Buffalo native, John attended Niagara University and The University of Buffalo, getting a certification from the University of Buffalo’s Center For Entrepreneurial Leadership a few years back. The equivalent of a master’s degree in coursework, the certification required nine months of hands-on business training.

A self-confessed thrill seeker and adventurer, highlights of those





adventures include scuba diving on Guam, sky diving from 14,000 feet and flying over Letchworth State Park in a hot air balloon.

Keeping healthy, he says is an important part of his life, and he loves being around water and “anywhere there’s a hiking trail,” especially Devil’s Hole and Whirlpool Rapids at the Niagara Gorge. And if that doesn’t keep him healthy enough, there’s also cycling and boating in the mix.

A practicing Catholic, prayers and spirituality are other important components of his life.

“Everyone that knows me realizes my faith is a vital component of my life,” John says. “I just try to do my small

part of fellowship with others, to be real with them and treat them with mutual respect.”

“And I always remember, each person has a story to tell and has many miles on their feet. So the more you listen and place yourself at their feet, the more you will see how God is truly present in each person and that they want joy like everyone else.”

As a person of faith, giving is also an important part of his and his team’s lives. Causes he and the Gatas Real Estate Team have helped support include breast cancer awareness, Saint Luke’s Mission of Mercy and others. And since the war started, they’ve been donating clothing and useful items for the Ukrainian people

through the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

A resident of North Tonawanda, John also started and was active in the Everything NT page on Facebook, listing upcoming events in the area and raising funds through festivals for causes like Sweet Buffalo and the Niagara County SPCA.

As for the future, John’s hoping to grow his team larger and lead them to ever greater success.

“I believe being a team leader is much more than a brand or banner or the next transaction,” he says. “You are the product of those you surround yourself. You must invest in your people so they can invest in you—that is the secret sauce my friends.”

“
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Kunji REY

▶ REALTOR® on the rise

Article by: David Cornwell
Photography by: Adore Studio



“It’s important for me to help people build generational wealth,” she says. “I came from abject monetary poverty, but thankfully there was no poverty of wonder and potential. We utilized food stamps when needed and my parents drove ancient cars that kept hobbling along somehow.”

“We lived eight people in a one-bed, one-bath home that, though extremely modest, was cozy and the family dinner table always filled with amazing food, laughter and stories,” Kunji says. “Never a dull moment, especially when trying to leave the house en masse with one bathroom. We always made the best of what we had and had a lot of fun doing it.”

Perhaps needless to say, Kunji’s early years instilled in her a profound appreciation of the potential value of home and the innate value as well.

Hitting the road after graduating from Buffalo Academy of Visual and Performing Arts, Kunji worked for various artisans and craftspeople, often behind the scenes at Renaissance festivals, other art shows and music festivals. Returning home, she became a manager at the Lexington Coop—a place where she grew up working member hours with her folks and then worked for a long time at a local midwifery practice.

What a long, strange trip it’s been indeed. If ever a lyric was written that best captured Kunji Rey’s life, the line from Grateful Dead’s Truckin’ might be it.

A top agent for Towne Housing Real Estate, Kunji was born to first-generation hippie artists, sometimes living in vans and tents as they traveled from art show to art show and at other times living communally in houses both big and small in New York City, Buffalo and other places.

“It was kind of one big, mostly happy, weird-ass family,” she says of her early days.

Consistently one of the top agents at Towne Housing, Kunji’s legacy from her parents and the plethora of “adults” she was surrounded by in her childhood include her openness, intellectual curiosity and acceptance of others, as well her own artistic sensitivities. This legacy also included the recognition that there were some things she would have done differently, and that has helped drive her success.

After about a six-year stint at home, she moved to Ithaca and studied to become a licensed massage therapist, then moved to New York City where she resided and opened a practice, working for herself as a licensed massage therapist for well over a decade. While in NYC, Kunji decided to go back to school to study psychology and theater at Hunter College, where she was awarded an opportunity to travel Europe and live for a time in France to study the language and culture.

Though she gained much from these places and experiences, Kunji says, “I missed home and always knew I would come back. My desire was always to return and work towards a long dream of being a landlord. 716 runs deep in my heart. Home matters to me in all ways.”

During her time in NYC, Kunji also started learning how to manage property. She started doing management for her own landlord’s buildings and through those relationships turned her apartments into Airbnbs. She studied property auctions and ended up buying her first home to flip at the Buffalo Daily Auctions. At the same time, she landed a role in a play in Buffalo and moved back for good for family, friends and love.

Despite already having a knowledge base wider than many agents, Kunji says when she first got her real estate license, inspired by the suggestion of a flipping partner, she didn’t know what she was doing when it came to the sales side.

“Learning to be a Realtor has been incredibly rewarding. More so than I could have ever imagined,” she says. “I don’t want to ‘sell’ anybody, anything. I am inclined to walk through a property and try to point out its beauty but also its blemishes. I want my clients to trust I was transparent and honest with them. I want them to feel completely confident and overjoyed with their decision to buy and sell with me and to refer me to their friends and family.”

After interviewing with a handful of other



“ I’VE EXPERIENCED MANY DIFFERENT LIVES

ALREADY. EVERY EXPERIENCE HAS LED

TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND

CHALLENGE MYSELF TO KEEP GROWING. ”

brokerages, it was my good fortune to find Towne Housing,” she says. “It is a team of highly driven, dedicated, fun and inspired people. I have to say I resonated with the culture and the individuals almost immediately. Even though I was green, they were 100% supportive of me.”

In addition to her colleagues and friends at Towne Housing and in Western New York’s real estate community, she also has lifelong friends from her childhood.

Kunji also has a large group of friends from Buffalo’s robust sailing community and feels grateful that a casual opportunity led her to learn to sail at the ripe age of 41. It quickly became an obsession.

Another group she’s proud to belong to is the Bills Mafia. Although she acknowledges “As we all know here in Buffalo, it can be a severe rollercoaster of emotions and wildly depressing at times and that’s OK. I am Buffalonian through and through. I take the ups with the downs.”

“I’ve experienced many different lives already. Every experience has led to new opportunities to learn and challenge myself to keep growing,” she says. “I wouldn’t be where I am today if I hadn’t gone through all of my yesterdays.”

“I really love my work. I’m lucky to get up every day and make a difference in people’s lives and that every day presents new and thrilling challenges. I’m grateful for the outstanding humans I



know through real estate. I plan to be in real estate traveling alongside this evolving community for a very, very long time.”

For someone born at home and

without a name for the first months of life, Kunji certainly has made a name for herself in real estate, her present success fueled by what came before and her excitement for what comes next.



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Clinton Hawkins

PILLAR TO POST HOME INSPECTORS

Clinton Hawkins hasn't found any meth labs, although he's tested for them. And while he did once find shackles and several jail cells in the basement of a home, turns out everything there was legit.

As owner of the Clinton Hawkins Team of Pillar To Post Home Inspectors, Clint says that while most homes don't have mysteries hidden in their basement doesn't mean there aren't plenty of hidden problems.

"It's like the difference between eating a slice of bread and really knowing how the bread was made," he says of two of the biggest advantages he has over competitors—experience and expertise. Prior to starting the Clinton Hawkins Team in 2018, he owned a construction company for 13 years.

"Inspectors have to know how a house works, what's going on behind the walls and in between the floors of a home," he says. "And you need to understand the possible ramifications of how a home was built or when it was built, how things deteriorate over time and many other things like that."

In addition to the licensing and continuing education requirements of New York State, Pillar To Post inspectors also undergo rigorous training at its corporate training facility, with the corporation



also requiring continuing education.

In addition to experience and expertise, technology is another factor that sets Pillar To Post and the Clinton Hawkins Team apart. "Usually whatever Pillar To Post does, other companies follow," he says.

A for instance, he notes that Pillar To Post was the first company to produce report binders for clients, an innovation most inspectors have used for many years now. But while it may take days for some inspectors to produce those reports, "our reports can be done right there, so clients leave the house with that inspection report."

"We're getting more digital with everything," Clint says of both inspections and reporting results and analytics. He is particularly proud of the 360° Virtual Tours the Clinton Hawkins Team produces. These virtual tours measure floor plans for the client and can be an invaluable tool in purchasing and planning decisions.

"We look at everything top to bottom," Clint says of the company's standard home inspection options. And while testing for wood-destroying organisms is also a stand-alone test, Clint says it's included at no charge.

Home inspections include a thorough examination of all structures and major systems of a home including roofs and attics, gutters and drainage, porches, structural foundation, electrical wiring, walls, flooring, ceilings, water heaters, plumbing and more. And inspections employ a variety of high-tech tools like infrared scanning.

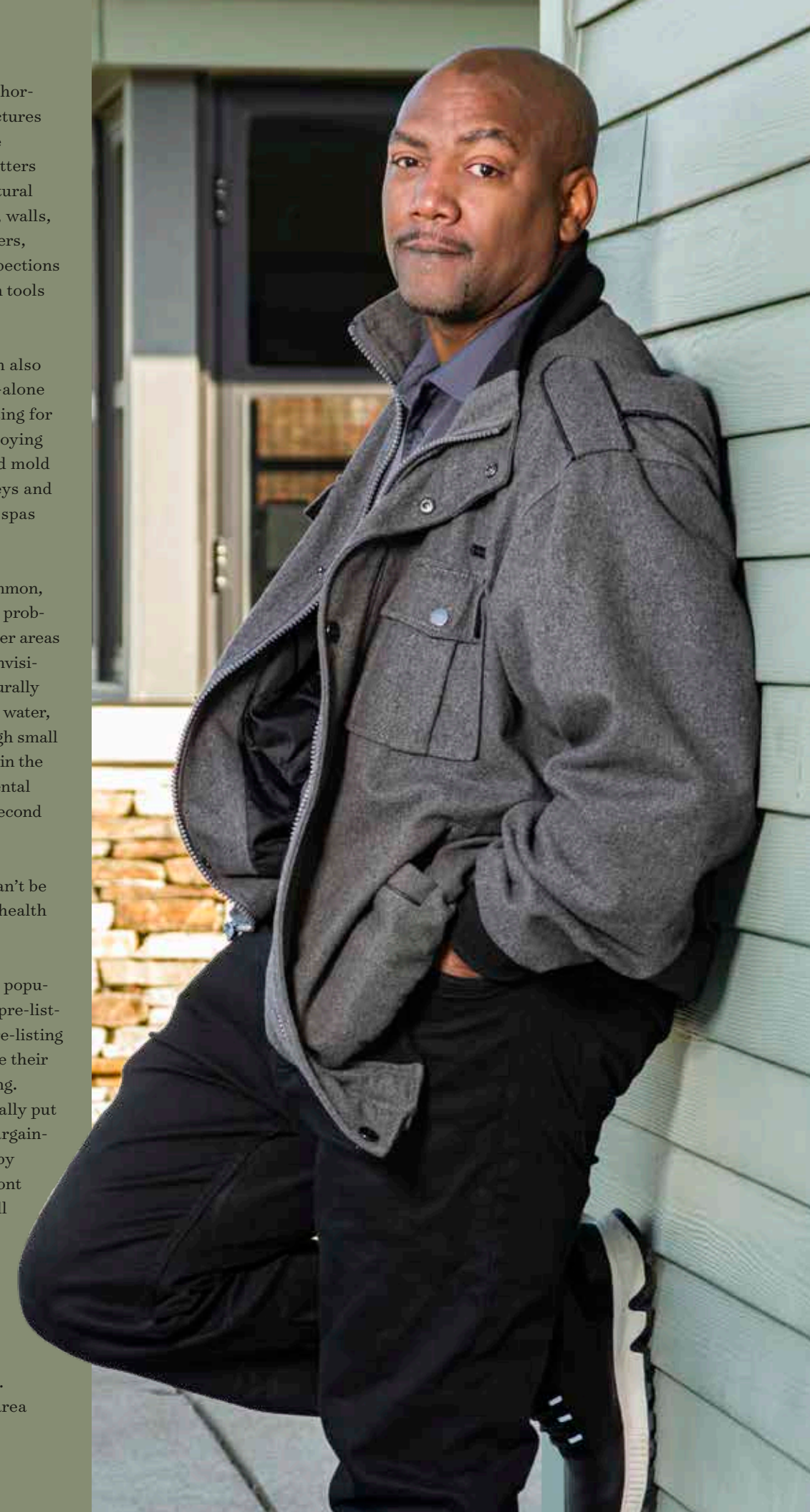
Homeowners and buyers can also select from a menu of stand-alone inspections that include testing for radon, asbestos, wood-destroying organisms, water quality and mold as well as inspecting chimneys and fireplaces, swimming pools, spas and hot tubs.

Testing for radon is fairly common, Clint says, since it's more of a problem in the Northeast than other areas of the country. An odorless, invisible, radioactive gas that's naturally released from rocks, soil, and water, Radon gets into homes through small cracks or holes and builds up in the air. It's the leading environmental cause of any cancer and the second leading cause of lung cancer.

"Radon can't be smelled, it can't be seen and it can cause severe health issues," Clint says.

Clint says he'd like to see the popularity of another inspection, pre-listing inspections, grow. In a pre-listing inspection, homeowners have their homes inspected before listing. Pre-listing inspections generally put homeowners in a stronger bargaining and negotiating position by letting them quickly get in front of any needed repairs and sell their homes more quickly.

"There are definitely advantages to them," Clint says, adding such inspections often negate the need for a buyer's inspection. But despite the advantages, area





“
IT REALLY
COMES DOWN TO
JUST BEING AN
OVERALL GOOD
HUMAN.
”

Realtors have been slow to adopt a practice that's rampant elsewhere.

As for meth labs, testing for meth is part of air quality testing and an unfortunate result of changing times, Clint says. As for the jail cells he found, they were in the basement of an early 1900s home originally owned by a judge.

Married with three children, Clint and the Clinton Hawkins Team try to stay active in the community.

The company is a member and sponsor of the Women's Council of Realtors Buffalo Niagara and supports that organization and the charities it in turn supports.

A veteran of the Marine Corps, he says his service instilled many values he's incorporated in his business and personal life, the same values he tried to instill in players on the high school football team he coached for a dozen years.

"I've always loved coaching football," he says. "It was just great to mentor kids and watch them grow and go off and do something great in life."

Those years of coaching are indicative of yet another reason for his personal and business success. In addition to his experience and expertise, he's just a nice guy.

Asked if he had any guiding principles, Clint says, "If anything, I'd say it's going the extra mile for my clients and agents. It's just being kind and supportive to people in general. It really comes down to just being an overall good human."



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BUFFALO REAL PRODUCERS TOP 3 REALTOR PANEL EXTRAVAGANZA

A RECAP OF THE GRAND FINALE EVENT OF 2023



INTRODUCTION:

Buffalo Real Producers recently hosted its grand finale event of 2023, a spectacular gathering that brought together over 100 Buffalo realtors for an insightful and engaging panel discussion featuring three of the city's top real estate professionals. Held on November 14th at noon, this event was a celebration of success, knowledge-sharing, and a glimpse into the exciting future that *Buffalo Real Producers* has in store for 2024.

THE TOP 3 REALTOR PANEL:

The highlight of the event was undoubtedly the Top 3 Realtor Panel, where industry leaders Karen Baker, Jason Sokody, and Michelle Winer took center stage. The trio, known for their expertise and success in the Buffalo real estate market, answered pre-submitted questions with enthusiasm and shared invaluable insights that captivated the audience.

ENERGY AND KNOWLEDGE:

Karen Baker, Jason Sokody, and Michelle Winer brought a dynamic blend of energy and knowledge to the panel, creating an atmosphere of inspiration and learning. Their thoughtful responses to the questions posed showcased not only their individual successes but also their commitment to elevating the real estate profession in Buffalo.

NETWORKING AND CELEBRATION:

Before and after the hour-long panel discussion, attendees had ample time to mingle and network. The event featured an open bar with unlimited mimosas and bloody marys, adding a touch of festivity to the occasion. A sumptuous catered lunch, including garlic-crusted parmesan chicken and fire-grilled Italian sausages with onions and peppers, provided a delicious backdrop to the networking activities.

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE:

In addition to the panel discussion, the event served as a platform to celebrate the achievements of Buffalo's standout realtors from



the past two months. Recognizing the outstanding contributions of professionals like Naomi Lasco, Nicole Leistner, Frank Sador, Kathy Sparks-Dimillo, and Thejan Geesara Kodituwakku, *Buffalo Real Producers* underscored its commitment to acknowledging and showcasing excellence within the industry.

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Their generous contributions played a pivotal role in creating an event that not only celebrated success but also fostered a sense of community and collaboration within the Buffalo real estate industry.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024:

As the curtains closed on the final event of 2023, *Buffalo Real Producers* left attendees eagerly anticipating what's in store for 2024. With a promise of more captivating panel discussions, insightful articles, and engaging events, the magazine is poised to continue its mission of bringing together and elevating the Buffalo real estate community.

CONCLUSION:

The Top 3 Realtor Panel at *Buffalo Real Producers'* last event of 2023 was a resounding success, blending knowledge-sharing, celebration, and networking into a memorable experience for all attendees. As the real estate community reflects on the accomplishments of the past year, there's an air of excitement and anticipation for the promising future that awaits in 2024. And to the sponsors, *Buffalo Real Producers* expresses profound gratitude for their essential role in making this event an unparalleled success.

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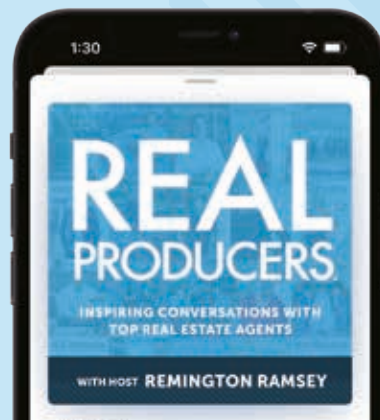


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