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## GUSTY GULAS

Stays One Step Ahead

**RISING STAR:**

Lindsay Sport

**DIFFERENCE MAKER:**

Terry Mills

**PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:**

Cutco Closing Gifts

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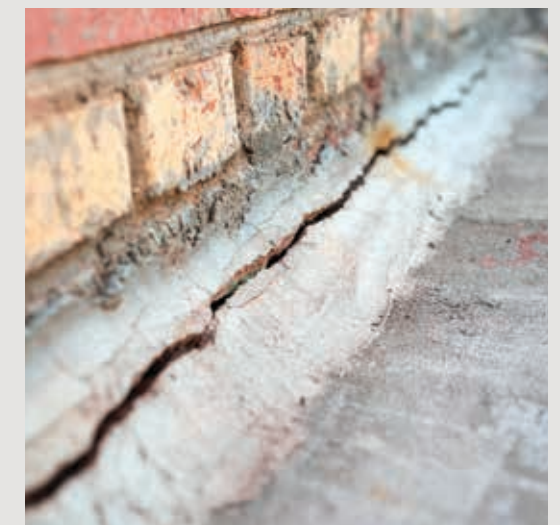
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If you are interested in contributing or nominating REALTORS® for certain stories, please email us at [meredith.jones@realproducersmag.com](mailto:meredith.jones@realproducersmag.com).

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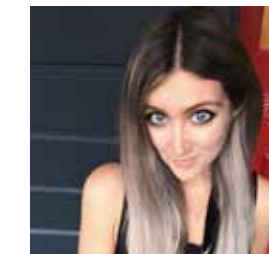
## MEET THE BIRMINGHAM REAL PRODUCERS TEAM



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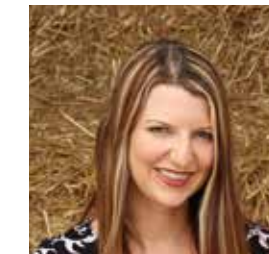
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▶ publisher's note

*Congrats and Welcome, 2023 Top 300 Agents!*

If you are reading this, then you should give yourself a big pat on the back! That means you have made the Real Producers Top 300 list for 2023! CONGRATS! Each of you should have received an email from us with some important information, along with your *Birmingham Real Producers* Top Agent badge for 2023. If you didn't receive that, be sure to reach out and let us know.

This is the first time you are receiving this publication, and you may not know entirely what it is all about yet. You will want to tune in to the rest of this publisher's note because I am going to give you a bit of a recap on what we're all about.

First, you are receiving this magazine because you are a top 300-producing real estate agent (based on your annual residential MLS production numbers)! That means that you will receive this publication, which is exclusive to the highest-producing agents in the market, every single month through the end of 2023. Consider it a badge of honor!

Being in the top 300, you also have the opportunity to be featured in our publication to share your story, and the beautiful thing is, there is no cost to you. It is a testament to you and your hard work! It is important to note that Real Producers is not a brag book. To be in the top 1-2% in your field takes a lot of grit, passion, hard work, trials, tribulations, and a strong "why" to keep pushing on.

Real Producers is about sharing and honoring those stories and humanizing you and your peers to create a culture of honor and collaboration that propels us all to the next level. We certainly cannot guarantee a feature, but if you would like to be considered for one, here are a few quick tips to increase your chances: Meet up with a member of our team, support Real Producers, and attend our



private events when you can. If that doesn't work for you, we also accept large sums of money. Kidding! No agent can buy their way into Real Producers. Your support means the world to us.

All of the businesses that are a part of Real Producers have been recommended by top-producing agents and vetted by us. They are our Real Producers Vetted Businesses, and this community could not be possible without them! If you are looking for some of the best businesses in the market to work with, look no further than here. When you meet one, be sure to thank them for supporting and investing in you.

Huge congrats to each and every one of you. Be sure to reference the FAQ page in this publication for more details.

We cannot wait to make 2023 the best year yet!

Cheers,

**Meredith Jones**  
Owner  
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## ▶ partner spotlight

Written by **Elizabeth McCabe**  
Photos submitted by **Elizabeth Stephenson**

# CUTCO CLOSING GIFTS are a Cut Above the Rest!

**W**ant to be remembered long after a real estate closing? Consider giving clients a gift that will last for years to come. Elizabeth Stephenson, the founder of The Gratus Group, offers closing gifts that are a cut above the rest. As a sales representative for Cutco, she understands the importance of excellent cutlery that stands the test of time.

Real estate agents should have a system in place to appreciate and engage their clients. A lot of people don't think about it. Instead of giving a consumable gift, such as a bottle of wine or a gift card, why not give them a gift that they can cherish for years to come?

Cutco is proud to have a Forever Guarantee, ensuring that their knives will always cut like new. A household name in cutlery, Cutco has been in existence since 1949 with over 16 million customers. With exceptional craftsmanship, these knives were built to last.

"In 2014, I began selling Cutco knives to real estate agents," explains Elizabeth. "I loved working with businesses and business owners. When we moved to Birmingham

in 2015, my husband was promoted to run a division of Cutco knives and I went full force into that."

Raised in Gulfport, Mississippi, Elizabeth originally planned on being an architect. She earned her five-year degree from Mississippi State University before falling in love with sales at Cutco. Originally her mother doubted her, which was the impetus for Elizabeth to work harder. In the process, her passion led her to a full-time profession selling knives and finding fulfillment in the process. "What was supposed to be a summer job turned into 13 years (and counting)," she jokes.

### Leave An Impression

The average American uses a knife 200+ times per year, regardless of whether they describe themselves as someone who "cooks," which



helps keep their real estate agent **top of mind**. For someone who cooks often, that can generate over 300 touches. Consider that Cutco is the lowest cost per touch as opposed to wine or a gift card.

For those in a competitive industry like real estate, branding should be prioritized as an element of your

gifting. With Cutco, real estate agents can have their name and logo engraved on the face of the knife.

Best of all, branded gifts are 100% tax deductible as advertising for real estate agents. Knives will also help real estate agents stand out above their competition.

"I've worked with 550 REALTORS® on their closing gifts," says Elizabeth. She has also worked with mortgage loan officers with their closing gifts as well as title agents. As a result, she has gotten to know many individuals. "It's such a community," she smiles. "I've made some really close friends. I forged some really strong relationships with people and their offices and their staff, and they've become a big family in a lot of ways."

### Exceptional Products

The difference is in the details with Cutco products. Not only have they been around for decades, but they hold up better than the competition. Additionally, everything with a cutting edge is American-made.

From knives to shears to pizza cutters, ice cream scoops, and wine openers, the options are endless for those searching for a closing gift. Knives, however, are the most popular product. As Elizabeth says, "The average person in America uses knives 4-5 times a week. There is



nothing else that matches Cutco's quality. Not only are the products guaranteed, but they only need to be sharpened once every 7-10 years, which is phenomenal." Cutco manufactures high-quality products that also have a warranty that travels with the products.

"You want something that is going to last, is high quality, and is going to be used," says Elizabeth. Gift baskets are discarded. Wine bottles are thrown away after consumption, and gift cards don't last very long. Cutco knives can last for decades.

"Whether a \$100 gift card or a \$100 knife, it's the same price," points out Elizabeth. With the agent's name engraved on the knife, Elizabeth calls it a "dishwasher-safe business card."

While people are conditioned to give gifts that they think others will like, consider getting a gift that will be used several times a week. It simply makes sense.

### Finding the Right Fit

Elizabeth, who runs The Gratus Group, oversees the Southern market for Cutco. Each one of her sales

representatives is full-time and is happy to help people find the right closing gift for them.

"Everything that we do is catered from person to person to help agents and business owners systemize their gifts," says Elizabeth. Whether clients want to purchase a few knives at a time or hundreds at a time, Elizabeth and her dedicated team cater to their clients. Based on the number of knives ordered, discounts are offered for quantity.

"We even bill monthly so we don't interrupt cash flow," she explains.



THE GRATUS GROUP  
CUTCO CLOSING GIFTS

For more information, check out Elizabeth's website, [www.thegratusgroup.com](http://www.thegratusgroup.com), or the Cutco Closing Gifts website, [www.cutcoclosinggifts.com](http://www.cutcoclosinggifts.com). She can also be reached by email at [elizabeth@thegratusgroup.com](mailto:elizabeth@thegratusgroup.com), or by phone at (601) 383-7404.



▶▶ rising star

Written by **Elizabeth McCabe**  
Photos by **Brendon Pinola Photography**



FORMER PERSONAL TRAINER

# LINDSAY SPORT

FOUND HER FUTURE IN REAL ESTATE!

“From the time I was 6 or 7, my only goal was to be a millionaire,” says Lindsay Sport. “I just wanted to make a lot of money,” she smiles. Little did she know that she would embark on a career in real estate, a profession that hadn’t crossed her mind at that young age.

Growing up in Luverne, Alabama, known as the “Friendliest City of the South,” Lindsay enjoyed being a “water girl” through and through. She lived in a small, two-red-light town on the way to the beach.

“We had a lakehouse and I spent a lot of time on the water, waterskiing and kneeboarding since I was 5 or 6 years old,” she reminisces. “It’s pretty easy to kneeboard; you start on your stomach, and pull on your knees.”

Because she lived in a small town, Lindsay was involved in everything there was to do. Softball, basketball, cheerleading, the Student Government Association (SGA), and gymnastics filled her schedule. A straight-A student, there was always something going on every week.

big dreams, hoping to be a WNBA basketball star or “someone famous” from the time she was young. “I knew I had to be in a profession with people,” she comments.

With that thought in mind, she got a degree in psychology to help people. “It was a little too much,” she admits. When she started carrying people’s problems, a new career was in order. “I went into the sports and fitness industry,” she comments. She enjoyed being a personal trainer for 10 years while going to grad school.

“Things started to fall into place,” she smiles. She opened two of her own gyms and sold them for a profit before switching gears to real estate. “Through and through, I’m an entrepreneur,” she points out. “My whole family is like that.”

## ROAD TO REAL ESTATE

“Now, I help people with their financial needs,” says Lindsay. With her heart to help others, she is a natural in the real estate industry. She is very people-focused as well as results driven. Interestingly, Lindsay’s interest in real estate was sparked by her grandfather, a real estate developer. “He was a developer even before ‘developer’ had a title,” she explains. Lindsay grew up around him, watching him buy buildings, rent land, put together deals, and learned the ins and outs of the industry. “It sparked my interest in real estate.”

“

It’s all about connecting with the person, connecting them with the house, and getting to the finish line.

”

When she was a child, Lindsay says, “I never had one thing in mind about what I wanted to be. I was never the kid who wanted to be a vet or a doctor.” She had

In August 2020, Lindsay decided to pursue her real estate license and hit the ground running, building a great database and securing her first contract within 60 days. She has not gone a single month without a contract since then, a testament to her hard work and dedication to her clients.

“Fifty percent of my business comes from the gym,” she says. A daily gym-goer, every day she walks in and has a conversation with someone about real estate.

With her unique background in mental health and personal training, Lindsay is better able to understand her clients’ wants and needs. Because of this ability, she is able to get better results for her clients. “It’s all about connecting with the person, connecting them with the house, and getting to the finish line,” she explains. “I believe there is a small percentage of real estate agents that truly love real estate, love people, and that understand real estate and understand people. I can do both really well.”

### FINDING HER STRIDE

One of the challenges Lindsay faced in her career was transitioning from being on a team to becoming a single agent. Doubting whether she could do it, Lindsay had to figure out the transition on her own, leaving behind friends and connections in the process. She now works for Keller Williams Vestavia.



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Lindsay defines success as continually learning, growing, and moving forward without quitting. Looking forward, Lindsay hopes to continue growing and taking on leadership opportunities in her brokerage, helping others get into the industry. She also plans to build a small team and step away from the daily grind to focus on building her rental and long-term portfolio for passive income.

Currently, Lindsay is working on getting her Certified Residential Specialist. To qualify for this designation, real estate agents must have sold 60 homes in 3 years or have \$30 million dollars in volume. Lindsay met these requirements and is excited to see the opportunities that await her in the years to come in real estate.

### RECHARGING FROM REAL ESTATE

“This year, I’m trying to slow down. I don’t have that many hobbies,” she laughs. One thing that she does love to do is eat. “I love fine dining, fine food, and fine wine. I love the food scene in Birmingham.”

Another pastime that she enjoys is CrossFit and shooting hoops on Sundays. Although she isn’t in the WNBA, she does excel in basketball. This action-packed sport is a great escape from the world of real estate and a nice way to relax and recharge.

On Sundays, Lindsay likes to relax and hang out with her dogs as well as her wife. “My partner has been the best thing that has ever happened to me,” she says. “She’s my support person and puts up with my shenanigans.”

### A BRIGHT FUTURE

Lindsay Sport is a rising star in the real estate industry, driven by her passion for people and building relationships. Her success is a testament to her hard work, dedication, and entrepreneurial spirit. This former personal trainer found her future in real estate!

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▶▶ difference maker

Written by **Ann Marie Harvey**  
Photos by **Brendon Pinola Photography**

# TERRY MILLS

The Importance  
of Giving Back

Although Terry Mills didn't have a clear career path, he knew he wanted to contribute to the community. While attending the University of Alabama at Birmingham, he changed his major three times before landing on criminal justice. Fresh out of college in 2006, Terry went to work as a probation officer for Judicial Correction Services, quickly advancing to office manager and then probation director for Central Alabama. "That gave me experience negotiating contracts, opening leases, and presenting to the Birmingham City Council," he says. "Running a business for someone else really sparked my entrepreneurial spirit."

In 2015, Terry got his real estate license and joined Keller Williams, thinking it would be a part-time way to earn some extra money. A few months later, his company folded and he lost his job. The janitorial service he had started with his wife, Tiquela, had become overwhelming and they lost contracts. Without a backup plan, Terry turned to real estate. "It was a hard time—I was at a point where I was doing well and I lost everything," he recalls. "I truly believe I wouldn't have accomplished what I have without that adversity."

A spiritual man, that experience made Terry realize God opened doors not just for him, but for him to help other people as well. He devoted himself completely to real estate and got busy. In 2016, Terry won Rookie of the Year and eventually built a team at Keller Williams. Terry recently opened his own brokerage with his mom, Deborah Andrews, serving as the qualifying broker. T. Mills Realty Group is located on 3rd Avenue North in the heart of downtown, offering their seven agents low overhead and the feel of a family business. "We are unique as a mother-son ownership team," Terry says. "One of our goals is to bring our agents in so they can experience the office vibe and team spirit we all missed out on during the pandemic."





“The brokerage is another avenue to open doors for us to teach people things we have learned, gives us an opportunity to network and develop relationships with agents across the country.”

**It's Your Dream. Let Us Make it Come True.**

More than just a tagline, the T. Mills Realty Group places an emphasis on helping others. Out of every transaction that closes within the brokerage, a portion of it goes into the T. Mills Scholarship Fund. In its fourth year, the scholarship is available through application for any high school senior in Birmingham or Jefferson County. In 2023, three students will receive the \$1,000 scholarship. “The money we award makes a difference to these kids,” Terry says. “Each year, I receive thank you notes and calls from recipients—they keep up with me and let me know how they are doing.”

Terry is in the process of creating a 501(c)3 for the fund so he can partner with corporate sponsors. “To this point, we have solely donated the funds, but we would like to help even more students,” he says. “Partnerships can be really impactful.”

A football player at both McAdory High School and UAB, Terry appreciates the life lessons he learned through sports—teamwork, respect, perseverance, and discipline. Through his fraternity’s foundation, Omega Psi Phi, Inc., he mentors 10th and 11th-grade boys in both Birmingham and Jefferson County schools to help them understand these same ideals. “I’m excited to show these young men that I care and share how real estate can be part of their career plan,” he explains. “Once they understand that you care, they buy into what you say.”

Becoming a mentor is demanding, but Terry says it’s worth the time and dedication that it takes. “We serve between 10 and 15 schools, and each session can have 10 to 50 kids in it,” he says. “The foundation posts a schedule and members plug in where they can—I usually volunteer two to three days a week.”

The sessions occur during the workday, so it’s a sacrifice to give up the time that could be spent on his own personal production, but Terry is passionate about his calling. “Just being able to see how a little effort affects people is a great blessing,” he explains. “The money and time that we set aside for good aren’t even missed, but the impact is great.”



In spite of the time Terry spends away from the business, he had a personal production volume of \$10 million last year. He partnered with a friend to flip several houses a year, calling their company Black Dogs. “It started when we bought a house in Norwood to revitalize for ourselves,” he says. “We have been renovating houses in the city—the end game is to become a developer and to involve the brokerage in bigger projects like neighborhoods and condominiums.”

Now that the early years are behind him, Terry has the luxury of prioritizing time for his two young sons, Trace and Tague, and Tiquela, a pediatric cardiovascular nurse at Children’s Hospital of Alabama. “This business allows me to be as busy as I want to be,” he says. “The brokerage is another avenue to open doors for us to teach people things we have learned, gives us an opportunity to network and develop relationships with agents across the country.”

The platform that Terry has chosen allows him to be successful while giving back to his community. “My focus is to positively impact the world around me,” he says. “My gift is influence, so it’s important that I do it to the best of my ability.”

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# GUSTY GULAS

## Stays One Step Ahead

▶▶ cover story

Written by Ann Marie Harvey  
Photos by Brendon Pinola Photography

Gusty Gulas began his career in real estate during an extremely competitive time in the market. It was 2006, and he had lost his job at a subprime lender due to a nationwide shutdown of the company, causing him to evaluate his career path. After receiving advice from his future mother-in-law, Gusty got his license and joined Abana Realty.

“I had a strong work ethic, knew the importance of follow-up, and that I could ask people for business,” he says. “I committed to real estate as my career and used my sphere of influence to generate leads.”

In 2007, Gusty was named Rookie of the Year and was a finalist for the Birmingham Association Rookie of the Year. Not long after, the Great Recession of 2008 hit REALTORS® hard. “No one was buying houses, so to make a living, I had to spend long hours building my business,” Gusty explains.

That also meant making the switch to Realty South in 2009. Through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and the Birmingham non-profit Glenwood, an agency dedicated to serving people with autism and other behavioral health needs, Gusty was able to make a difference. NSP was established to provide emergency assistance to stabilize communities with high rates of abandoned or foreclosed homes. The funds were used to purchase and redevelop foreclosed homes, residential properties, and demolished or vacant properties.

“With the foreclosure experience I had, I assisted Glenwood in buying 16 foreclosed properties for their adult community residential needs,” he says. “As I built those relationships, business really took off.”

Gusty attributes innovative, forward-thinking as a major key to his success over the last 15 years. When people weren’t buying, he helped them find rentals. He implemented social media and was early to incorporate Zillow and Trulia into his marketing plans. “I’ve typically been one step ahead of where the market was,” he explains.

Right after the height of the pandemic shutdown, Gusty used virtual conferences to address the many questions he received from both agents and consumers. To reach a larger audience, he created a radio show called *Bought, Borrowed, and Sold* with friend Josh Cornutt from Movement Mortgage. “I put my college degree in radio management to work for this project,” he says. “We discuss real estate and highlight local entrepreneurs and the best about Birmingham.” *Bought, Borrowed, and Sold* can be heard locally Sundays on 105.5 FM or the iHeart Radio Network as a podcast.



Since 2012, the Gusty Gulas Group has been the top team in the market and currently has 22 agents and six support staff. Last year, the brokerage closed 425 homes for \$134 million in volume. “I knew when I created a team that I wanted to foster a collaborative environment,” he says. “Ninety-five percent of the time, I’m going to co-op with an agent, so I focus on creating positive relationships, even through negotiations. I’m just a vehicle and a messenger for my client—that makes it a win-win situation for everyone.”

Gusty formed his first independent brokerage, Brick Realty, in 2014. It quickly grew to number 3 in the Birmingham market and one of the top 500 in the U.S. according to *Real Trends*. In August 2019, the brokerage merged with eXp Realty, where the Gusty Gulas Group remains today. “We focus on full-time agents who want a seamless opportunity to grow their business,” Gusty explains. “We provide coaching,

mentorship, accountability, marketing, branding, and support services so our agents can focus on dollar-producing activities.”

Among the full-time staff members are coordinators for events, listing, marketing, and closing, a chief marketing officer, and a videographer/photographer. “I call it stress-less for my agents because they can just go on listing appointments and show houses,” Gusty says. “It makes their job easier and makes it better for the clients as well.” The group generates five to six hundred leads per month for their agents, creating a lot of opportunities for the team.

The partnership with eXp brings additional benefits—increased training, options for wealth building through stock awards, discount company investment opportunities, and revenue sharing. “eXp is a platform that allows me to grow a real estate brokerage anywhere in the world,” Gusty says. “We help coach and mentor almost 400 agents in 12 states.”



We focus on **FULL-TIME AGENTS** who want a **SEAMLESS OPPORTUNITY** to grow their **BUSINESS.**



“

Last year, Gusty established a development company called Cured Homes and began pursuing a master’s degree in real estate development at Auburn University. “There is a lack of affordable housing in the greater Birmingham area—my solution is to tackle this issue by providing it,” he says. “We plan to utilize forward-thinking home building technology and team up with preferred partners and vendors.” This will also provide his sales team with a steady stream of houses to sell.

As REALTORS® know, balance is the hardest part of the job. “Business provides the revenue for me to enjoy life, but it’s equally important to me to spend time with my wife, Katie, and my two sons, Tripp and Max,” Gusty says. “I’m not going to miss their activities, so I aim to be home by 6 p.m. so I can wind down the day with them.”

To make sure this happens, Gusty lives by his calendar. “I have a lot of irons in the fire and I am pulled in many different directions,” he says. “If I can manage my time to the best of my ability, then it’s easier to break away.”

Year-to-date, Gusty’s personal volume includes 26 homes under contract for almost \$3 million. His current main focus is lead generation, marketing for his team, completing his master’s degree, and planning for the future. “At the end of the day, if you take real estate seriously and become a professional, you will win in any market,” he says. “Invest in your staff and agents, build a culture through positive, collaborative people, and be willing to take chances.”

# FAQ

## ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE

*Real Producers* magazine started in Indianapolis in 2015 and is now in over 125 markets across the nation and continues to spread rapidly. *Birmingham Real Producers* is launching in May 2023!

### Q: WHO RECEIVES *Real Producers* MAGAZINES?

A: The top 300 real estate agents serving the Birmingham metro area, based on their annual residential sales production for the previous year, as recorded on the MLS. Refer to the map in this publication for the exact territories. If your broker address is within that given territory, and you are in the top 300, you will receive that publication for the year. The list will reset at the end of every year and continue to update annually.

### Q: WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THIS MAGAZINE?

A: We believe that we are better together. When we surround ourselves with other successful, like-minded people, we grow to new heights. *Real Producers* is a platform that brings together the most elite individuals in Birmingham real estate.

We take the top 300 real estate agents and RP Vetted Businesses in our market, and we build an exclusive community around that group. We share their stories, successes, market trends, and upcoming events — really, anything that will connect, inform, and inspire, we put in our monthly publication.

It is important to note that *Real Producers* is not a brag book. To be in the top 1-2% in your field takes a lot of grit, passion, hard work, trials, tribulations, and a strong “why” to keep pushing on. *Real Producers* is about sharing and honoring those stories and humanizing you and your peers to create a culture of honor and collaboration that propels us all to the next level.

### Q: DOES *Real Producers* HAVE EVENTS?

A: Yes! We'll host them throughout the year and have several different types of events, such as magazine celebration events, partners-only events, social events, mastermind/educational style events, and an annual awards gala. For these events, we invite the top 300 real estate agents and our partners. Top 300 agents are allowed to invite members of their team, as well. These events are an incredible opportunity to connect with the best of the best in Birmingham real estate. It is amazing to see the power in the connections made at these events. Be on the lookout for your exclusive invites!

### Q: WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR BEING FEATURED IN THIS MAGAZINE?

A: It's really simple. You have to be on the top 300 list, and we take nominations seriously. You can nominate other real estate agents, businesses, brokers, owners, or even yourself! Office leaders can also nominate real estate agents. We will consider anyone brought to our attention who is in the top 300 because we don't know everyone's story, so we need your help to learn about them. We cannot guarantee a feature, but we encourage you to meet with one of our team members, support *Real Producers* and attend our private events to increase your chances.

You can email your nominations to [meredith.jones@realproducersmag.com](mailto:meredith.jones@realproducersmag.com).

### Q: WHAT DOES IT COST A REAL ESTATE AGENT/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 ARE THE RP-VETTED BUSINESSES?

A: They are one of the best businesses in Birmingham in their category, and you can find them listed in our index! We don't just find these businesses off the street, nor do we work with all businesses that approach us. One of many of the top real estate agents has recommended every single business 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 team will further vet every business to make sure they are a good fit and bring value to our community. Our goal is to create a powerhouse network, not only for the best real estate agents in the area but for the best businesses, as well, so we can grow stronger together. When you meet one of them, be sure to thank them for their continued support and for investing in you and your growth.

### Q: HOW CAN I RECOMMEND A BUSINESS?

A: If you know and want to recommend a business that works with top real estate agents, please email us to let us know at [meredith.jones@realproducersmag.com](mailto:meredith.jones@realproducersmag.com).



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