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TABLE OF CONTENTS



06

Index of Preferred Partners



10

Publisher's Note: How Is Your Brand?



12

Meet the Fort Myers Top 500 Real Producers Community



14

The RP Experience Podcast Recap: Episodes 63-66



18

From the Desk of the President of Florida Realtors®



22

Cleanup Issues in Post-Hurricane Ian Southwest Florida



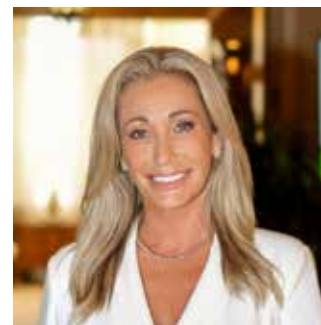
26

Featured Agent: Jessica Gatewood



32

Featured Agent: Jake Arden



38

Cover Story: Candace Kelly-Brown

RP

If you are interested in contributing or nominating REALTORS® for certain stories, please email us at SWFL@n2co.com.

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How Is Your **BRAND**?

Dear Real Producers of Fort Myers,

Happy May, especially to all the hard-working moms out there! With Mother's Day just around the corner, it's a good time to reflect on the relationships in your life you value the most, and which ones you need to nurture a bit more. The same goes for your business... How can you best nurture the relationships that you currently have, as well as the ones you'd like to have?

As a publisher, I have to do the same thing with my own business — examine what efforts my team and I make that will provide the greatest positive impact to keep the boat afloat and cruising steadily along. What I've discovered is that creating and sustaining a solid brand has far more benefits than traditional direct-response marketing. For Realtors, this is the difference between outbound marketing, whether in print or online, and the more "pull-selling" method of brand marketing. Think about it: TV advertisers have known this for a long time. They get more bang for the buck over time by creating a brand that, with enough repetition, people come to KNOW and recognize them for than they do with special offers, sales, and more aggressive calls to action.

What are some of the ways you've established your own brand? Some of the most obvious musts are creating a unique logo for your business that fits the image you want to project and having a tagline that can be used consistently across all of your marketing materials and social media posts. You should also create a consistent tone and message that communicates your values and mission. Even somewhat "gimmicky" things, like always having your dog, your car with vehicle graphics, a certain color outfit that is your "signature," a specific musical track ... can create your brand. I'm not suggesting you get gimmicky, by the way! Just pointing out some of the ways people do brand themselves to get your creative juices flowing.

Ultimately, while direct-response marketing can be effective in generating leads, it really isn't a sustainable strategy for building your business over the long term. Branding, however, is focused on building a relationship with clients over time by creating a consistent message that communicates your values and mission, helping establish trust and credibility with potential clients. And trust is what makes them more likely to choose you for their real estate needs.

Wishing you all the success with your business this spring!

Very respectfully yours,



Andrew Regenhart, Owner/Publisher
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Andrew Regenhard
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RECAP OF EPISODES 63-66

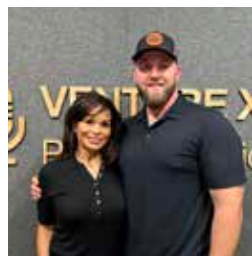
EPISODE 63 | JOE NUGENT



Preferred Partner Joe Nugent, owner of Joe the Home Pro, discusses his dedication and commitment to quality service. In this episode, Joe relates how his hospitality background has helped him provide his clients with the highest quality and best service possible. Joe shares how

he began his inspection business and how he is serving and protecting homes in the area, and describes what is needed to ensure clients are happy.

EPISODE 64 | LEAH PAIGE



Top producer Leah Paige spent three years in the military in Oklahoma right after college. In this episode, Leah discusses the importance of a strong work ethic and how her military experience shaped her as a person. Leah also shares her recent struggles with an illness she was

diagnosed with in 2021 that has changed her life and made her realize the importance of taking time to relax and take care of herself.

EPISODE 65 | JONATHAN POLK



Preferred Partner Jonathan Polk is the owner of Online Certified Property Inspections. In this episode, Jonathan discusses the importance of making connections and describes his business model. Jonathan is big on differentiating himself from the competition and gives us the scoop on his latest

home inspection business endeavor. Be sure to check out this podcast to hear what Jonathan says is critical when running a business and how he markets himself to stand out from the rest.

EPISODE 66 | SEAN BARAKETT



With his father a successful Realtor, top producer Sean Barakett grew up in and around real estate. After graduating from UCF with a degree in business management, Sean obtained his license and launched his own career in real estate, today focusing a majority of his business on

Heritage Bay, the community he lives in. In this episode, Sean discusses goal setting and implementation of the right marketing tools to grow a successful real estate business.

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The breakneck pace of market changes has even the most seasoned REALTORS® experiencing whiplash. Just 12 months ago, homes were flying off the market as soon as they were listed. Some sellers were unlocking massive equity, while buyers were getting into homes at historically low interest rates.

Fast forward to today, when market conditions are starting to become vastly different. How do you know if what you see in the field reflects a particular deal or if it points to a

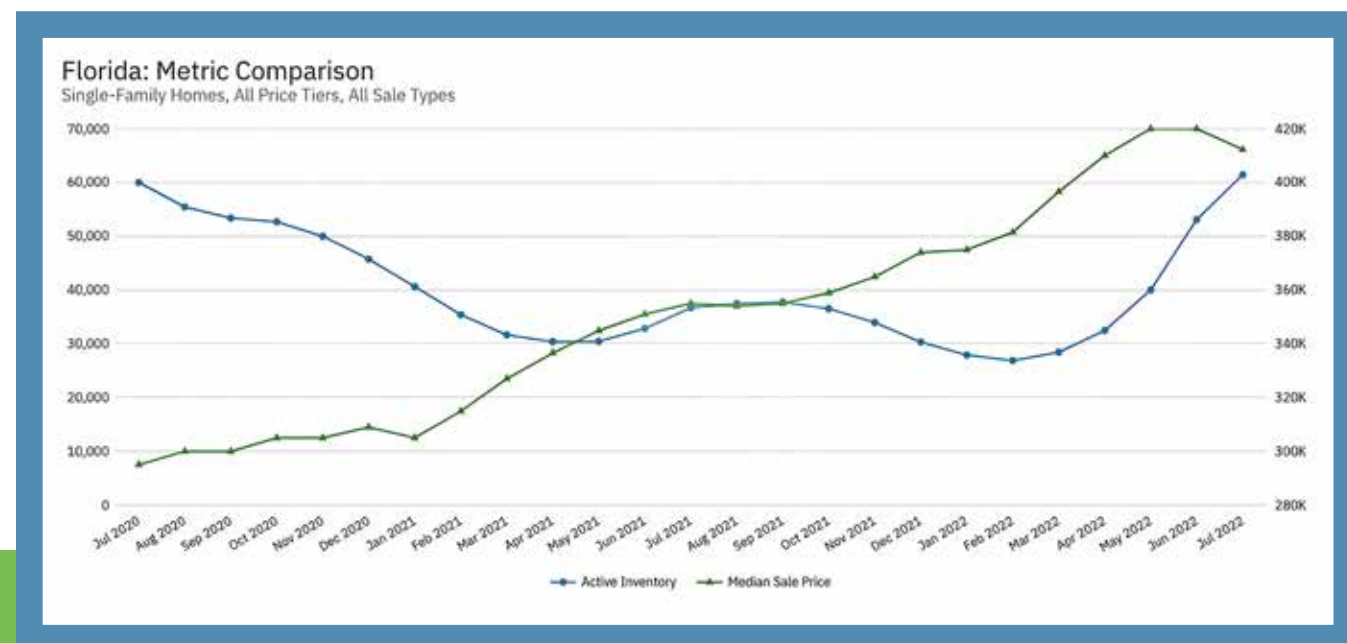
broader market trend? This is when you need data analysis to guide the way. This data is quickly and uniquely analyzed and displayed on the SunStats platform, a product FREE to all members of Florida Realtors®.

Data can tell a story, but you must know what to look for to get the entire picture. Key indicators like **Active Inventory**, **Median Time to Sale** and **Median Sales Price** illustrate the overall health and pace of the market.

Low inventory levels create competition among buyers who start waiving contingencies and placing higher bids to win, increasing the median sale price over time. In aggregate, when people start paying more than the asking price, the higher the median sale price will be. It's a classic case of supply and demand — the less there is of something, the more expensive it will be. (*See Figure 1.)

After bottoming out in February 2022, active inventory has increased monthly. While the median sale prices are still high, the pace of growth has started to

FIGURE 1



Data can tell a story, but you must know what to look for to get the entire picture. Key indicators like Active Inventory, Median Time to Sale, and Median Sales Price illustrate the overall health and pace of the market.

slow, perhaps an indication that more inventory is lessening the competition among buyers who can put more reasonable deals together. Economists also look to the increasing interest rates as a contributing factor for declining demand. (*See Figure 2.)

Then, you must consider how long deals are taking to go from listed to closed. Before the pandemic, a typical single-family home in Florida took about 90 days to close. That

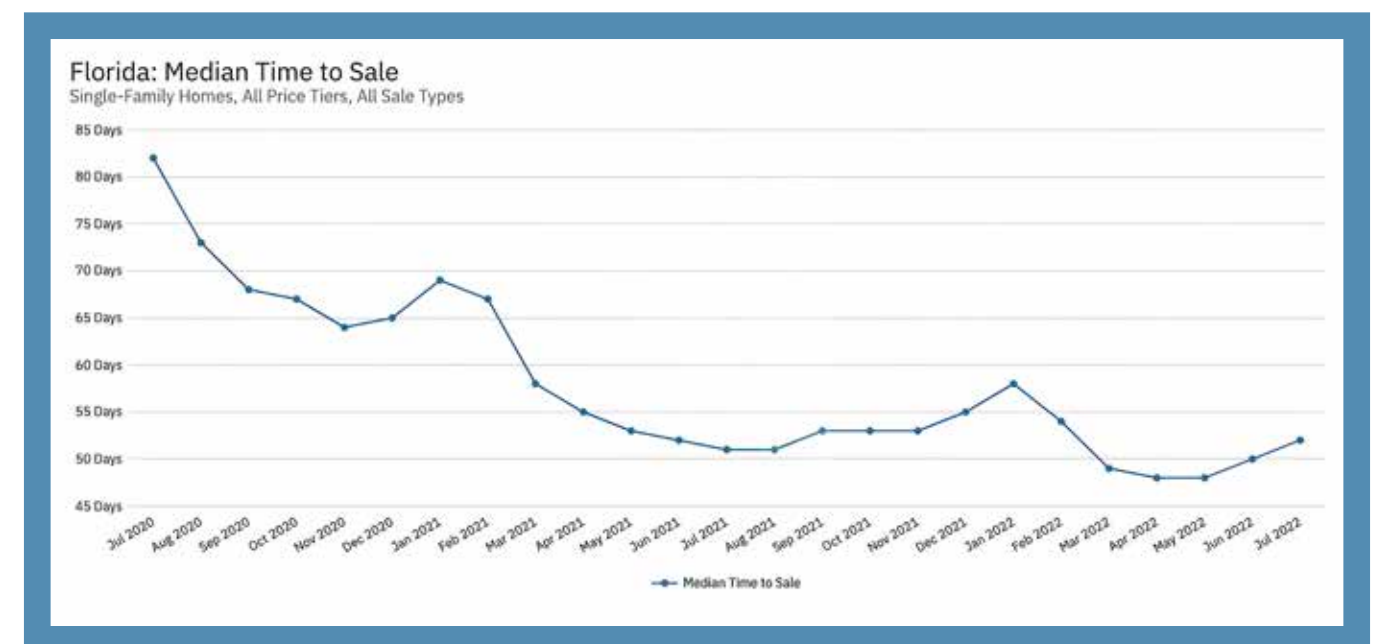
all changed when inventory shrank, demand accelerated, and buyers were looking to upgrade, take advantage of low interest rates, or finally get out of rentals. This is a metric to continue to keep an eye on, particularly in deals where you're representing a seller.

No two areas of Florida are the same, and neither are their real estate markets. Take some time to explore SunStats® at sunstats.floridarealtors.org (login required for this

exclusive member benefit). Pull up these three metrics in your market and see what's happening.

Mike McGraw
2023 President of Florida Realtors®
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FIGURE 2





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Cleanup Issues in POST-HURRICANE IAN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

This past hurricane season struck Florida with one of the worst hurricanes to date. The fallout from Hurricane Ian has, unsurprisingly, had a considerable impact on real estate transactions in Southwest Florida. Below are a number of prevalent issues arising in the “Post-Ian” real estate market.

Special Assessments

Condominium and homeowners associations are evaluating the full extent and cost needed for repairs and whether insurance will cover

said repairs. An association may ultimately pass a special assessment to homeowners. If an assessment is possible, buyers and selling agents should include language addressing the need to escrow funds at closing to offset a potential special assessment post closing. If the contract does not include such language, the buyer will end up paying for hurricane damage assessments passed post closing. The amount and timing of holding funds in escrow will vary from association to association, so it is important to get as much information as possible

from the association concerning the cost of any damage, the amount of any proposed insurance claim, and when the claim may be awarded. For example, after Hurricane Irma, it was not uncommon for associations to pass special assessments six months to a year after the hurricane. Thus, addenda were often included stating funds will be held in escrow for a period of six months, pending the approval of an assessment by the association for hurricane-related damage. Most importantly, specificity as to the reason for the assessment is

needed in such addenda; otherwise, a seller could end up paying for non-damage-related improvements.

Permitting

In the wake of Hurricane Ian, the City of Naples, Collier County, and Lee County have currently, yet temporarily, altered the permitting process required for certain repairs. For example, currently, in the City of Naples, work such as the minor removal of drywall and wood trim no more than four feet above the floor; finishes, including painting, wallpaper, tiling, carpeting, and other interior finishes; HVAC repairs and minor plumbing repairs and fixture replacement (same locations); and minor, non-structural repairs made to exteriors do not require a permit. Collier County has waived the requirement for repair and replacement of dry-wall less than 18 inches above the floor in single-family homes. In Lee County, work such as completing minor non-structural repairs to the exterior of structures and repairing minor water leaks that do not involve structural, mechanical, or electrical systems are permitted to be completed without permits.

Consequently, it is commonplace to uncover unpermitted repairs. While some permitting procedures have been expedited or temporarily modified, this is a rapidly changing area. With updated information being readily provided, it is imperative that the proper inspections are completed on the property and that any prospective buyer completes their own, independent due diligence with the applicable governmental, quasi-governmental, or any other entity having jurisdiction over the property.

Insurance Claims

Active insurance claims due to Hurricane Ian will be around for the foreseeable future. If you are representing a seller with an open insurance claim, it is imperative that the claim is disclosed to any potential buyer prior to signing a contract, as the claim will impact their ability to obtain insurance or financing for the property. If the buyer would like to move forward with the purchase, the claim should be addressed in an addendum to the purchase contract.

Vacant Land and Fraudsters

Fraudsters have increasingly targeted owners of vacant land, attempting to sell such land without the rightful owner ever being aware. Vacant land, in particular, presents an ideal situation for fraudsters, for obvious reasons. Typically, the fraudster reaches out to REALTORS® via email or posts the property online as ‘For Sale By Owner’ ... and is never seen in person, often refusing to speak on the phone or provide a number. Initially, you should reach out to the owner using the contact information listed on the prior deed or property appraiser’s website. If you have never met the seller before, do not trust the information they provide without independent verification. The best way to avoid being involved in a fraudulent transaction is to be as informed and diligent as possible.

Termination of Condominium

In the case of major damage or destruction, unit owners of condominiums must determine if the damage is great enough to warrant if the land should be sold to a potential developer, whereby the condominium must be terminated, or if the structure and common elements should be rebuilt. A review of the governing documents (i.e., Declaration of Condominium, etc.), together with legal counsel, is advisable to determine the manner in which to proceed.

To ensure the optimal outcome, it is in the best interest of the parties to work with a real estate attorney well versed in the applicability of the law to their specific transaction. Should you have any questions, the real estate attorneys at Woods, Weidenmiller, Michetti & Rudnick, LLP, are prepared to assist.



Michael Michetti is a partner and founder of the real estate department at the law firm of Woods, Weidenmiller, Michetti & Rudnick, LLP, a Southwest Florida-based law firm representing individuals and businesses in matters

involving civil litigation, real estate, and business and corporate law. Founded in 2010, Woods, Weidenmiller, Michetti & Rudnick has emerged as one of the leading law firms in Southwest Florida with advanced proficiency in digital business technologies that simplify, safeguard, and organize client account data, documents, and communications for optimum management and timely filings, updates, and retrieval. The client-focused firm has offices in Naples, Florida, and Bonita Springs, Florida, and is known for providing big-firm quality coupled with small-town service. Their attorneys have backgrounds with premier law firms in Florida and around the country, and the quality of their legal representation rivals that of the largest law firms. Because of the breadth of their experience and services, the attorneys at Woods, Weidenmiller, Michetti & Rudnick offer seamless legal representation as your legal needs evolve. Call them today at 239-325-4070 to see how they can assist with your legal needs.

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CULTURE AND COMMUNITY



Longtime friends Jessica Gatewood (left) and Lauren Shaw (right) teamed up in 2021 at Sun Country Realty.

In the fall of 2022, Jessica Gatewood teamed up with friend and fellow REALTOR® Lauren Shaw to bring a new brokerage, JL & Associates, to Southwest Florida. Jessica and Lauren have built the brokerage in their vision — one that is built on a culture of community.

“Our mission is to grow the brokerage to 15 to 20 agents that want to build and maintain their own businesses organically. This isn’t about me or Lauren. This is about creating a space where agents feel empowered. We love working together,” Jessica smiles. “We have a calling to be catalysts for our agents and our community.”

Rewind: Jessica’s Path

Jessica was first introduced to the real estate business through her mom, Marion, who is a successful real estate broker and home builder.

“Honestly, I didn’t think real estate was for me when I was young,” Jessica admits. “I’m not an extrovert, and in real estate, you have to be. I thought I didn’t have the personality for it, so I didn’t foresee it ever being what it is today — my career and passion.”

Still, Jessica was licensed while attending college at Florida Gulf Coast University. She sold real estate part-time for the next five years, primarily to friends and family members. She graduated from college, got married, and gave birth to her daughter. By that time, she was the office and operations manager for Sun Country Homes and associate broker for Sun Country Realty.

“When I had my first daughter, I knew I did not want to work 9 to 5

anymore. I wanted more freedom, so I decided to do real estate full-time,” Jessica explains. “I felt I might as well give real estate a real shot and see where it would take me.”

A New Vision

Jessica’s business grew slowly, her natural pull towards serving others and building relationships allowing her to steadily gain steam. People began trusting her, and referrals rolled in. Year by year, her sales improved.

“It’s like a competition with myself. Every year, I set a sales goal, and I don’t like to fail. I push myself. That competition with myself is a driving force,” Jessica explains. “The other piece of my business that is huge is that I’m a Southwest Florida native, and I love



Daughter of a real estate broker and builder mom, Jessica Gatewood became a licensed REALTOR® while still in college.

this place. My driving force behind my real estate passion is the love I have for my town.”

Jessica had known Lauren Shaw since high school, but they didn’t connect on a deeper level until 2018, when they were both members of the Young Professionals Network. As the pair worked on charity projects, they realized they had similar goals, work ethics, and values.

Jessica was looking to grow the firm and encouraged Lauren to join her. After three years of convincing, Lauren joined the team in late 2021.

“She built her own business to where I was in half the time it took me to do it,” Jessica says. “I knew she was someone I wanted to work with.”

Initially, Jessica and Lauren teamed up to grow Sun Country, and they joined their personal books of business to create the leverage to do so. Soon, their vision evolved, and an even bigger dream came into focus — a brokerage of their own.

“We had so many plans we wanted to bring to light, and we felt we’d outgrown that space. We wanted to go to the next level,” Jessica explains.

Building the Dream

At JL & Associates, Jessica and Lauren intend to build more than just another real estate company; they intend to empower their agents with the tools, community, and information they need to build the real estate business of their dreams.



“We have a calling to be more for our community. That’s one of our missions — to do as much as we can to give back.”



Jessica Gatewood and Lauren Shaw opened their own brokerage, JL & Associates, in the fall of 2022.

Jessica and Lauren have put giving back to the larger Southwest Florida community at the center of their mission. They understand their business can only go as far as the community that drives it.

“We have a calling to be more for our community. That’s one of our missions — to do as much as we can to give back.”

As of November 2022, JL & Associates has five agents, including Jessica and Lauren. In 2023, they will focus on growing the brand

and an agency culture that Realtors want to be a part of.

“My goal is to instill calmness in my agents by teaching them the tools to build a business that will sustain anything,” Jessica says. “Our focus is on the team and building their confidence as agents.”



BEYOND REAL ESTATE

Outside of real estate, Jessica Gatewood lives a family-oriented life. She and her husband, Chris, have four daughters, Hailey (24), Aubrey (16), Kinsley (8), and Cambrey (3).

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▶▶ featured agent
By Zachary Cohen

Jake Arden

BUILT ON RESILIENCE

Jake Arden was born and raised in the Chicago suburbs, but he's long held ties to Southwest Florida. His grandparents lived in Bonita Springs, and Jake's family often traveled south for the warmer weather. After playing golf and studying at Carthage College in Wisconsin for two years, Jake transferred to Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, earning a bachelor's degree in finance with a minor in real estate.



Photo by LaCasaTour

Photo by LaCasaTour





Photos by LaCasaTour

Jake initially planned to return to Illinois and become an investment banker, but after living in the Florida sun for two years, he fell in love with the area. Ultimately, he decided to make Southwest Florida his full-time home.

Professionally, Jake shifted his focus, too. Rather than becoming an investment banker, he chose to become a REALTOR®. He was licensed in August 2015, the summer after graduating from Florida Gulf Coast.

“I was excited because there was no ceiling,” Jake reflects. “However hard I worked is how much success I would have. I loved that idea: what you put in is what you get out. Real estate gave me the room to grow.”

The Path of Success

Like many Realtors, Jake struggled to get his business off the ground. During his first year, he sold three homes while



Jake Arden is team lead of The Arden Group at John R. Wood Properties. (Photo by LaCasaTour)

supplementing his income at the local golf course. In the following years, his business grew, and he left the golf course in 2017 to pursue real estate full-time.

Fast forward to 2023, and Jake is thriving. Approaching \$70 million in career sales, he’s become one of Southwest Florida’s fastest-rising Realtors. He closed 46 homes for \$20 million in 2022.

2022 brought another big shift in Jake’s business. After seven years as a solo agent, he hired his first two agents, founding The Arden Group with John R. Wood Properties.

So how has Jake risen from a struggling young agent to a top producer? He credits

his success to his commitment to the basics. Strong communication, relationship building, and perseverance have been the pillars of his success. The result has been a business that relies more on referrals and repeat clients each year.

Resilience and Perseverance

Jake has another secret weapon in his arsenal: resilience. He’s been through his fair share of challenges and believes his ability to stay the course in times of struggle has been pivotal.

One of Jake’s biggest obstacles came when he was a young boy. At three years old, he was diagnosed with kidney cancer. He later had surgery to

remove his right kidney, and although he fully recovered from cancer, the loss of his kidney has impacted his life in many ways. He can’t play contact sports (hence his love for golf), but there have been positive impacts too. Jake’s battle with cancer has helped him tap into gratitude daily.

“I’ve learned to take life day by day. You never know what may happen,” Jake offers. “All we have is today. Knowing I survived cancer, I was put here for a reason — to help others out.”

Jake has overcome other challenges with the same ferocity. When he moved to Florida, for example, he



In Jake's free time, he enjoys riding his Ducati motorcycle. (Photo courtesy of EZ Rider Pics)

didn't have a large sphere of influence, but he was still able to build a successful real estate business.

"I took a trial-and-error approach and learned through different failures. I just kept growing and pushing forward," he explains. "Success doesn't happen overnight. It takes years in this business to build a database and build trusting relationships with clients. It takes consistent follow-up."



Photo by LaCasaTour

A Bright Future Ahead

Jake is excited to take his real estate career into the future. Rather than resting on his laurels, he continues to push forward with a growth mindset. His next big goals are to grow his team and move more into the investment space.

"I want to grow the team so I can have my income go to work for me through investments. I want to create more passive income to replace the day-to-day work of being a Realtor and get back some more time," he says. "I begin with the end in sight. I'm working my butt off day to day, doing what I need to do to get it done. My goal is to get 1 percent better every day. I know it'll eventually pay off. It's just a matter of time."

Jake has big dreams in real estate, but his deepest wish is to live a life of enjoyment and fulfillment. As he learned early in life, all we're given is the present moment.

FUN FACT

Growing up, Jake Arden couldn't play contact sports due to the loss of his kidney, so bowling and golf became his athletic outlets. He was a standout in both, playing college golf and once bowling a 299 — just one pin short of a perfect game.

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KELLY-BROWN

CANDACE



Photo by LaCasaTour

►► cover story
By Zachary Cohen

“It’s all about taking the opportunity. When you have the opportunity, you have to be ready. And finally, I’m prepared. I’m ready to take the jump, and I know I can be successful,” Candace Kelly-Brown begins.

The Next Big Step

After nearly two decades in the real estate business, Candace is taking a bold new step, having recently gone out on her own as a solo real estate agent. She’s out to build the business of her dreams with the wisdom of nearly 20 years of real estate experience in hand.

“I’ve lived a really blessed life, but I’ve also had major hurdles,” Candace reflects. “I’m blessed for the opportunity I’ve had and taken. I’m ready to grow, ready to take off.”

Midwestern Values

Candace’s story begins in Chicagoland, where she was born and raised. She comes from a business family with traditional Midwestern values. A strong work ethic, integrity, and kindness were valued and demonstrated by those around her.

Candace’s family owned the beverage company her great-grandfather founded in 1927, Canfield’s Beverage Company. By the ‘90s, it had grown to become the largest private-label



Candace lives at Gulf Harbour Yacht & Country Club and has done a majority of her business there. (Photo by LaCasaTour)

“

If there's one thing I want people to know about me, it's that I'm a people person.



Candace Kelly-Brown is a top producer with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Realty. (Photo by LaCasa Tour)



Photo by LaCasaTour

beverage company in the nation, and Candace always assumed she'd join the family business. But in 1996 — the same year she graduated from college — her grandfather sold it to Cadbury Schweppes.

Candace was forced to shift directions. She spent two years in print advertising before starting a tanning salon. For the next eight years, she ran two large, successful salons.

Tough Times

Candace sold her businesses in 2005, the same year she picked up her life and moved to Fort Myers. Rather than starting a tanning salon in Florida, she chose another path — real estate. Her husband, at the time, became a mortgage broker.

Candace's business thrived for the next few years, but the Great

Recession brought chaos into her world in 2008. She returned to advertising — this time in the digital marketing arena, for four years. Still, this was a tremendously stressful and challenging time, capped by a heart-breaking shift in her personal life. Her husband passed away suddenly, leaving Candace a single mom to her two kids, then 11 and 8.

A New Beginning

In 2012, Candace returned to the real estate business full-time. She relied on the digital marketing experience she gained and the network she built to capitalize on an improving market.

When she moved to Fort Myers, she landed at Gulf Harbour Yacht & Country Club. She put a ton of effort into building her community and network, joining clubs, playing tennis, and socializing with as many members as possible. By the time she returned to the business in 2012, her sphere of influence was strong, especially inside the country club.

“I came to the community and saw the opportunity. I started immersing myself in the community — foodie groups, tennis, you name it. I was doing everything to get involved,” Candace explains. “And my diverse past — it prepared me to offer my clients a well-rounded experience. It all helped me to be the person I am now. It's taken a long time to build a successful real estate business in such a competitive community, and that's what has really helped me a lot. I've stayed true to myself.”

Taking the Leap

Today, Candace is thriving. She recently got remarried to her partner of 10 years, Richard. In 2022, she had her best year ever in real estate, closing over \$30.5 million. She does business outside the country club, but much of her business still originates



Photo by LaCasaTour



Candace Kelly-Brown married her longtime partner, Richard, in 2022.
(Photo by Steph Jones Photography)

FAMILY IN FOCUS

Candace Kelly-Brown now has a blended family of five children, including Peyton (20), Kaylin (23), Chloe (23), Chase (25), and Hunter (31). She and Richard are newly empty nesters, giving them more energy to focus on their relationship, travel, and professional projects.

from within the gates of Gulf Harbour Yacht & Country Club.

A standout sales year in 2022 encouraged Candace to become an independent agent. While she struggled to find the faith and trust to make this move, now that the decision has been made, she's confident in her abilities. She knows that her dedication to her clients — who often become friends — will carry her toward continued success.

“If there's one thing I want people to know about me, it's that I'm a people person. I work hard at making relationships work. I pride myself on keeping relationships. My clients are my friends. I live here. I work here. This is my home, and I'm excited for what the future as a solo agent holds.”

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