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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	05 Meet The <i>Silicon Valley Real Producers</i> Team		10 Profile: Alfredo Barajas		14 Flashback Favorite: Denise & Courtney Laugesen
	20 SVRP Cover Story: John Forsyth James		26 Event Recap: Silicon Valley Real Producer Happy Hour		28 SVRP Agent Feature: Rachel Ni



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Founder & Publisher



Amy Felix
Editor



Teresa Nora Trobbe
Photographer



Ewa Samples
Photographer



Nicole Wright
Ad Strategist



Zach Cohen
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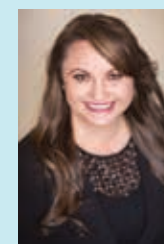


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ALFREDO BARAJAS

FROM RAGS TO RICHES

Growing up in Uruapan, Mexico, Alfredo Barajas was surrounded by countless gifts. His family taught him the value of hard work, perseverance, and kindness.

“We also had the best avocados in the world,” Alfredo reflects with a telling smile.

While Alfredo was lucky enough to grow up in a supportive environment, he also grew up in extreme poverty.

“All my childhood, we lived in one of those houses that’s like a shack. When it rained, you might as well stay outside. Our floor was nothing but wet dirt. Extreme poverty,” Alfredo continues.

Alfredo was lucky enough to attend a private Catholic school on a scholarship. Many of the students were from wealthy families, going Alfredo insight into a world that was brand new to him. The success he saw inspired him to create the same in his own life. He remembers having a goal of buying a house as young as eight or nine.

At 17, Alfredo came to the US, joining most of his extended family, who already lived in California. Immediately, he set out to achieve his goal of homeownership, however audacious it seemed.

“When I came here, I wasn’t looking for a nice car or clothing. I was just focused on saving to be able to purchase a house. That goal was engraved in my mind,” he reflects.

Despite working low-wage jobs, Alfredo bought his first home at 20. Soon, his friends and family became curious about how he did it.



“Everyone was pretty impressed that I was new to the country and did what a lot of people dream of — purchasing a house. I got a lot of people in my sphere of influence, family and friends asking me, ‘How do you do it? Can you take me in the same direction?’”

For a few years, Alfredo referred those friends and family members to his real estate agent. Soon, she turned back toward Alfredo, encouraging him to get his license. Despite his young age and self-doubt, he went for it, leaving his role as a butcher at the Los Gatos meat market behind to begin his real estate career.

Alfredo has now been in the real estate business for over 25 years. He sold real estate from 1997 through 2009, achieving great success. By 2009, he had his own brokerage, his own building, and a considerable overhead. The economy crashed, pushing him to rethink his real estate business.

@realproducers

profile

By Zachary Cohen

“I decided to go full-time into investing — flipping, investing, developing. And that’s what I’ve been doing for over a decade,” Alfredo explains.

In recent years, Alfredo’s son, Alfredo Barajas Jr., got his real estate license. The opportunity to work alongside his son has lured Alfredo Sr. back into sales.

“It’s really great to work with my son. My son is 28. I’m 52. I had him when I was 24. I used to work 12 to 14 hours back in those days, so I missed a lot of that good father-son bonding. But right now, we have it. He’s a hardworking guy with a lot of fresh ideas. It’s outstanding,” Alfredo smiles.

As Alfredo begins the next leg of his real estate journey, he’s most excited to make a positive impact on the people around him. He’s been lucky enough to influence many people over the past two and a half decades, and now that he’s stepping back into an active sales role, he’s sure to impact more in the years to come.

“Look at me — a kid who escaped across the border and started making crazy money in his twenties. It just doesn’t happen anywhere else. I want to influence more people, inspire more people to get into this business, to do amazing things. It’s possible for any and everybody.”

BEYOND REAL ESTATE

Outside work, Alfredo enjoys traveling with his wife, Nancy. Travel is their passion; the couple goes on vacation five or six times a year.



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DENISE & CORTNEY LAUGESSEN

▶ flashback favorite

Originally printed in
September 2019
(San Mateo County
Real Producers)
By Jessica Frere

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Growing up, Denise Laugesen wasn't your average child. Unlike most of her peers, who were oblivious to the happenings of the real estate market, she was fascinated with houses and property from an early age.



“
WE INTERACT
DIFFERENTLY. WE ATTRACT
A DIFFERENT STYLE. AND
SO, PUTTING US TWO
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WHOLE PERSON.

- CORTNEY

“It sucked me in, all of my life,” says Denise of the industry. “As a child, I would tell my mom to go to open houses because I wanted a home that had molding. We lived in an Eichler. And today, I love Eichlers, but when I was a kid, I didn’t like them.”

FROM BANKING TO REAL ESTATE

As the years passed and her interests broadened, Denise put her love for real estate on the back-burner. After graduating from college with an accounting degree, she went to work in the San Francisco banking industry as a bank examiner. As part of this role, she audited mortgage loans, an activity that slowly began to rekindle her passion for property.

At the same time, Denise regularly visited her then-husband, a heavy equipment operator, at his job sites. Here, she witnessed the intricacies of both property building and selling firsthand, and managed to form relationships with an array of local builders. These experiences and connections not only affirmed her desire to become an agent but also ignited a spark for a different segment of real estate: home building.

“I saw that they (builders) were basically paper contractors,” shares Denise. “They’re not really the ones out there pulling out the hammer and working. And so, I thought, ‘You know, this is

really just management of people. I can do that.’”

It turned out that Denise’s assessment of her abilities was more than accurate. After leaving her banking job and obtaining her real estate license, she went on to sell 26 homes in her first year of business, an impressive feat for any rookie agent, and simultaneously jumped headfirst into property building. Fast forward in time and, today, Denise has built 40+ houses and remains a highly recognized name in the region’s real estate market. The key to her accomplishments, she claims, is her unwavering commitment to her business.

“I always treated real estate as a lifestyle. So, the moment I got into it, I was all in. Always.”

JOINING FORCES

Equally as impressive as Denise’s career success was her ability to achieve it while simultaneously raising her daughter, Courtney, as a single mother. After a childhood spent watching her mom grow her business, Courtney, too, fell in love with real estate and now partners with Denise on their own mother-daughter team. To Courtney, becoming an agent was an inevitable career choice; real estate is simply in her blood.

“My mom got into the business when I was four,” says Courtney. “So basically, from four on,

all I knew was real estate – going into the office in my PJs at nighttime because she had business to take care of.”

Despite Denise’s attempts to dissuade her daughter from entering the business (“I wanted her to have a life”), Cortney’s passion for the industry won out and, after graduating from college, she joined forces with her mom in 2009. As is often the case in the initial stages of any new partnership, Denise and Cortney’s first year in business together presented a steep learning curve. However, after fleshing out their individual work styles and learning best practices for team success, the duo soon found their groove.

“I only thought that the right way to do things was my way,” confesses Denise. “And my daughter taught me so much. She taught me to be a better leader, a better person. Because there are a lot of ways that you can achieve success.”

A WINNING COMBINATION

As a testament to their achievements, The Laugesen Team has been ranked as the top producing one- to three-person real estate

team in North America, an honor that Denise and Cortney credit, in part, to their powerhouse partnership. By acting as equals in every aspect of their business (they both work with sellers and buyers, show properties, and even tag-team open houses), both women are fully immersed in day-to-day operations and consistently offer a unified, yet agent-specific client experience.

“We’re so different – our personalities, the way we do business,” shares Cortney. “We interact differently. We attract a different style. And so, putting us two together, I think we’re just that perfect, whole person.”

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- DENISE

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SHE ALWAYS SAYS,
‘IF YOU WORK HARD,
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KEEP DOING IT, IT’S
GOING TO RETURN.

- CORTNEY

Denise and Cortney’s business has also flourished as a result of two other practices. The first, they claim, is consistently finding ways to connect and engage with prospective and current clients.

“Stay in front of your clients,” says Denise. “Write those personal notes. Make those phone calls.”

In addition, the pair also supports several local non-profit and charity organizations, including The Peninsula League, The Hillsborough Auxiliary to Peninsula Family Service, and are Hillsborough REACH partners. Giving back to their community



is not only a personal priority for both agents, but the public exposure and relationships that they have built through these experiences have positively impacted their business, as well.

However, it’s Denise and Cortney’s strong work ethic that has earned them both such sustained career success. Neither agent craves much free time, largely because, to them, real estate doesn’t feel like work. Whatever downtime they do have is typically spent relaxing at home and strategizing on new ways to catapult their already thriving business towards even greater success. With drive and persistence like theirs, the sky is the limit to the heights that The Laugesen Team will reach.

“I think that’s one thing I learned from my mom early on,” shares Cortney. “She always says, ‘If you work hard, and you just keep putting (yourself) out there and keep doing it, it’s going to return.’”



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Being helpful is all about being a guide for clients. John does his job in a way that ensures clients understand the process of purchasing and selling. He is always adding value.

Innovation is linked to creative thinking. While John's 30+ years of real estate experience help him understand the essential buying and selling processes, he also challenges himself to think outside the box.

Being polished is all about the image he presents and, thus, the respect he shows for clients.

"The dress. The overall feel. You're respecting your clients. I don't go show property in my shorts or my jeans. I dress the part. I wear a suit or a nice pair of slacks and a shirt. I look at it as something that is respect for my client," John explains.

John's approach results in a tremendously successful and enduring real estate career.

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

John began his real estate career in 1992 at the age of 24. He didn't have a long family history or a particular event that struck his



WORDS OF WISDOM

“There are some agents that may have only been in the business for less than ten years, even top producers, so they haven’t seen the cycles. I’ve seen three major cycles of up and down. My advice would be for an agent that hasn’t seen the cycles: you have to make sure you are pricing your properties properly and consulting with clients more frequently to be able to come out with a sale and a happy client. It’s fairly easy to sell in a market where everyone wants to buy and sell, but when it turns around, you need to stay on top of things more. Stay in touch with clients and give them good advice.”

interest in real estate, but when he came across the possibility of a career selling homes, he felt it would be a great match. That instinct has proven to be true.

“I didn’t really enjoy punching the clock in and out. For me, that was not the type of job I felt was a good fit. Most people want a salary position, but I prefer being in different environments, meeting people,” John explains.

John has been a solo agent for his entire career. This model allows him to set goals, get to work, and help his clients personally. Rather than putting his efforts





▶▶ event recap

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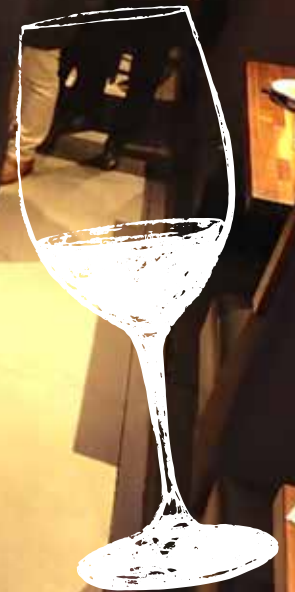


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Rachel **NI**

Growing up in Taiwan, Rachel Ni was fascinated with the American way of life. Her first visit to the States was in middle school when she stayed in California for a summer.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

“I loved it. People would talk to me, and I was only able to say ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in English, but I still loved it,” Rachel reflects.

By high school, Rachel was convinced she wanted to go to college in the US. After attending university in China for a year, she transferred to the University of Utah, where she obtained a degree in consumer studies.

“I found this book at a bookstore, and it was about the top 200 schools in America. They broke down everything. I picked six schools and applied to them. One was The University of Utah. I got four acceptance letters... My cousins suggested Utah, so that’s where I went,” Rachel explains.

After graduating, Rachel moved in with her aunt and



uncle, who were real estate agents in Los Angeles. Rachel’s uncle pressed her to get her real estate license, but she had other career aspirations.

“My dream was to become the general manager of a hotel. After high school, I worked at the Hyatt in Taipei, and I admired the management. I wanted to be there one day. That was my hope and dream.”

Forging Her Own Path
Rachel landed a job at the Hyatt in Palo Alto, bringing her to the Bay Area. Over the next ten years, she worked her way up from Restaurant Manager to Director of Banquets and Convention Services. She got the chance to travel the country running events and even moved to Florida for a time.



▶ svrp agent feature

By **Zachary Cohen**
Photos By **Teresa Nora Trobbe**
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FUN FACT

Rachel enjoys cooking, painting, photography, wine tasting, and traveling in her free time. She belongs to the Rotary Club of Belmont, Burlingame Chamber of Commerce, and Downtown Burlingame Business Improvement District.



In 2009, Rachel welcomed her son, Agustin, to the world. This arrival led her to take a careful look at her career path.

“Honestly, I didn’t realize how expensive child care was. In Taiwan, it was free (family help), but here it costs a lot of money, and I had to make a decision about how I was going to survive in the Bay Area. Working at the Hyatt was a lot of fun, but it wouldn’t feed my kids.”

Years after her uncle tried to convince her to become a REALTOR®, Rachel turned back toward the business. She got her license in 2012 and worked part-time around her job at the Hyatt for a year.

“I sold five homes in the first year, and then I realized I couldn’t do both. I just don’t have enough time in the day. The day I quit my hotel job, I had \$5,000 in my bank account. I needed to take a leap of faith to see if I could do this in real estate.”

Living Her Dream

More than a decade later, Rachel is thriving as an individual real estate agent. She has steadily built her business to become one of Silicon Valley’s best. In 2022, she closed 14 transactions for \$36 million.

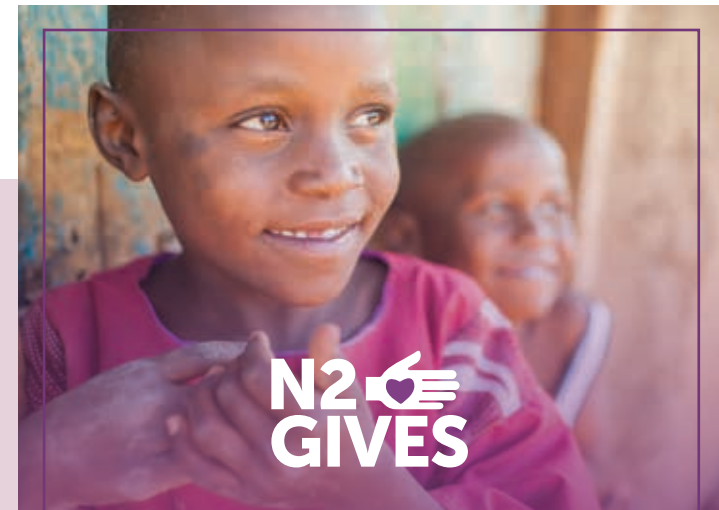


“I am very fortunate,” she beams. “The most rewarding part of real estate is that I am helping people get to where they want to go. It changes someone’s life to get them in a house. For first-time homebuyers, to start a family – that’s very exciting. And then, for the move-down clients, it’s to hear them, to understand, to be their advocate. It’s very meaningful to me.”

Rachel’s children, Augustine and Victoria,

are now 13 and 11, respectively (and she reminds us not to forget about her dog, Charlie). She’s found a groove in life, and now her primary goal is to give back to her family and community.

“My journey in real estate started as a necessity for my family, but I’ve continued doing it because of passion for it,” Rachel says. “I’m passionate about helping people... This is a business I don’t plan to stop.”



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Business Development
870 Tennant Station
Morgan Hill, CA 95037
669.437.4052 office
408.921.4374 mobile
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stewart.com/santa-clara

