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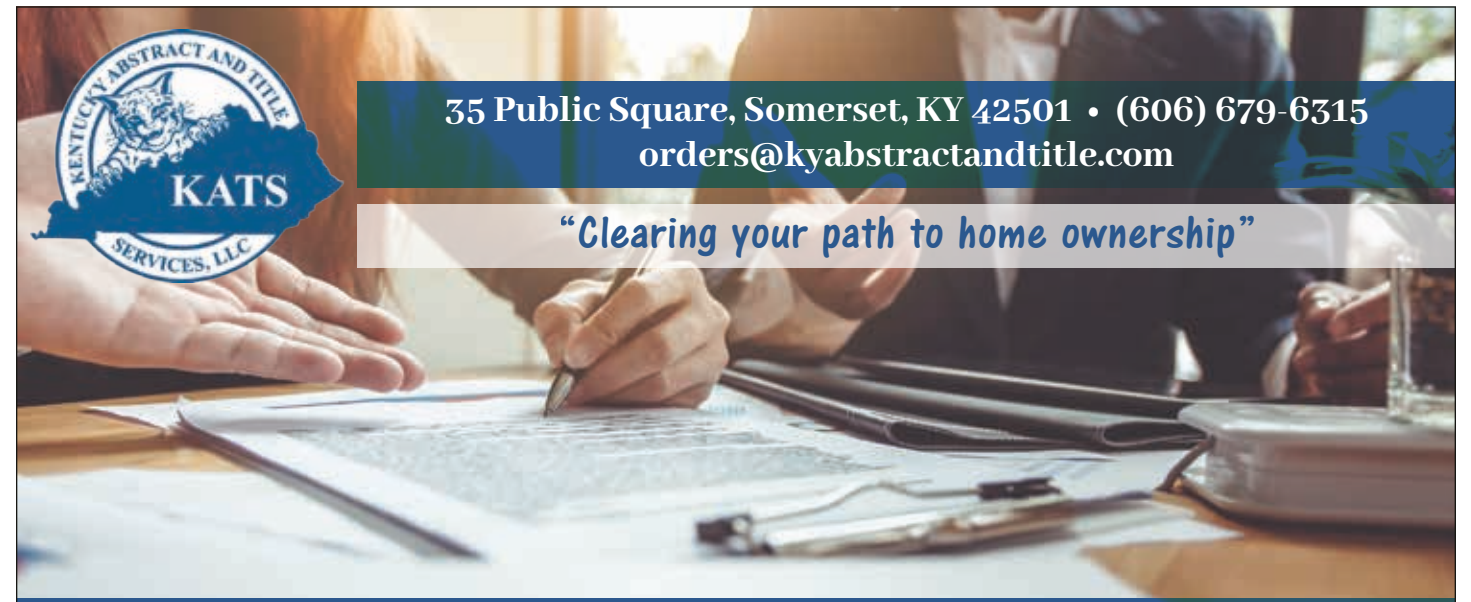
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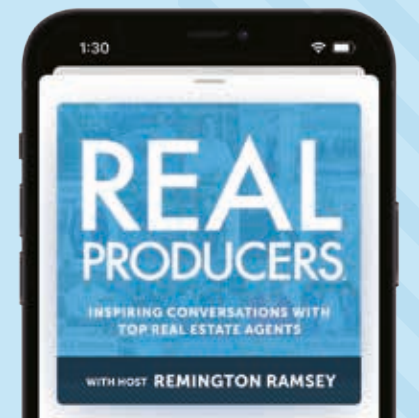
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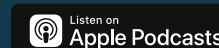
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GEIGER

Continuing to Build Businesses in Lexington

For Lauren Geiger, owner and general contractor at Bluegrass Builders and Remodel, the idea of building and growth has – both literally and figuratively – been at the forefront for most of her life.

Geiger, originally from Louisville, attended the University of Kentucky with the intention of going down a political science path. However, during her time in Lexington, she realized she wanted to switch to a major in architecture and design.

► sponsor spotlight

By Brett Rybak • Photos By ThePhaseTwo Media
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“Once I realized I wanted to make the switch, I enrolled in Bluegrass Community and Technical College,” Geiger said. “After enrolling, I immediately realized what my passion was and I started to begin work and an internship with a local builder.”

Geiger then parlayed that internship into full-time positions with multiple builders in Lexington.

“Through these separate experiences, I was able to learn everything I needed to start a career in this business,” Geiger added. “I learned how to handle an estimate, basic marketing skills, plan designs and material selections. But I also gained valuable experience in the

scheduling, project management and sales side of the business.”

Now, Geiger stands as owner of her own custom remodeling company, Bluegrass Builders and Remodel, along with roofing company All-Around Roofing and flipping business Lauren’s Properties, which is more “just for fun on the side.”

But when it comes to Bluegrass Builders and Remodel, her main priority is creating a strong business foundation. While the company has only been in business for two years, it already has completed \$4 million in remodels and additions and 90% of its clients come from either referrals or repeat clients.





“
The mission statement at Bluegrass is to provide the highest quality construction services possible
to each person that contacts us.

”



“The mission statement at Bluegrass is to provide the highest quality construction services possible to each person that contacts us,” Geiger said. “Even if they are just looking for an estimate, I take the time to educate them from start to finish. I believe in honesty and transparency. Those are the two principles that our foundation is actively being built upon!”

That foundation is helping Geiger continue to grow and develop for the future.

“I am always looking to continue to grow by increasing customer retention, participation in the local community and taking part in networking events,” Geiger added. “Since roughly 90% of my current business is based upon referrals, when I go into a job I make sure that my team and I put 110% into every step from start to finish! I have a great team behind me that helps with all the marketing and sales funnel. I couldn’t be more pleased!”

However, while Geiger has achieved significant success early on, she is pushed just as much by her failures as her successes.



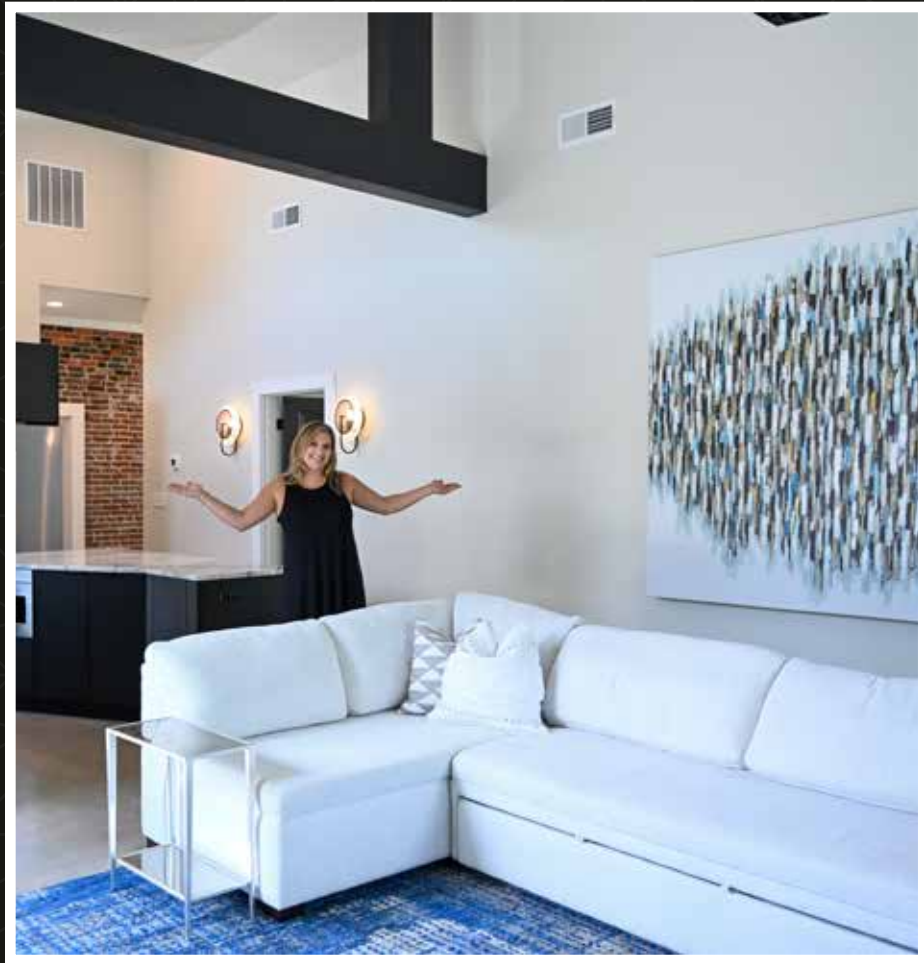
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“
**I have learned
 from every failing
 step I have taken.**
*Getting back up is a
 measured success and
 a must in my book.*

“With success comes failure,” Geiger admitted. “I have learned from every failing step I have taken. Getting back up is a measured success and a must in my book. Continuing to grow is a rewarding aspect of my job as well because I constantly develop the skills I need to succeed in the future, helping others create their own dream space that they can enjoy forever with their families.”

But it’s not all work for Geiger, an avid college football fan.

“I love going to all the games and activities that come along with being a UK season ticket holder,” Geiger said. “The start of football season is my favorite part of the year. But I love spending time with my family, I’m a foodie and practicing yoga also keeps me centered and peaceful while running my businesses.”

While Geiger certainly has a lot on her plate, the foundation she has put in place has set her up for continued success in the future.



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Written by Elizabeth McCabe
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a man of integrity,
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MEET JOHN FITZWATER

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“Your honesty is all that you have. In our business, your reputation is your lifeblood,” says REALTOR® John Fitzwater with Weichert REALTORS® – Ford Brothers. He tells people the truth about listings and gives them advice that can help them safeguard their finances.

When John sold a house for a young adult who was moving to Florida, the client made a considerable profit. “Don’t spend it all on guns and tattoos,” John cautioned him. When the client later wanted to move back to Kentucky, he hadn’t wasted the money and was able to get a house better than the one he had sold. “I was just being honest,” says John, who feels fortunate that the young man heeded his advice. “Otherwise, he wouldn’t have had enough money for a house.”

A Foundation Rooted in Integrity

John’s early life unfolded in Somerset, Kentucky, a quintessential small town where everyone knows everyone else. Raised by parents who instilled a strong sense of integrity, he was shaped by the values of community building, honesty, and compassion. John’s father, a respected newspaper publisher, and his grandparents, pillars of the community, left a lasting impression on him.

“My grandfather sold tractors for 65 years in our farming community,” says John. “Everyone loved him. He might not tell you what you wanted to hear but he told people the truth. He could sleep at night because he was honest and didn’t take advantage of people.” John learned that reputation and integrity are essential. The commitment to truth, fair-mindedness, and treating people with respect became the cornerstone of his character.

Unconventional Beginnings

John’s career journey started in an unexpected direction – the world of music and sound engineering. He recalls being in Hawaii at the age of 8 and hearing the band at a tiki bar, telling them they were either too loud or he couldn’t hear them. It was a taste of things to come. Imagine his surprise when he ended up becoming a sound engineer in New York City years later.

His natural inclination to connect with people led him to become a sought-after sound engineer, working with renowned bands such as the Spin Doctors, Blues Traveler, Dave Matthews Band, and more.

“I’ve traveled with bands, which is a lot like going on the road with the circus,” explains John. He can relate to people from all walks of life with varied experiences. This unconventional path was invaluable to him, teaching him resilience in the face of chaos and uncertainty, qualities that proved invaluable when he eventually transitioned into real estate.

John, who had lived in New York City during 9/11 and in Naples, Florida for Hurricane Andrew, has lived through



harrowing events in life. He attributes these experiences to making him stronger. He can relate to people with small-town roots, rural communities, and cities.

Pivoting During the Pandemic
Prior to real estate, John and his wife owned a store in Kentucky with local items. With the stay-at-home order

and the rise of online shopping during the pandemic, it was a challenging time for small businesses. John’s leap into real estate was prompted by the need for stability during the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic. His decision to join Weichert REALTORS® – Ford Brothers was guided by a belief in honest service and community values. The reputation of the brokerage and its owner, Matt Ford, resonated with him, aligning with his own principles of treating clients and colleagues with respect and integrity. Matt’s words rang true and he came from a service mindset, similar to John.

John, a talented real estate professional, is a natural when it comes to sales. His skillset in interacting with others resonates with them, dating back before real estate. For several years, he sold Ducati motorcycles, making it to the top of the nation in sales back in 2007. Now he sells houses and loves what he does.

One of John’s biggest challenges has been navigating deals that start to fall apart. His commitment to keeping deals together and maintaining a positive outlook has been a driving force in his success. His experience of being a top producer in his first full year in real estate attests to his dedication and the unwavering customer-centric approach he brings to every transaction.

Success = Sleeping Soundly

For John, success is defined by the ability to sleep soundly at night, knowing that he has treated both clients and family with respect and honesty. In his career, it’s about helping clients find the right fit, whether it’s their dream home or a smart investment. In his personal life, it’s about striking a harmonious balance between work and family, cherishing every moment with his wife and four children.

Finding Love on Facebook

John has a heart of gratitude for his family. “I am so flipping lucky to find the people I’ve found,” he smiles. “My wife Jamie posted on a mutual friend’s Facebook page that she was starting a farmers’ market. I sent her a message, ‘How can I help?’ I had done concert promotions and productions.” Although Jamie wondered who John was, she was taken aback by his writing. A writer herself, Jamie loved that his message had no Internet shorthand with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. A year later, John had the courage to ask her out, at Jamie’s prompting. “We have been together ever since,” says John. “Jamie is my best cheerleader, my most honest critic. She keeps me focused with my eye on the prize. She also lets me be me.”

John has two stepchildren, ages 16 and 13. “They’re fantastic,” he raves. “They are always a part of our life, and we don’t go anywhere without them. Our 16-year-old wants to be a chef and cooks for the family five nights a week.” He has a natural skill for complex spice blends. The 13-year-old is a flutist, and blacksmith, who wants to be an engineer and go to MIT.



“ My grandfather sold tractors for 65 years in our farming community. Everyone loved him. He might not tell you what you wanted to hear but he told people the truth. He could sleep at night because he was honest and didn’t take advantage of people. ”



John also has two of his own children with Jamie. His son Johnny (7) is opinionated and very bright. "He's too much like me," jokes John. "He has his own opinions about the way his life is going to be." He also has another son named Jesse, age 3.

"I waited until 50 to have kids," says John. "When my wife and I got married she told me that I had done everything in the world except the best thing life has to offer – have kids." He took her advice to heart and enjoyed one of the greatest blessings in life.

An Artist's Heart

Beyond real estate, John is a multifaceted individual with a passion for photography, kayaking, hiking, and live music. As a professional photographer, his work has been featured in national magazines and corporate art installations. He's also an ardent music lover and loves attending concerts, and he understands the value of appreciating life's moments as they unfold.

A Legacy of Honesty

John's message is simple yet profound: honesty and integrity are the guiding lights that lead to success, both in business and in life. His commitment to serving others with respect, empathy, and a genuine desire to help sets him apart as a remarkable REALTOR® and a true advocate for those seeking to find their place in the world of real estate.



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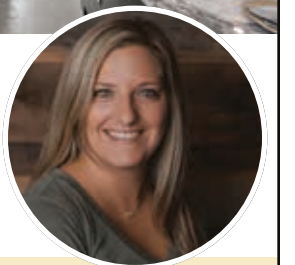


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What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Top Producer Shevawn Akers can attest to that. Diagnosed with breast cancer at 37, she knows what it's like to face battles and win. Her strong character, coupled with her resilience, can be traced back to her childhood growing up in Jessamine County.



Country Roots

"I grew up as a country kid," says Shevawn. "We rode horses, roamed the countryside, went fishing, and had lots of pets." She has fond memories of pet rabbits, birds, chickens, cats, dogs, and a goat. "My grandparents were farmers in Harrodsburg; I have lots of fond memories there, too." Running from cattle in the fields, driving a tractor, and playing in the tobacco barn were memorable moments.

"Having that freedom to play outside, run in the fields, and explore the hills helped me appreciate adventure, while making me independent," points out Shevawn. "I'm not afraid of risks." Shevawn eventually earned a BA in Social Work, with a minor in Psychology, from the University of Kentucky. She later returned to UK where she earned her master's degree and worked in the non-profit sector for 15 years, managing grants, overseeing state advocacy projects & directing a group home for homeless and pregnant/parenting teen girls.

An Unexpected Diagnosis

Diagnosed with breast cancer at 37 rocked Shevawn's world, especially as a single mom to her 10 year-old son, Hayden. She shares, "My life flashed before my eyes; the fear of dying and leaving Hayden alone was terrifying. It changed my perspective 1000%. I was no longer afraid of anything else. I contemplated my own death and realized there was nothing to ever be afraid of. I don't waste time on frivolous things, on petty things or drama. None. Life is far too precious and too short to waste time on such. My treatment included surgery, four rounds of chemotherapy, 20 rounds of radiation, and Tamoxifen." She is grateful to be cancer-free for 12 years now. Fascinatingly, there was a silver lining to her ordeal. Surviving cancer gave her the courage to forge a new career.

Diving into Politics

"I have always loved politics," says Shevawn. Since college, she has been engaged with political campaigns. "Because I loved volunteering for campaigns - making calls, knocking doors, etc. - I thought I might run a campaign or be a speech writer someday - something behind the scenes," she says. "I never thought I would be a politician." A self-described "political nerd," Shevawn used to spend hours watching the Kentucky General Assembly on KET and has never missed an election in 30+ years.

Just one month after finishing cancer treatment, a council member asked Shevawn if she might consider running for a vacant seat on Lexington's City Council. "Before cancer, I would have said 'No way.' My hair was the length of a buzz cut. I couldn't imagine my name on a yard sign.

But because of cancer, I thought, 'Why not?' What do I have to lose?' I just wasn't afraid anymore," she says. Shevawn knew how to raise money, talk to voters and had the drive needed to succeed. She decided to run, won her primary and general elections and served four years as a Lexington City Council Member.

Making Her Mark

The idea of switching gears and going into real estate was actually the suggestion of Shevawn's soon-to-be mother-in-law, Myrna Downing, who has been a REALTOR® in Lexington for more than 30 years. Myrna saw Shevawn's potential with her outgoing personality, her education, and experience. Shevawn explains, "After my first year, I realized the demands of Council didn't allow me to give 100% to my non-profit job, so I resigned from that position. Soon after, Myrna encouraged me to sign up for real estate classes."



During her second term, Shevawn became a REALTOR® in January 2015. She is so grateful for this career and how it has changed her life and her family's future. "If I knew how my life would be transformed, I would have left social work a long time ago!"

Helping Families Build Wealth

Shevawn loves helping families build wealth through real estate. She shares, "I have personally experienced the difference real estate investing can make for your family and I want to share that with others."

This Top Producer took her own advice to heart. When Shevawn first found success in real estate, she didn't spend her earnings lavishly. Instead, she purchased investment properties. In the process, she was able to help clients in dire situations. As Shevawn says, "Foreclosure is not the answer." Saving people from foreclosure, as Shevawn has done for others, is priceless. Currently, she owns several long-term and several short-term rentals.

A New Chapter

Last year, Shevawn started her own brokerage, Firefly Realty & Investments. She obtained her broker's license during the state COVID lockdown. "I wanted to take the class & get my broker's license in case I ever decided to go out on my own," she explains. Little did she know that two years later she would launch her independent office. It was one of many surprises that life had in store for this go-getter. Her daughter was another.

"Emerson is a miracle baby," explains Shevawn. "She was born five years after my cancer treatments. My estrogen levels were very low from the effects of Tamoxifen and I

have only one fallopian tube from an ectopic pregnancy. I never dreamed I could get pregnant with all of these issues - especially at 42!" My husband is an only child, so Emerson is his parents' only grandchild and the light of our lives.

Family Matters

When not working, it's all about family for Shevawn. She feels blessed that her son is now 21 years old and a firefighter in Frankfort. "Hayden is fully self-sufficient and loves his career," she says. "What else can a mom hope for?" Shevawn is also grateful for the love and moral support from her husband, who has encouraged her every step of the way. "Jarad is the kindest and smartest person I've ever known. I admire him immensely," shares Shevawn. Emerson recently celebrated her 7th birthday while on vacation in Mexico. "I love having the opportunity to be a girl mom now, after doing all the traditional boy things with Hayden. Now, I get to braid hair, paint fingernails, and shop for cute clothes," she smiles.

Shevawn's hobbies include traveling the world with her family as often as she can. She's in the process of buying a condo in Playa del Carmen and hopes to move there soon. She enjoys riding bikes with Jarad, taking Emerson to the playground & cooking for family and friends. She loves college football, craft beer, a smoky mezcal & bourbon.

A Legacy of Resilience

Shevawn's story is one of resilience, empowerment, and the pursuit of dreams. From a carefree country childhood to facing life's challenges head-on, she has emerged as a beacon of strength, courage and determination. She serves as an inspiration to all who dare to defy expectations and embrace their true potential.



“
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”

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