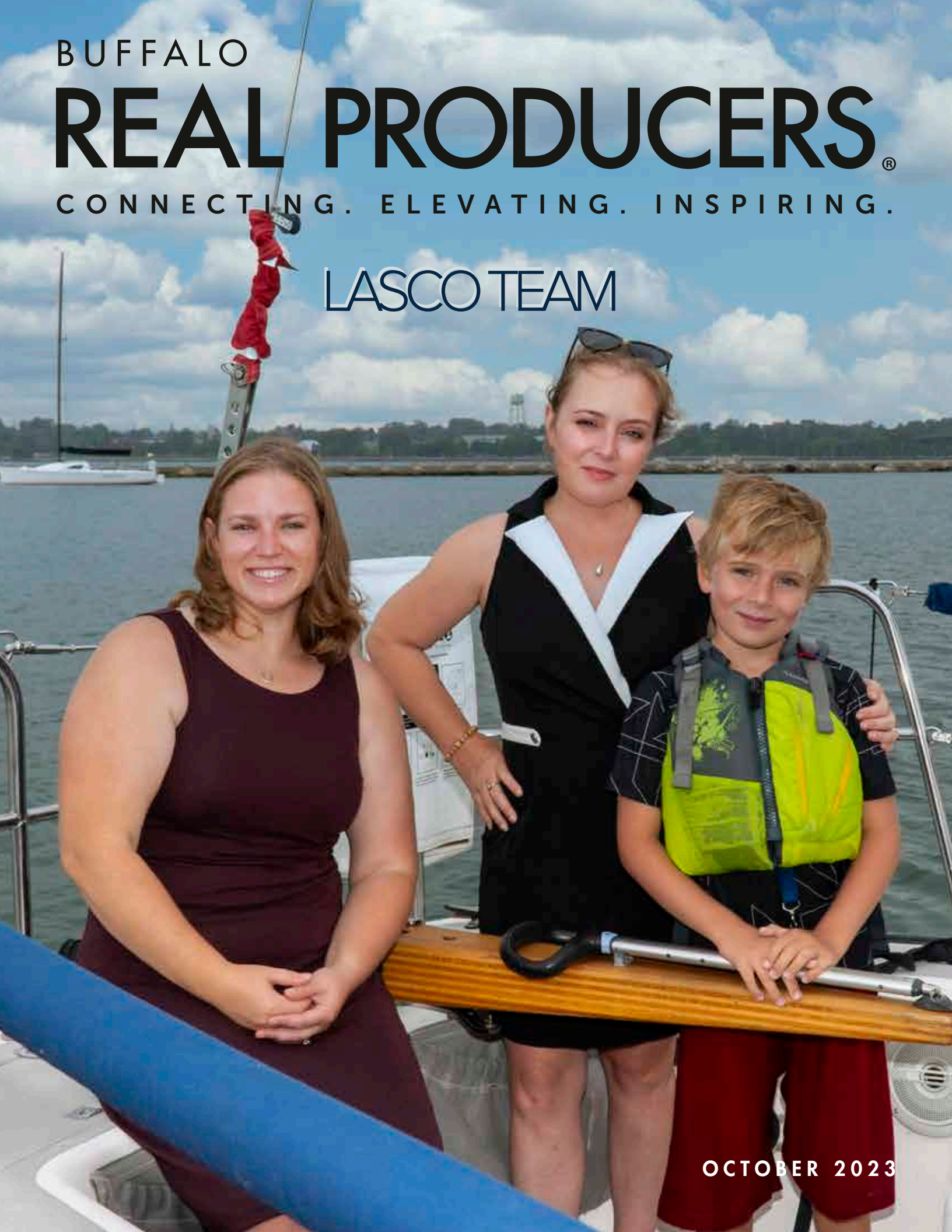


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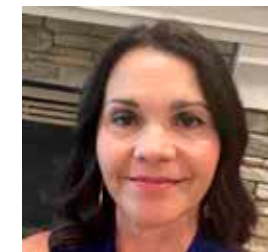
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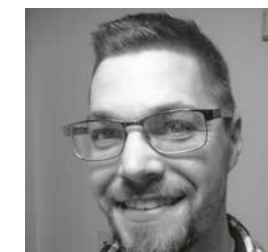
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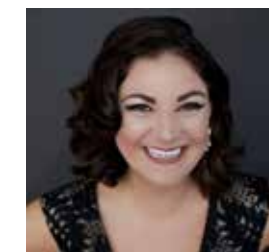
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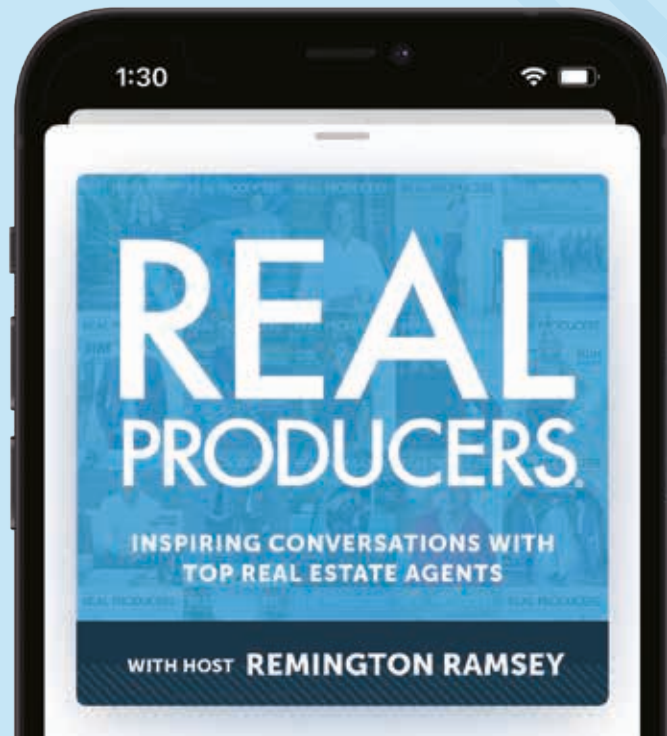
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BUFFALO'S TOP REALTORS

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Buffalo's real estate elite recently experienced a captivating evening that perfectly blended networking, relaxation, and breathtaking vistas on the shimmering waters of Lake Erie. The occasion? A sold-out sunset cruise specially organized for the city's top 300 realtors, a remarkable gathering of industry leaders who seized the opportunity to reconnect in person after a prolonged period of remote transactions.

This extraordinary event was brought to life by the dedicated team at *Buffalo Real Producers*, who have consistently shown their commitment to nurturing and celebrating the city's real estate excellence. Their expertise in orchestrating such gatherings ensured that the evening went off without a hitch, allowing real estate professionals to focus on what mattered most: connecting and enjoying the spectacular scenery.

Despite the initial weather forecast not looking promising, with threatening clouds on the horizon, the rain miraculously held off, allowing the cruise to proceed as planned. As realtors sailed into the horizon, they were treated to a visual masterpiece of colors dancing across the sky and reflecting off the tranquil waters.

The vessel chosen for this unforgettable evening was none other than the "Queen Harbor," the largest boat charter available in Buffalo. Its spacious decks and panoramic views provided the perfect canvas for this memorable gathering.

With only 80 spots available for this exclusive event, it's no wonder that it sold out quickly. Buffalo's real estate leaders were eager to be a part of this unique experience, recognizing the tremendous value of in-person connections and conversations.

This extraordinary evening was made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of some of Buffalo's most prominent businesses, reaffirming the city's commitment to fostering real estate excellence. Eric Vallone, founder of Vallone Law, took center stage as the official sponsor of the event, his support instrumental in making the cruise a resounding success.





Tarek Jabaji, representing Haus Capital, joined the festivities as the Gold Sponsor, emphasizing the company's dedication to Buffalo's thriving real estate scene. With their continued backing, these industry leaders ensured that the evening would be nothing short of spectacular.

Silver sponsors were equally instrumental in creating a night to remember. Clinton Hawkins, known for his expertise at Pillar to Post, Green Genie Flood & Restoration, and Buffalo's Cleaning Crew, demonstrated their commitment to Buffalo's real estate community by generously supporting the event. Their sponsorship showcased the importance of collaboration and support within the industry, reinforcing the bonds that bring realtors together.

The sunset cruise didn't just provide a magnificent backdrop for conversations; it underscored the resilience and adaptability of Buffalo's real estate professionals. In a world where transactions often occur remotely, this event served as a powerful reminder of the enduring value of face-to-face interactions.

As the evening came to a close, with the stars beginning to twinkle overhead, the realtors disembarked with a renewed sense of camaraderie and purpose. The success of this sunset cruise wasn't merely in its stunning scenery but in the bonds it rekindled and the opportunities it created.

Buffalo's real estate community, with the support of generous sponsors like Eric Vallone, Tarek Jabaji, Clinton Hawkins, and their respective companies, is poised to continue thriving, proving that even in an age of digital connections, there's no substitute for genuine face-to-face interactions. This event was not just a sunset cruise; it was a celebration of unity and a testament to the enduring strength of Buffalo's real estate network, beautifully orchestrated by *Buffalo Real Producers* on the grand canvas of the "Queen Harbor."



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HAUS

CAPITAL

▶ preferred partner spotlight

Article by: David Cornwell
Photography by: Eagle 1 Photography



Turns out accentuating the positive really does eliminate the negative. At least that's been the experience of Tarek Jabaji, a senior loan officer at Haus Capital Corporation.

"I'm a big believer in positivity and believe that what you put out in the world is returned tenfold," he says. "Every phone call, every client is an opportunity to change someone's life for the better. Even just putting a smile on the face of someone who's having a bad day can really go a long way."

After opening its first office in Rochester in 2016, Haus Capital expanded to Buffalo four years ago and now also operates in Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Florida. It was the No. 1 wholesale loan originator in New York last year and is looking to repeat that feat this year.

"With everything going on with the economy and the country, it's going to be a slower year in real estate," Tarek says. "But we're still trucking along."

Higher interest rates are likely one of many reasons behind Haus Capital's continuing high level of business as more people turn to mortgage brokers for the lower rates and flexibility they offer.

"Being a broker, we have access to a lot of different banks so we can shop around for interest rates and also to find the best program to fit a client's specific needs," Tarek says. "If one bank tells us no, we can take it to six others."

In addition to working with conventional loans, Haus also works with commercial and investor loans and loans through FHA, USDA and the VA.

"We stay involved in all aspects of the loan," Tarek says, another advantage of mortgage brokers. Unlike a bank, which has to spread its expertise across a variety of financial products, the Haus team focuses only on mortgages.

"No matter what's going on in a year or the economy, brokers just have so many more options," he says, adding those options help put more money in referring agents' pockets.

"Using a local lender who has such a good reputation, it's going to be easier to get your clients' offer accepted and quicker to close, so they can clear their pipeline a little bit and move on to the next sale."

“If one bank tells us no, we can take it to six others.**”**

Tarek's own career in the mortgage industry began when he was 21 after having worked at a mall in high school and college. "I thought there had to be more to life than helping some guy pick out clothes." A friend's mom who owned a mortgage brokerage offered him a job and he's been in the business ever since.

He says he thrives on the pressure of his job and it's that pressure that motivates him. He's also a huge advocate of networking and encourages other professionals to see what it can do for their success.

"I wouldn't be where I'm at if it wasn't for networking," he says. "But I mean who wants to go out at the end of a long day and talk to a bunch of strangers they've never met."

Tarek says he felt the same way but found the more he stepped out of his comfort zone, the more comfortable he became. "The more you just be yourself, the more people will gravitate toward you."

Some of his favorite networking opportunities are those offered by the Women's Council of Realtors Buffalo Niagara. But, he says "if I hear about anything at all, I'm going to try to get there."

"They see your face so many times and then they put a name to that face and then they find you do good work and that you're pretty much fun to hang out with," he says of the many friendships and business relationships he's formed through networking.

“
Every phone call,
every client is an
opportunity
to change
someone's life
for the better.”

Helping him cope with 10 to 12-hour days that spill over into the weekend is his long-time girlfriend, Chelsea. "She's been with me since day one, letting me do all the nonsense and attend events and all. She's a trooper, my biggest supporter and I can't thank her enough."

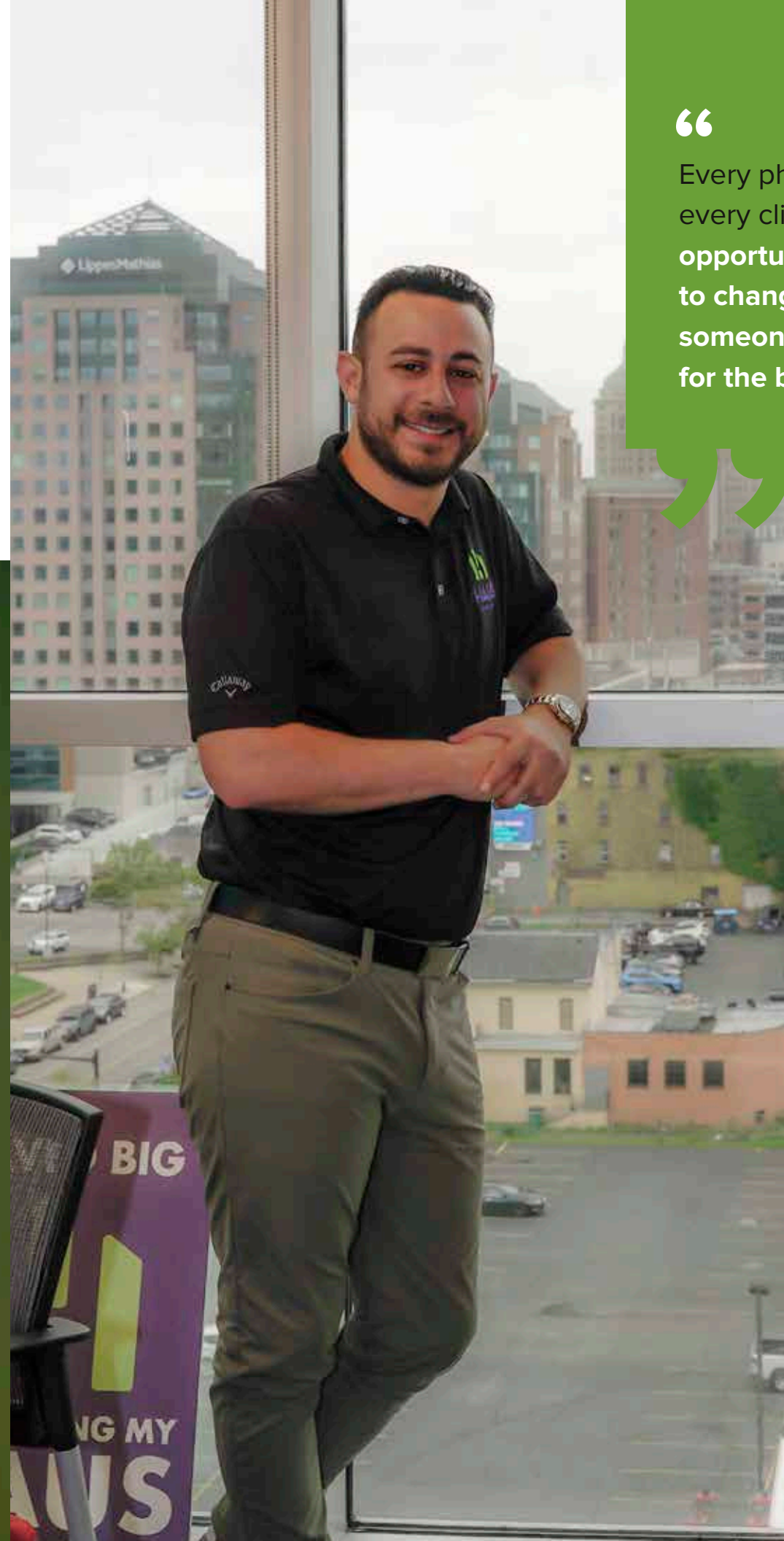
Sports are another major stress reliever for Tarek outside the office. "I'm a big sports guy. That's kind of my drug of choice."

"Sometimes I love being a couch potato, too. When you're going seven days a week, sometimes you just want to lay on your couch and not do a thing."

While he and Chelsea attend the Bills home opener every season, truth be told his football heart lies elsewhere ever since his grandfather gave him an Eagles jersey when he was a kid. He and Chelsea try to head to Philadelphia to see a few games each year.

Through it all, one constant remains in both his personal and professional life: positivity. "I can mope and feel miserable or I can be positive, keep an upbeat attitude and make the most of every opportunity I get," he says.

"Just change your attitude, put on a smile and watch what the world does for you."



Naomi LASCO



▶▶ REALTOR®
team spotlight

Article by: David Cornwell
Photography by:
Eagle 1 Photography



With a passion for racing sailboats and success in virtually every aspect of real estate, Keller Williams platinum agent and team leader Naomi Lasco is something of a renaissance woman. But at the heart of her success is family—and hers is a big one.

While many real estate professionals may call coworkers family, few mean it as deeply as Naomi, her work family very much becoming her extended family when tragedy struck four years ago. “The support they gave me was amazing,” she says of the love and care shown by Keller Williams, its agents

and staff following the untimely death of her first-born son, Ricky, from complications of the flu. He was just 20.

Devastated by his untimely death, Naomi says she took a step back from real estate and that it was her Keller Williams family that kept her from plunging further into an abyss of grief. “Anybody that knows me knows my son was my biggest cheerleader,” she says. “He was in a baby carrier and went to college with me. And on days I didn’t feel like going, he would look at me and say ‘Mommy, you can do this.’”

Deep in grief, it was memories of her son and his support that led her to ask what Ricky would want her to do and knew he would want her to continue pushing for success. She did just that, getting her broker’s license and forming the Lasco Team, which in just a few short years has transactions in the millions each year.

While Naomi herself primarily deals with commercial properties these days, another team member focuses on residential home sales, particularly enjoying working with first-time buyers. Another, like herself, enjoys building investor portfolios.

With a background in accounting, business management and marketing, she's well experienced in commercial and residential leasing and property and project management, positioning her as a top agent for business and investor clients to work with.

She's also a Keller Williams Platinum Agent, a level of recognition reserved for the company's top performers. And one of her main goals is to mentor team members to achieve platinum-level success too.

"I mentor them and give them all of my knowledge on how to be a Platinum Agent and to sell millions in real estate," she says, adding she also strives to ensure that there's balance in her team's lives. "When my son died I was just work, work, work, work," she says, his death making her realize that was no way to live. Requirements for team members now include taking at least three weeks vacation each year, during which other agents completely take over. Another is that team members take

at least two days off each week. "You have to have time off because burnout is huge in this business," she says. "It's not about money. It's not about working constantly. You need balance."

“
I'm a numbers girl when it comes to selling real estate.
I'm not all about the paint & the carpet and the lovely kitchen.”

Originally from Philadelphia, Naomi moved to Buffalo in 2010 as a single mother because real estate was very affordable. "I wanted to invest and put roots down in this community." She began investing and looked at it as a way not only to support her children but also to create generational wealth for them.

Having attended Arizona State University with her son in tow, she returned to education during the pandemic, studying finance online. "I'm a numbers girl when it comes to selling real estate. I'm not all about the paint and the carpet and the lovely kitchen." "I'm very logical and like to be on the inside of things. I want to know what's going on in politics, government, the financial sector, the Federal Reserve."

It was in Buffalo she took up sailing, initially learning the ins and outs of the sport from the then \$50 course from Discover Buffalo Sailing. She and her life partner, Adams Masters, regularly race their own boat at Buffalo Yacht Club.

Through the years she has planned or hosted a number of regattas and other sailing events. On the day of her interview with Real Producers, she had just returned from a three-day Junior Olympics regatta in Rochester in which her nine-year-old son, Brison, competed. Her daughter,

Frances, 21, was never bitten by the sailing bug.

Serendipity has also sailed along with Naomi over the years. She's met countless friends sailing, including one who has been instrumental in her success.

She first met Rian Matzel at a sailing shop Rian owned, Obersheimer Sailor

Supply. They became fast friends and when she formed the Lasco Team, Naomi needed an administrator and knew Rian was the best person for the job. "She said, 'Sure I'll do it, but I don't know anything about real estate,'" Naomi recalls. "I told her it doesn't matter. You're a sailor. I have faith in you." With Rian now a licensed agent, the wisdom of that decision becomes

more apparent each day. Naomi and Rian are also partners in a transaction coordination company.

While she's not exactly sure where her professional future will lead, she is sure of one thing and that's as she navigates that future, memories of Ricky will help guide her way.



“It's not about money. It's not about working constantly.
You need balance.”



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THEJAN ► REALTOR® on the rise

KODITUWAKKU

Article by: David Cornwell • Photography by: Adore Studio

You can't help but be impressed with Keller Williams agent Thejan Kodituwakku. His is a success story worthy of a Hollywood script.

The storyline would read something like this: Sri Lankan parents scrimp and save for their children to attend college in the U.S. Dwindling funds put education on hold. A simple business idea succeeds beyond expectations. A successful real estate career is launched.

Working out of Keller Williams in Williamsville, Thejan, or TJ as he's most often called, joined the brokerage in 2020 and with his drive and determination quickly found success. He was the office's Rookie of the Year his first full year with transactions of \$3.4 million. He also earned the Keller Williams Bronze Award that year.

Primarily working with residential properties, TJ does occasionally handle commercial transactions and says he might like to work with his

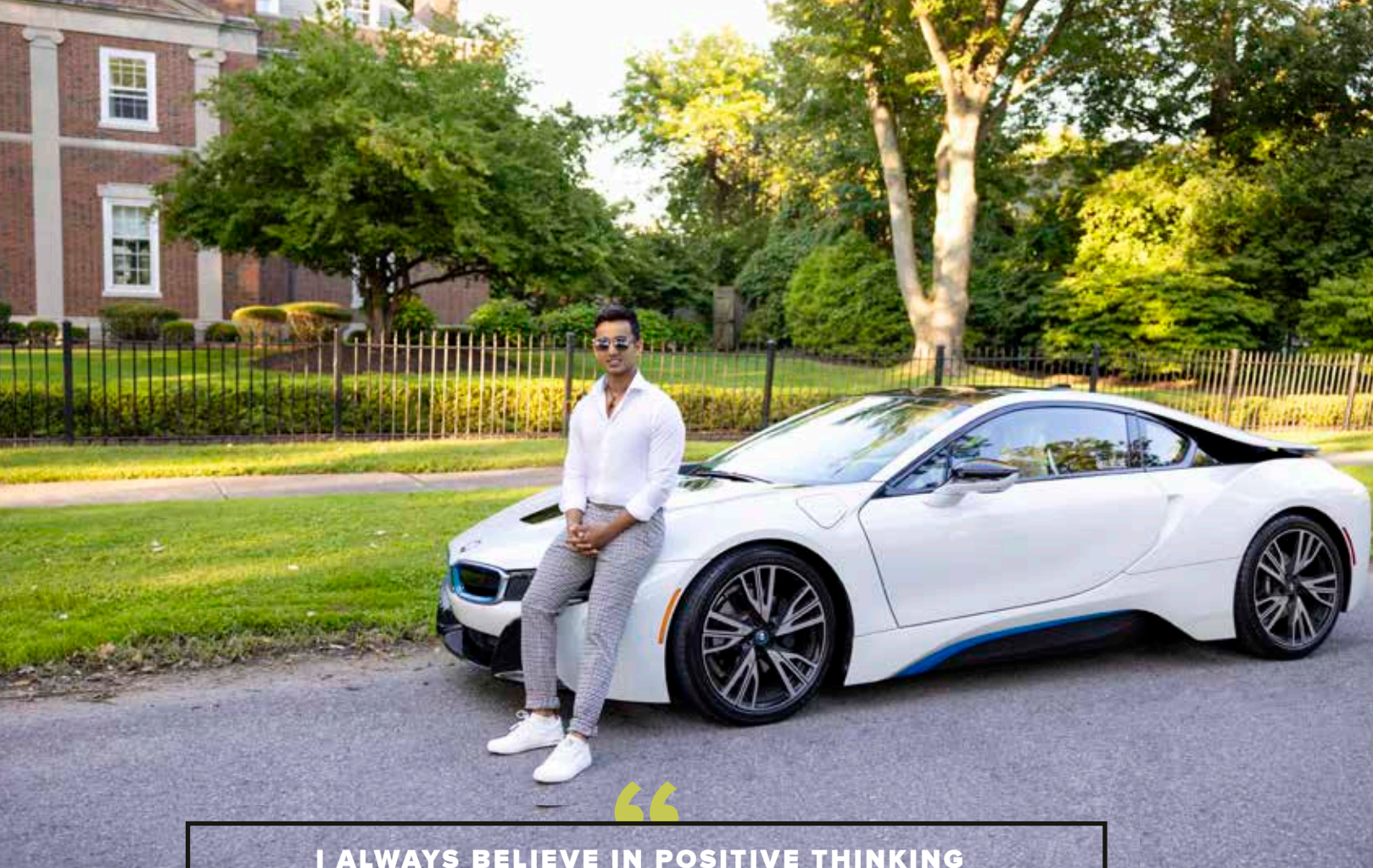
twin brother, Geemal, one day on large, industrial properties and projects.

He particularly likes working with home sellers, he says, "because marketing is my strength. I love to promote listings to their highest potential." "In selling a property, I want to make sure I give it all the exposure I can through open houses, online and social media marketing, everything."

He says communication is also paramount to ensuring clients get the best price whether buying or selling.

"A lot of people say agents aren't responsive, but I'm not one of them," he says. "I answer my phone almost every single time and the few times I can't, I get right back."





“
**I ALWAYS BELIEVE IN POSITIVE THINKING
AND BELIEVE WHAT YOU PUT OUT, YOU GET BACK.**

Having earned his Eagle Scout award back in Sri Lanka, Thejan says he naturally took to the outdoors when he moved here. “I like to spend as much time as I can outdoors, hiking and camping and all,” he says.

The importance of keeping healthy extends to daily workouts. And he gives back to the community through joining and supporting organizations such as The Rotary Club of Kenmore. “I always believe in positive thinking and believe what you put out, you get back,” he says. “My guiding principle is always to be kind and positive, even when it’s hard to be.”

Of course, any good script has got to have a good ending. While his story is far from over, an ending for this scene that would capture TJ’s drive and determination would be him walking across a stage in cap and gown to receive his mechanical engineering degree.

Despite the considerable success he’s achieved and a very busy schedule, he’s returned to the University of Buffalo and has about another semester left to earn his degree.



TJ credits much of his real estate success to Keller Williams and says he’s particularly grateful to the 300-plus agents out of the Williamsville office and the network of tens of thousands of KW agents nationwide for helping him learn how to develop his business and increase sales.

He and his brother’s journey to Buffalo began with lots of research into which U.S. colleges offered a balance between affordability and a quality mechanical engineering program, both of the brothers’ chosen fields of endeavor. They decided on the University of Buffalo, moved here and enrolled. “I’m so very grateful to my parents for sacrificing their whole life and life savings for us to come here for an education,” he says. But after their first year, the high cost of being an international student forced them to put college on hold and start looking for income.

Seeing a need for junk removal in the area and feeling it was a relatively easy field to get in, they launched Quick Help Junk Removal and for the next several years worked to develop and expand the business.

Today Quick Help serves all of Western New York and has expanded to include dumpster rentals, recycling, curbside trash collection and junk removal for a wide range of businesses, including hospitals, apartments and construction sites.

After starting the business, TJ realized many of the property owners calling for its services were doing so because they were getting their property ready to sell. With an inside track on investment opportunities, the brothers began buying investment homes for rentals. TJ then got his real estate license to facilitate those investments.

These days, Geemal runs the Quick Help side of things while TJ handles the real estate side.

With his parents 9,300 miles away in Sri Lanka, TJ hopes he and his brother can get back to visit at some point. Their sister is also in the U.S., studying to be a doctor.



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TIM

LaDuca



Article by: **David Cornwell** • Photography by: **Glass Forest Media**

If Norman Vincent Peale hadn't written The Power of Positive Thinking, Realtor Tim LaDuca might well have instead. "You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it," the Howard Hanna agent and leader of the Green Bison Team out of its Tonawanda office says. "I try to surround myself with good, positive people and pass the knowledge on to others."

"I will it to happen," he tells other agents when asked what's behind his consistent success. "I will the business to come to me. I wake up every day knowing and believing that I'm out there to help or guide people through one of the most important decisions they will ever make."

Much of Tim's positive outlook was inherited from his Mom, who raised

him as a single parent after his father died when he was young. Growing up, Tim remembers how they lived in South Buffalo, North Buffalo, West Side, Amherst, Tonawanda, "just all over." "I was born and raised to help people and be a real estate agent," he says. "it's a perfect fit."

With more than three decades of experience in the Western New York market, Tim began his career in the days before computers, back when books of MLS listings were delivered to agents every couple of weeks and everybody was a sellers agent. "But real estate is always changing and evolving, and I try to keep ahead of the new technology and programs that come along," he says.

As for his experience, he says, "I've been through markets when you didn't want any more listings and just wanted

buyers for the listings you had. And now it's the opposite, where you've got a scarcity of houses and a lot of buyers." "Even with the shortage of houses on the market, I diligently work to get my sellers top dollar for their homes and to find my buyers the home of their dreams—no matter how long it takes."

After having been a one-man operation for years, it was his desire to share his years of experience and expertise with a new generation of agents that led him to launch the Green Bison Team four years ago, not long before the Covid quarantine.

"We definitely had to adjust, work together and brainstorm to come up with new ways of practicing real estate at a difficult time in history," he recalls. "That really brought us together and I believe made us better."



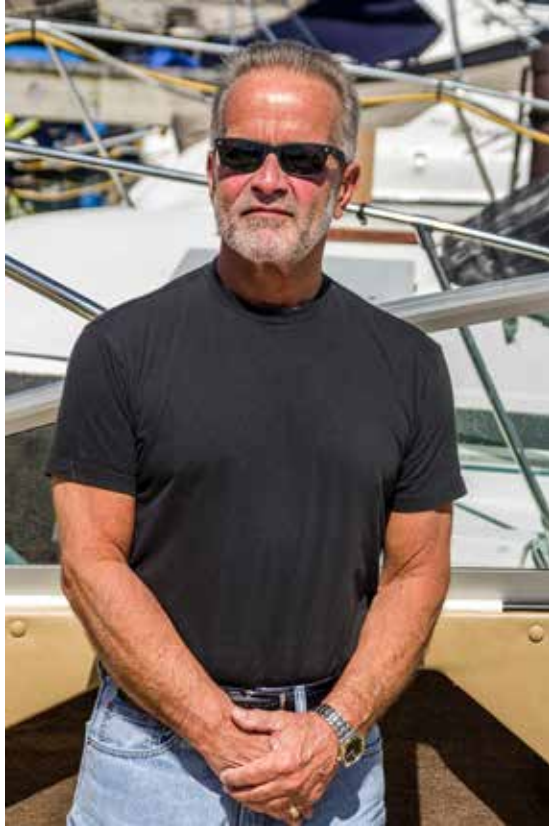
As the team leader, Tim spends a lot of time mentoring its members in the successful marketing, staging and business strategies he's developed over the years. He's now looking to grow his team and share his experience further.

"It's not about what you have, but what you give," he says of wanting to mentor other real estate professionals to success. "I want to give the best I have to my team members because I want them to exceed beyond their expectations," he says, including team member Greg Styliades, who Tim says calls a personable and consummate professional. "Greg is a natural in real estate and is finding great success in his career," he says. "He's very detail-oriented. At the rate he's going, he will do better in this business than I did in my career."

Bobbi Jo Hughes is another team member who began her real estate career with Tim 16 years ago, handling numerous stagings, interior decorating jobs and other projects, all the while learning from Tim. "She's my right hand in real estate," he says.

Another team member, Angel Stenzel, is just starting out. "I tell her it's not going to be easy but it's something you can build a lifetime of financial security with. She has a lot of potential and I know she'll do well."

Each of the team members contribute valuable assets to the team, whether it's social media, photography, staging and more. "We're a team. We need to work together and support each other to be able to grow."



Surprisingly enough, the Green Bison Team isn't the only color of bison with which Tim is associated. He's also part owner of Red Bison Homes, LLC, which he runs with his sons, Sam and Sean LaDuca. Set up in 2014, it's been a tool for them to build their own success.

Typically buying two homes a year, Red Bison Homes rehabs and sells them at a profit. But don't call them a flip. Tim will assure you they're not just cosmetically done. "When we get houses, we don't flip them. We rebuild them. We rewire and replumb them, get all the necessary permits. It can take up to eight months for a quality rehab." "I'm proud of them," he says of his sons. "They seem to be doing well with the business."

Married for 37 years to his wife, Renea, the couple recently became grandparents with the birth of a baby girl to their youngest son and his wife. "I'm still nervous about picking her up," Tim says. "She's too little for me to handle. I don't want to break her."

Tim coached youth football, baseball and basketball for many years and says some of his former players still call him coach. They've also become clients as have the children and grandchildren of former clients, referrals Tim cherishes and takes as the highest compliment.

One of his favorite places to be is on the water, he says. A boater for over 30 years, he's long had a slip on Tonawanda

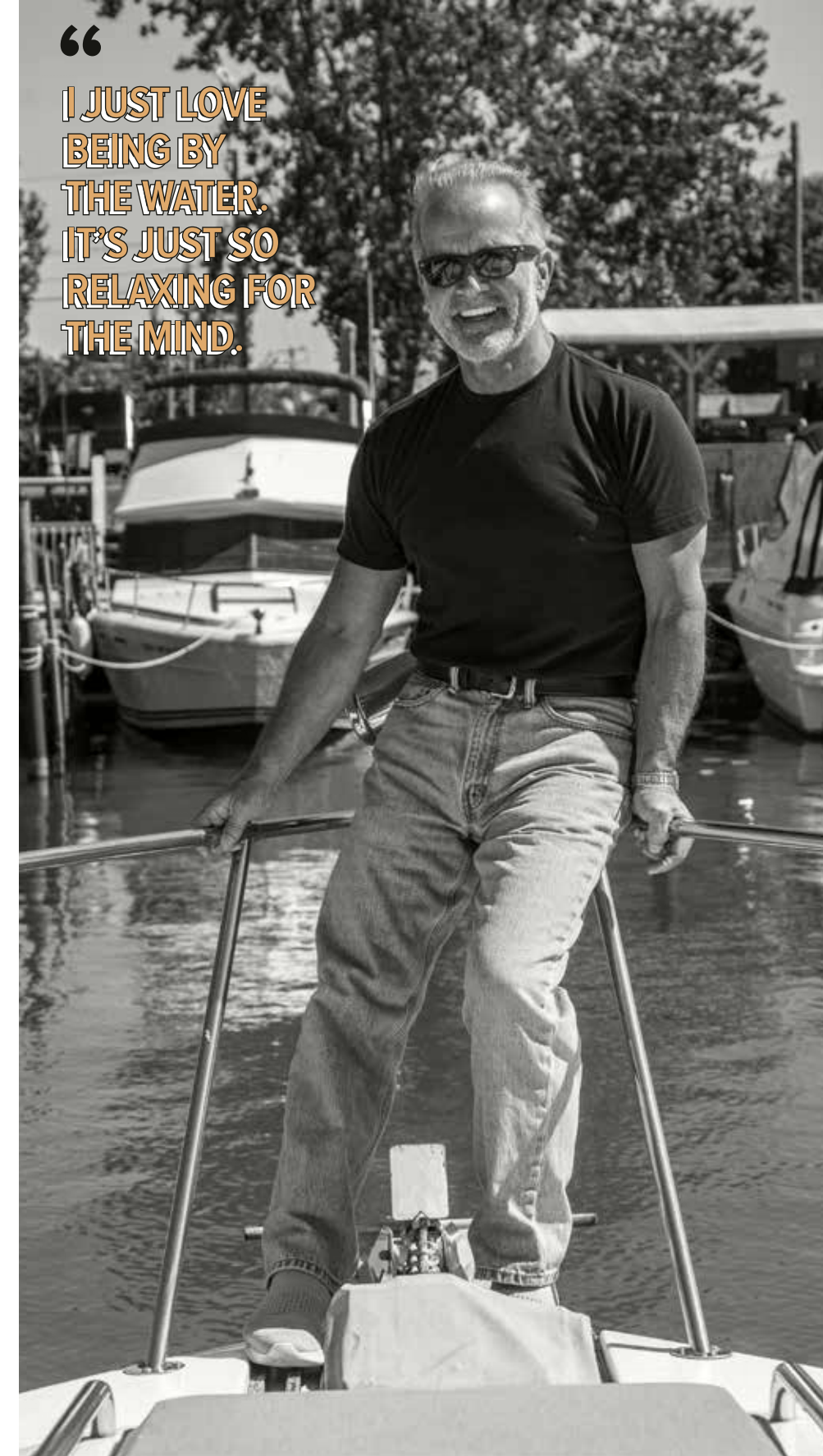
Island where he keeps a goodly sized boat that is "an old one but a good one" and one he often uses it as his mobile office—especially during some periods of the pandemic. "I just love being by the water. It's just so relaxing for the mind."

Active in the community, he and Renea generously support a number of organizations that are dear to their hearts, including Ronald McDonald House, St. Jude's Children's Hospital, Buffalo City Mission, SPCA and others.

"My middle name is Jude, the patron saint for hopeless causes," Tim says. "And while I wasn't born at St. Judes, I understand the need for support." Renea is also heavily involved in animal rescue work. "I live my life in gratitude, every morning I am thankful for everything," Tim says. "I do very well, not just monetarily, but in helping people in life. That's something everybody needs to do and to pass along. You've got to help people—that's what life is all about."



“**I JUST LOVE BEING BY THE WATER. IT'S JUST SO RELAXING FOR THE MIND.**”



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Stay tuned for more details, and get ready to be inspired and educated by Buffalo’s top realtors. See you there!

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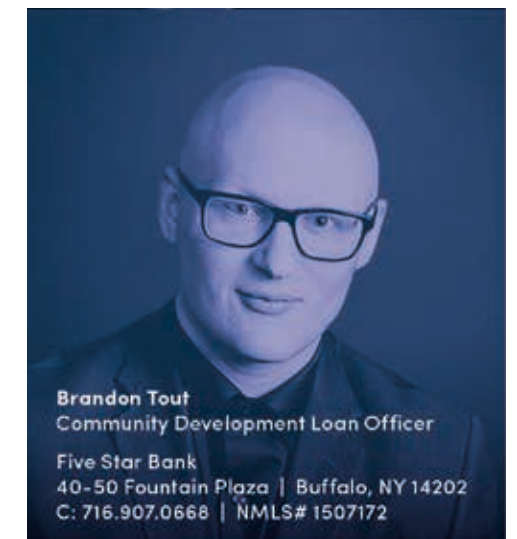
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