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Favorite part about being a Mortgage Loan Officer?

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What has been your greatest work accomplishment while working at NOLA Lending?

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How long have you lived in Baton Rouge?

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What is an interesting fact about you that other people may not know?

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TABLE OF
CONTENTS



07

Meet the
Baton
Rouge Real
Producers
Team



08

Preferred
Partners



10

Partner
Spotlight:
Landscape
King



16

Rising
Star:
Ali
Brooks



22

Team
Leader:
Jillian
Wright



28

Cover
Story:
Kyle
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A swoon-worthy outdoor space is a claim to domestic fame on every homeowner's wish list, and if that dream oasis elicits a few double-takes from onlookers, well, all the better. Of course, envisioning a lawn that's the envy of the neighborhood and achieving one are two entirely different things. If you've ever attempted a yard glow-up, you know that it's a task best navigated with the right professionals by your side.

As someone who has been in the industry since 2010, Joseph is thrilled to have parlayed his expertise into such a thriving and well-respected business, though he admits that being an entrepreneur wasn't always on his radar. He got his start in the world of plants as an hourly employee at Clegg's Nursery, and his experience there led him to open Landscape King (formerly King Lawn and Landscape) in 2017. The undertaking was originally intended to be a modest side hustle rather than a

booming enterprise, and Joseph says the eventual transition from one stage to the other was an organic about-face. "From the beginning, my goal was simply to make some extra money, planting stuff on the side for clients . . . then that turned into my business," he recalls.



As his new initiative began to take off, Joseph decided to level up, and he supplemented his natural horticultural talents with a formal education, going back to school to earn a degree in turf and landscape management and, later, beginning coursework for a master's degree in landscape architecture. It was a move that not only helped elevate

LANDSCAPE KING

▶ partner spotlight

By **Jamie Taylor**
Photos by **Ace Sylvester**

FIRMLY ROOTED

Enter the team at Landscape King

- experts in all things alfresco. Still, within the first six years of its inception, the company is currently enjoying rapid growth, and founder Joseph King attributes this impressive trajectory to two guiding principles – doing good work and being intentional. It's a formula that clearly resonates, as the company boasts a solid word-of-mouth referral base, and Joseph says

such client satisfaction is not only a cornerstone of his success, but it is also one of his favorite aspects of the job. "I love to see the result of our service when a customer's life has been transformed because they have a new landscape. It seems like a small thing, but it really goes a long way for people who enjoy being outside to have an enhanced outdoor space."

his company but also allowed him to develop an appreciation for the logistics of running a successful operation. "For a while, my crew was just [me] and a couple of guys with a passion for plants and beautiful landscape design. Now, for me, it's evolved into a passion for business. Now we are running multiple crews and [have] other office staff; we are becoming an efficient machine to better serve our clients . . .," he shares.

With that goal of effectiveness in mind, the company has chosen to fine-tune its offerings, concentrating its efforts on landscape consultations and a curated menu of services (flowerbeds, flowerbed maintenance, sod, paver patios and walkways, and landscape lighting). “We no longer offer lawn care, which allows us to spend more time and focus on what we’re really good at: awesome installations. We’ve learned the best ways to do what we do, and we implement that in our refined proven processes,” Joseph says, adding that only quality resources are used in each design.

On top of having such a specialized and well-executed focus, Landscape King also offers value by assigning a designated client-success manager to every project, which helps ensure a seamless experience for homeowners. Additionally, Joseph and his team have a secret weapon in their ranks – in the form of degreed landscape architect Tim Bullion, who brings over 30 years of industry knowledge to the table.

When he isn’t steering the ship at work, Joseph can be found enjoying the sweeter things in life with his family. He originally met his wife, Jess, during a landscape install at her house, and the duo now have two adorable children, James and Jude. Outside of time spent with his people, Joseph also enjoys listening to music, playing the guitar, and - no surprise - working in his yard. “One of my favorite hobbies is customizing my own landscape using the same plants and materials I use for my clients.

“
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”

Testing out plants and material myself, first, gives me confidence that my clients will love them just as much as we do,” he shares, adding that another one of his favorite pastimes is creating social media content to showcase his company’s processes in an entertaining way.

Considering that his passion for landscaping permeates even his downtime, it’s fair to say that Joseph has found his true calling in life. And with his business firmly rooted in the trinity of success – service, knowledge, execution – it’s an equally fair assumption that Landscape King will continue growing and elevating outdoor spaces to bona fide eye-candy status for many years to come.

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▶ rising star

By Jamie Taylor
Photos by Ace Sylvester

ALI BROOKS



QUEEN OF RELATIONSHIPS

When it comes to finding representation in real estate, homeowners have no shortage of options, and that truth is not lost on Ali Duplesis Brooks. As a REALTOR® who honors a client's gift of trust by never taking it for granted, Ali focuses on showing up for her buyers and sellers in significant ways and treating them as she would hope to be treated were she in their shoes. It's a sound philosophy and one she backs up with sincerity and an arsenal of relationship-building skills for good measure.

Growing up with an entrepreneurial mom who ran multiple businesses, Ali gained early insight into the benefits that hard work and successful systems bring to a brand, and through years of assisting in her family's enterprises, she cultivated eclectic talents in client services and creative marketing – strengths that would come in handy as she set out into the professional world.

After graduating college, Ali accepted a position as an advertising executive with the LSU Alumni Association and later transitioned to a role as the association's engagement and travel manager, where a typical workday involved organizing Traveling Tigers' trips and hotel logistics for away games. With the restrictions that came on the heels of Covid, this travel-focused position was rendered obsolete, and Ali found herself facing an unexpected layoff. It was a turn of events with unfortunate timing, as she and her husband, Blaine, were expecting their first child. Adding to the stress of losing her income source was the realization that Covid concerns would make it challenging to find childcare once her baby did arrive, and Ali's mind began to shift toward finding a professional opportunity that would allow her the flexibility to work from home.

Luckily, she found career inspiration through her mom, Amy, who had, by that time, sold her businesses and jumped into the real estate game. With low-interest rates stimulating the market, Amy's business was taking off, and Ali saw the potential for carving her own

niche in the industry. Leaning into that vision, she got licensed, hit the ground running, and built a booming business over the ensuing four years. It was a swift rise that she attributes, in large part, to maternal influence. "I really had such a great mentor in my mom. With interest rates being low and whatnot, her business was really starting to pick up, so I was able to go with her and [learn] everything. I was able to gain so much experience quickly, and I never would have been able to retain so much without someone who was already established [guiding] me. I credit a lot of my success now to being able to have that opportunity."

Though Ali and her mom operate independently through eXp Realty, they still function as a team, and Ali says this is something she is grateful for. "My mom and I always lean on each other, and I think it's really important to have that person you can lean on, because, in real estate, the highs are high, and the lows are low. Everybody needs somebody. And I'll be somebody's somebody if they don't have anyone they can call. Growing up, our parents were so encouraging, and it just breaks my heart to know that some people don't have that."

The autonomy that comes with the eXp model means Ali has her hands in all aspects of her business, which presents a valuable advantage to her clients. "I think one great thing about working with me is how involved I am in literally everything in the transaction," she shares, adding that being solely responsible for every part of the sale comes with a lot of responsibility – something she does not take lightly, as she finds herself invested with her clients very early on. "I love fighting for people. I love being able to help them through something stressful and getting them to where they're happy, and they feel like they got the most out of the entire experience. That just makes me really proud to do what I do. I am one to try to make everybody my friend and try to find some type of connection, because I want [everyone] I work with to understand how much they mean to me, and I think the best way I can show that is to make them a part of my family. When I serve them, and I help them purchase a home, I'm going to treat them the same way as [I would treat] my sister or brother," she explains.

Her passion for going to bat for her clients is at no time more evident than when Ali is asked to reminisce her favorite real estate memories, as her mind immediately goes to those moments that were hard-won. One such instance was a challenging sale that extended over six months and was complicated by a firm seller, and Ali says it was a moment that opened the door to self-doubt. "It was like, 'Is this career really for me? Am I good at what I do,'" she recalls. Fortunately, affirmation showed up at the closing table. "The buyer was saying how the transaction wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for me. I am very 'squeaky wheel gets the grease,' and I'm very diligent because I would want someone fighting that hard for me," she says, adding that the fact that those attributes did not go unnoticed by her client gave her an unforgettable sense of validation at the end of the experience.

In a similarly challenging scenario, Ali helped friends purchase a home, only to have the seller's mortgage company winterize the house immediately after the purchase, as it had been slated to go into foreclosure. Before the mix-up could be straightened out, the winterization process was underway, with locks being changed and trash dragged through the house. Ali remembers rolling up her sleeves, going to the local hardware store to buy cleaning supplies and locks, and getting on the phone to straighten things out. Though she took all the right steps, she says her concern for the client's overall experience still weighed heavily on her mind, as did their potential perception of her service. "I just thought, 'Oh my gosh, my buyers probably think I have no idea what I'm doing,' but they ended up leaving me a nice review."

While it may seem unusual that such stressful experiences rank high among her favorite memories,

Ali says these moments were special to her because they helped her grow in her belief that she has a place in the industry. "In real estate, every day is different, and showing myself that I can respond in a way that I can quickly problem-solve reassures that this really is the [career] for me."

When she isn't busy steering the ship of her clients' homeownership dreams, Ali's free time revolves around her precious daughter Palmer, who is currently rocking toddlerhood. "She has pretty much become my hobby," Ali jokes of the vast amount of mom-and-me time she and Palmer spend together. "She was a Covid baby, so the hobbies I had [before that time] – exercising and stuff like that – became nonexistent, so she kind of became my identity."

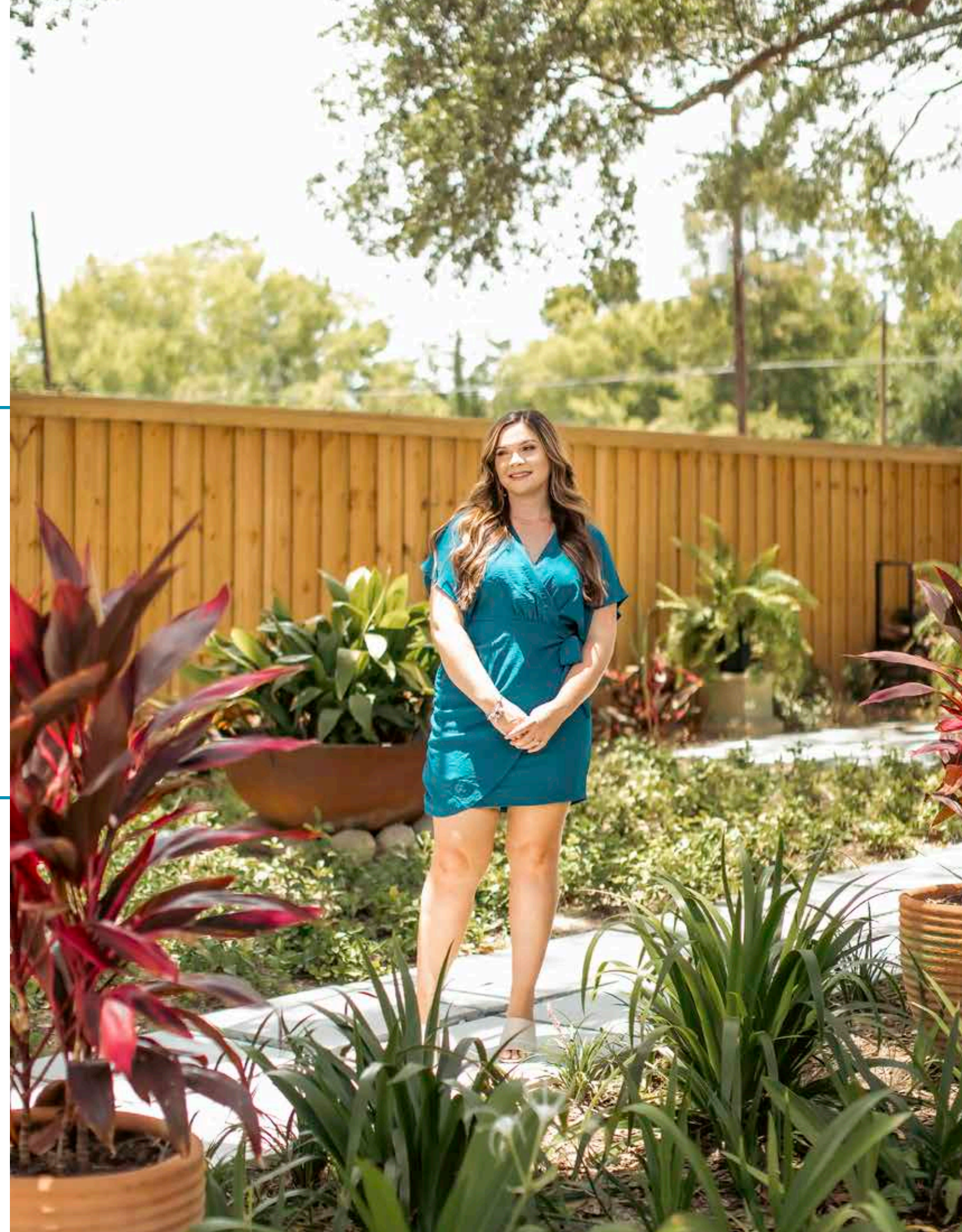


“““

I love fighting for people. I love being able to help them through something stressful and getting them to where they're happy, and they feel like they got the most out of the entire experience.

In addition to bonding with her mini-me, Ali also enjoys time spent with her husband, parents, and siblings (fun fact: she has a twin!). Rounding out her crew are Blueberry and Bowser, the adopted four-leggeds who offer canine and feline personality, respectively, in spades.

With her unique mix of assertiveness and kindness, there is no doubt Ali will continue to forge her way to the top of the real estate mountain, happily charting her own path but simultaneously willing to offer a hand up to anyone who comes along behind her. And as her list of closings grows longer, so will her inventory of pals, considering that her clients become genuine friends and fixtures in her life long after the sale (a relationship style that she and her mom share). "Once we close, they don't get rid of us, and, I mean, it's true, right? We know where they live!"





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» team leader

By Breanna Pizzolato
Photos by KJ Wright

Wright

Jillian

WIFE. MOM. BOSS.

There are countless studies on leadership, exploring whether it is a set of learned skills or an intrinsic ability. Jillian Wright is a case study for the latter. For as long as she can remember, she's naturally assumed leadership positions. At 21, Jillian embraced the responsibilities of a wife and mother and discovered a newfound strength and resilience within herself that propelled her toward her entrepreneurial aspirations. Through her unique blend of life experiences, personal growth and unwavering dedication to her family, she laid the foundation to establish The Wright Group in January of 2023—a testament to her remarkable ability to balance multiple roles and emerge as a visionary leader.

Love at First Sight

While working as a waitress at Waffle House in her hometown of LaPlace, the district manager, KJ, dropped in for a visit.

"I remember thinking, 'Who is that?! And he told me the first day we met that I would be his wife. I thought he was crazy," she said, folding her arms. "But sure enough, I was his wife a year later," she laughed. Following their marriage, KJ's desire to return home to Baton Rouge coincided with Jillian's yearning for something new. They started their life together in the city they now call home, and Jillian considers nurturing a joyful and affectionate marriage with KJ for 12 years among her most cherished accomplishments. Three kids, Jayce, Khloe, and Jaxon, then a career change later, the unwavering commitment and love they have cultivated shines through as she explains how KJ is the photographer and graphic designer for The Wright Group. "You're not going to see many other real estate agents with graphics that look like mine," she said, smiling. They showcase her personality with bright color blocks, bold lettering and fierce poses.



Together, Jillian and KJ continue to fulfill their promise to themselves and their family to do things differently by always putting family first.

Making Good on Promises Made

For years, Jillian worked as a phlebotomist while attending school to become a nurse. She worked full-time while pursuing a nursing degree and raising their two oldest children. The 16-hour shifts, late-night studying, and coordinating childcare around it all began to take its toll.

“My husband and I sat down and agreed; this isn’t going to work. This is not what we signed up for. We have kids, and we said we would do things differently, and them being here and there and not with us is not what we said we were going to do.” KJ suggested she try real estate, assuring her that her passion for helping people, natural leadership ability and personality would serve her well as a Realtor. She liked the idea and called her best friend for advice. “I had no idea she had been thinking about real estate and signed up for the classes. I thought, ‘This is my sign.’” Jillian signed up, too. And then, life happened.

Three years passed as Jillian started and paused the courses while continuing to work in the hospital. In that time, the Wrights welcomed their youngest, Jaxon, to the family. Jillian sat in the parking lot before her first shift following a brief maternity leave. “I cried and cried,” she said, shaking her head. “I kept thinking, ‘This is my last baby, and I have to go back to work, but I don’t want to miss anything. I don’t want someone telling me I can’t be somewhere for my kids. I want to be at everything I want them to do everything.’ And I was finally determined,” she said. “I was more motivated than ever to study, and I wasn’t back at the hospital for four months before I passed my test, quit the job, and started my career in real estate.”

Keep Pushing

“I always remember that when I first started, I had help and people to lean on when I got lost, and I wouldn’t be where I am without them,” she said. “I wanted to give back and be that person for other new agents.” She leaned on the mentorship and guidance of Shane Robertson and Brittany Howard, now joining them as a fellow Real Producer.

In 2022, Jillian was awarded agent of the year and began a mentorship program within her brokerage, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices. “When I decided to start the program, they backed me, helping me bring my mission to life,” she said. The 3-month program focuses on helping new agents build confidence by navigating real-world scenarios and leveraging their unique personalities in business. “Everything happens when it’s supposed to, and when the women in the first cohort graduated, I couldn’t leave them,” she said. Once again, she felt called to leadership and started The Wright Group, and all four women in her mentorship program joined her.



“
*You feel like you can
take on the world
when you look and
feel the part.*”

“She always tells us, ‘It’s not easy, but you will see results. Just keep pushing,’” said Jourdan Jackson, an agent with The Wright Group. “That’s the main thing - just keep pushing.”

“Taking on the leadership role was second nature to me,” Jillian explained, “But to have each of these women who look up to me, depend on me, and expect me to be me every day, it was scary and not easy because I don’t like failure. But I’m going to keep pushing because the only way to get where God wants us all is to go through the trials and tribulations He uses to mold you!”

When she needs the same encouragement, she doles out, she looks to KJ. “When something doesn’t go the way it’s supposed to, or I’ve had a bad day, he’ll say, ‘What’s the next play, bae?’ and that shifts her perspective. “Sometimes, depending on the situation, it may take a little longer for me to change my outlook on a situation,” she said, smiling. Being a football family and their oldest being a great athlete, the family often uses coaching terminology in difficult times. “We know you must let go of the last play to focus on the next one.”

The Next Play

Her next play is to continue to pour into her family, business, team, and, soon, a new cohort of mentorship program members. “During my hardest days, my kids, with their countless practices football, cheer, volleyball, girl scouts, and mentoring - that’s what keeps me going,” she said. Taking time to step away from her roles as wife, mom and boss are just as important as the time she spends dedicated to them. “The way to my heart is going out to eat and a good ole French 75s,” she said, recalling a recent Girl’s Night spent with a group of amazing women at Soji. “It’s nice to have a night out, step away from everything for a bit and enjoy good company.” Nights out and meticulous self-care keeps her grounded. “If I don’t do anything else, I’m going to have my hair, nails done, and a pair of shoes to fit my personality,” she said. “You feel like you can take on the world when you look and feel the part.” Sometimes she looks back and wonders how in the world she gets everything done, “and then I realize that it’s by the grace of God.”

Jillian exemplifies the true essence of a multifaceted leader. She’s true to herself and her mission, unwilling to fit any mold



and determined to authentically show up in every role. From embracing her role as a wife and mother at a young age to establishing The Wright Group, Jillian’s entrepreneurial spirit, personal growth, and unwavering dedication to her family have been instrumental in her success. Through her mentorship program and commitment to helping others, she continues to inspire and uplift those around her. With God, a supportive partner by her side and a relentless determination to keep pushing forward, Jillian’s leadership journey serves as an inspiration for her fellow Realtors faced with balancing multiple roles and leaning into their authenticity while pursuing their dreams.



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Kyle

PETERSEN

►► cover story

By Breanna Smith Pizzolato
Photos by Ace Sylvester

The Perfect Blend

As the saying goes, “man plans, and God laughs.” Often, the life unfolding before us becomes far greater than our plans. Kyle Petersen understands this truth all too well. The Baton Rouge native has faced the ebbs and flows of the industry for 20 years. And he approaches business the same way he does life - one day at a time. “I’ve worked hard and persevered to build a great life for my family,” he said. “But this chapter is better than I ever could have dreamed.”



In this new chapter, he’s a husband to Ronda and father to their beautifully blended family of six kids.

Embracing Life’s Adventures

Kyle envisioned himself as a real estate agent and father early in high school. During sports practices and field trips, he recognized that the parents who were most often there to cheer and volunteer were real estate agents, namely Laura Dupree and Karl Landreneau. Inspired by their dedication, he developed a plan. “I knew then that I wanted to be a real estate agent,” he said.

He developed a passion for music early in life, too. “Dad always had instruments and music around when I was growing up,” he said. For years, he watched his dad, long-time attorney Glen Petersen, play saxophone in an all-attorney band, and his love for live music only grew as the years passed. “I like to play the guitar, but my singing is off-key,” he said, laughing. Fortunately, no one notices - or hears - at a live concert.

He’s leaned wholeheartedly into his role as a father and brings the same caring, compassionate energy to his friendships and business with Keller Williams First Choice. After earning his license in 2003, he immediately connected with Pat Wattam, and learned under her leadership for 6 years. He leaned on her mentorship to develop the foundation of his polished, efficient and detail-oriented service. But don’t let the professional business dealings fool you - he’s also willing to fly across the country for a weekend of jamming out to live music. He recounts one weekend in Houston - a frequent pilgrimage he makes to see friends and musicians - his friend extended an invitation to New York City. On a whim, he bought the plane ticket. That weekend, he saw what many consider to be the most legendary bands of the ’90s - Blues Traveler, Train, Jewel and Elton John.

Throughout his life, he’s developed other passions, like his affinity for the unique architectural styles of South Louisiana. “Nothing is cookie-cutter here,” he said. “All of our cultural influences and history come to life in architecture here. I never get tired of exploring new homes and studying the elements of architecture that make each one unique.” But above all, Kyle is most passionate about being a devoted dad - the one at nearly every practice, performance and event who’s never afraid to “make it weird” with a long hug or loud “I love you!”

Consistency, Compromise & Randomness

Before joining his family with Ronda’s this summer, Kyle made life as a single dad of three look easy for over seven years. But we all know better - no parenting journey is an effortless one. “My main job has always been to make sure they feel safe and heard,” he said. He emphasizes the importance of creating a life-work balance over a work-life balance and meticulously schedules activities and events. “If it’s not on the calendar, it doesn’t exist. And family time is the first thing on my calendar.” He’s leaned into fatherhood by embracing the activities his kids love most. For his oldest, Hadley, 19, that’s theater; his son Connor, 13, enjoys gaming with his sights set on becoming a YouTuber; and for his caboose, Presley, 10, it’s skincare and goofy TikTok dances. “I’ll admit, sometimes I forget I’m the dad,” he said, chuckling.

Presley has him on a strict daily skincare regimen and weekly facial routine. “This is all her,” he says, laughing and waving to his face. “She tells me which products are cruelty-free and have the best ingredients. I just bring the money to checkout,” he said, laughing. “And she makes sure I wear sunscreen every day. She gets on to me about it!”

Kyle prioritizes time both for small moments and unforgettable experiences with his family. Each year, they take at least one vacation together, and throughout the year, Kyle adds an individual trip for each kid to the calendar. Kyle and the kids visit everything from historical landmarks like The Alamo to Harry Styles concerts and colleges. Well, except for the Harry Styles concert, which was a surprise for Presley, which they, unfortunately, had to cancel after she broke her collar bone the night before while perfecting a TikTok dance.

“

IF YOU WOULD HAVE TOLD ME FIVE YEARS AGO I'D BE THE DAD IN A BRADY BUNCH SITUATION, *I would have laughed at you.*



“There’s no set way we determine where to take our next road trip, sometimes, I’ll suggest a place, but mostly it’s a lot of randomness. And when they’re ready for a Disney trip, they’re not shy about letting me know,” he said.

At home, they enjoy going to the movies, which sometimes serves as a lesson on compromise. “If we go see something like the LEGO movie, then the next movie is my pick,” he said, smiling.

Whether they’re exploring the country and enjoying breakfast in new places, or compromising on a Saturday night movie choice, Kyle treasures each moment of togetherness. “When they walk through the door, I hug ‘em, and when they wake up in the morning, I hug ‘em. That’s my biggest advice for any parent: hug ‘em, tell them how much you love them, and try your best to keep things consistent. Like all things, consistency is key.”

A Beautifully Blended Bunch

“I knew on our first date that I wanted to marry her, and I knew on our third that she would say yes,” Kyle said with a coy smile. Kyle and Ronda tied the knot in a small, private ceremony surrounded by their children in August, thrusting them into their greatest adventure yet. Of their six children, five of them are teenagers. But that doesn’t scare Kyle. It thrills him. “We’re going all in, and we’re going to enjoy this time while we have it,” he said. “Because it goes by in a blink.”

“It’s been incredible to watch,” he said about watching their kids become fast friends. “They all have such different and distinct personalities and mesh so well. It didn’t take long for them to make a group text and start adding events to our calendar,” he said, beaming. “We’ll ask each other who put a family night to SkyZone on the calendar and laugh when we realize it’s the kids.”

Apart from family nights, the newlyweds enjoy finding date night spots with live music, especially Yacht Rock. "We've seen Ed Sheeran, and we saw a Steely Dan cover band a few weeks ago - it was one of my favorite shows I've ever been to," he said. "At least once a month, we go see live music somewhere."

Their shared love of live music and creating memorable experiences with their family is a testament to the deep connection he and Ronda

share. "If you would have told me five years ago I'd be the dad in a Brady Bunch situation, I would have laughed at you," he said. "But we're all just thrilled about this new adventure together."

In this new chapter, Kyle is doing what he's always done - embracing life's adventures with an open heart. From his aspirations as a high school student to his remarkable journey as a real estate agent, music lover and devoted father, Kyle's path has unfolded in unexpected and beautiful ways. Through it all, he reminds us that sometimes the best moments in life are the ones we never planned but that we embrace with gratitude and enthusiasm.

“

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IT DOESN'T EXIST.
*And family time is the first
thing on my calendar.*



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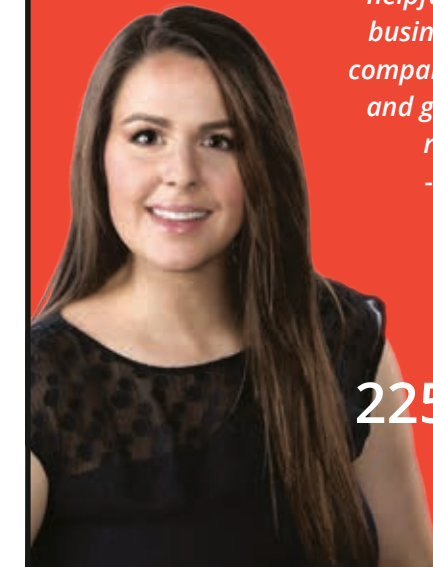
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Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket ~ Carrie Godbold, Carrie Godbold Real Estate

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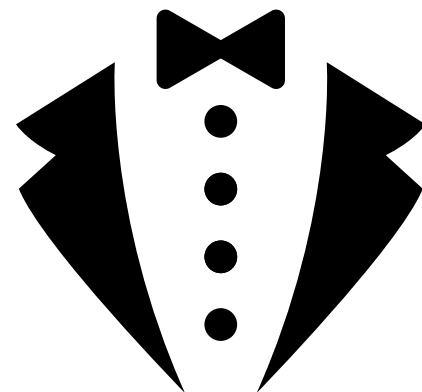
I played in Destin at my son's wedding. ~ Stacie Thevis, Greene Properties of Louisiana

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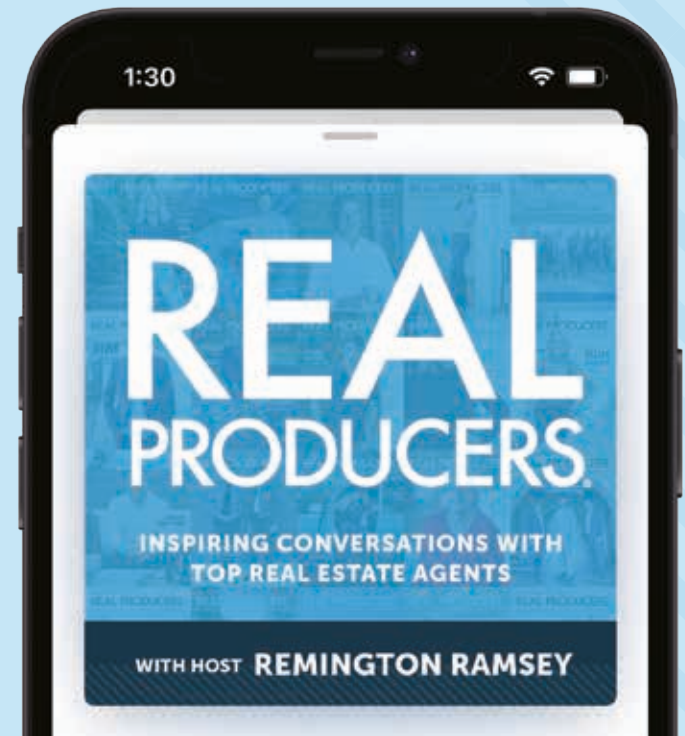
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