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Rob Yontz ★★★★★
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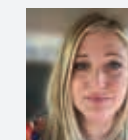
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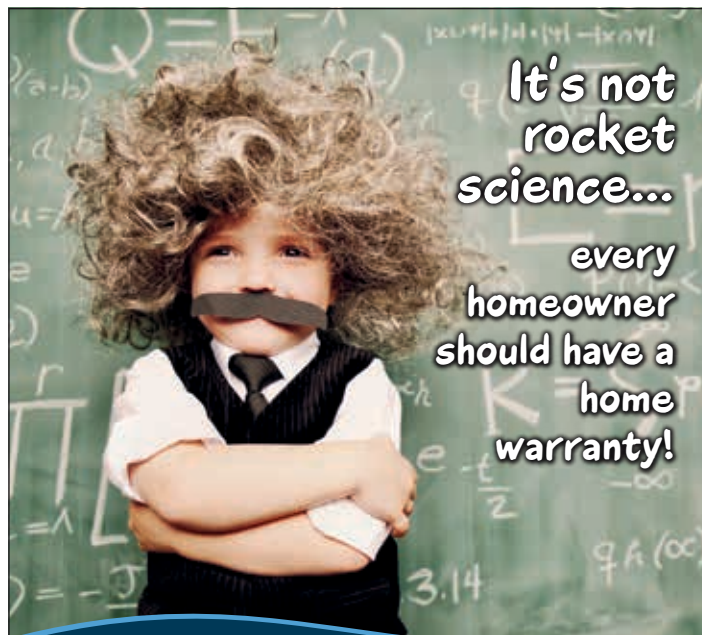
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DEANNA MENDENHALL- MILLER

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➤ broker spotlight

NO TIME TO SLOW DOWN

As broker/owner of Knoxville's NextHome Makers City franchise and team leader for the Knoxville Living Group, Deanna Mendenhall-Miller has worked hard over the last 18 years to carve out a niche for herself in the competitive East Tennessee real estate market. But she knows that true success is about far more than professional achievements.

"To me, success means being able to help the people I love," she said. "My husband and I have two children, a 30-year-old son and a 26-year-old daughter. They're both married, and we have two grandchildren. Time is something you never get back, so it's really important to spend time with the ones you love."

Deanna's early career was in restaurant management; she and her husband spent years moving around opening NASCAR Café restaurants. Then she transitioned into a regional position involving

“
YOU LEARN TO
WORK WHEN
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WORK AND TAKE
TIME OFF WHEN
IT'S AVAILABLE. ”



“

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THE ONES YOU LOVE.

”



point of sale systems for restaurants, hotels, and hospitals. But she remembers a pivotal moment in 2006 that changed her life trajectory.

“One night there was a bad wreck on Chapman Highway, and I could not get to my children to pick them up from after-school care,” she said. “I was in a complete panic. When you pull up and all the lights in the building are off and your kids are waiting outside on the sidewalk...well, I was done.”

Real estate had always piqued her interest, so at that point, Deanna took the leap—although it wasn’t easy going from a steady corporate paycheck to working on 100% commission. “It was a hard life lesson, but I wouldn’t change anything,” she reflected. “I got to spend so much more time with my children, and I was especially glad to be home and have more control over my schedule the following year when our son was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.”

After more than a decade in the industry, Deanna earned her broker’s license in 2018, and later decided to open her own brokerage. “Instead of recreating the wheel and having to build everything on my own, to me it made more sense to go with a franchise,” she explained. “I came across NextHome online, and I loved their philosophy and mission statement as well as all the tools they offer agents—and their colors are orange, gray, and white!”

A believer in community service, Deanna enjoyed being involved in 100 Women Who Care, a group that meets quarterly and donates \$10,000 to a local nonprofit (100 women each giving \$100). As a result, several years ago she spearheaded the founding of 100 REALTORS Who Care. But then the pandemic hit, and then the real estate market changed, so the group never really gained traction. “So many nonprofits would come

and share, and they just spoke to my heart,” she described. “It’s a truly great way to find out what’s going on in your community and what the needs are. I had no idea there were so many groups in Knoxville doing such fabulous work.”

Deanna’s belief in the power of real estate has led her to invest in the industry herself. She currently owns six rental properties and manages about 10. “I 100% believe in investing in real estate, so I want to do what I say,” she explained, emphasizing the importance of practicing what she preaches to her clients. Looking to the future, she sees herself transitioning into more of a managerial role, pulling back from working directly with clients and moving more into managing the team and the brokerage.

While balancing her professional and personal life is an ongoing challenge, Deanna has found a rhythm that works for her. “I think with any entrepreneurial position, you have to learn early on that there’s no nine to five,” she said. “You learn to work when you need to work and take time off when it’s available.”

When she’s not working, she enjoys gardening and spending time with her grandchildren. She is also deeply involved in dog rescue, particularly with the Tennessee Doberman Rescue. She likes books and switches back and forth between fiction and nonfiction. Most recently, she’s been reading *When the Moon Hatched*, a “romantasy” novel by Sarah A. Parker. If she had time, she’d like to learn to speak Spanish fluently and conversationally.

As for what makes Deanna tick, she describes herself as a morning person who likes to get up early, have her coffee, and ease into the day—and then she hits the ground running, diving into her full, busy schedule. She likes to be constantly moving. “You know that Tom Petty song...” she quipped. “*If you never slow down, you never get old.*”



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» partner spotlight

PILLAR TO POST
the
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Team

Location: The Graduate

HONORING EVERY HOME & EVERY CLIENT

Joseph and Norita Cruz's path to owning Pillar To Post Home Inspections in East Tennessee began when they met aboard the USS Higgins DDG 76 in the Pacific Ocean. "We used to stand watches together," Joseph recalled, "and after our deployment, we both bought motorcycles and went riding together in California where we were stationed."

After they concluded their naval careers, the couple faced the daunting task of choosing where to settle. Their decision to move to East Tennessee was the result of a lot of careful research. "You look at things that are important to you," Joseph described. "Our criteria involved places that had a good real estate market, a low tax burden, a good economy for businesses, a good rental marketplace, a good place to raise children, and low crime rates, for example. We considered Arizona and Florida but kept coming back to Tennessee."

"We initially decided to settle in Chattanooga," he continued, "but the Pillar To Post franchise wasn't available to us there, so we began to consider Knoxville. The more we looked at it, the more Knoxville seemed like the perfect fit. We took a trip out here and had a great time doing a little exploring and sightseeing. We saw the people, we saw the places,

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*I KNEW I
WANTED TO HELM
MY OWN SHIP,
BUT I WANTED
A BLUEPRINT.
—JOSEPH*



Location: The Graduate



“
EVERY TIME
WE’RE IN THESE
HOMES, IT’S
FOR A PURPOSE.
—NORITA
”

and after four days, we made the decision to move here, not knowing a soul.”

During his transition from sailor to civilian, Joseph had felt strongly led toward entrepreneurship. “I knew I wanted to own my own business and helm my own ship,” he said, “yet I wanted a blueprint. I wanted a plan for what to do and how to do it, so the franchising model looked like the best way to go. Pillar To Post had really good reviews among veterans, so I got in touch. I

really liked the music they were playing, so I signed on.”

Norita initially pursued a career in education, but during the pandemic, she found herself helping with the family business. “I stepped into the office role first and grew from there,” she explained. “Eventually, I got my home inspector license, and it ties in well with some of my previous background in construction and mechanics as well as my teaching skills.”

Fittingly, the Cruzes launched their Pillar To Post franchise on November 11, 2019—Veterans Day. Since then, they’ve been working to effectively juggle their business and personal lives. “It was much harder at first,” Joseph noted, “but at this point we have a lot of systems in place that help us achieve that work-life balance we want.”

Looking to the future, Joseph envisions expanding their business. “I’d like to see us opening up in more markets, offering more continuing education, hosting social events with realtors, and building solid relationships with other affiliates in the game,” he said. “And I really want us to continue giving back to the community,” Norita added, “particularly helping people who are facing challenges.”

Outside of work, the Cruzes maintain an active lifestyle. They practice Krav Maga (an Israeli martial art), are involved with various veterans’ organizations, and enjoy outdoor activities like hiking and biking. Norita is passionate about crafting and is a member of a Knox Makers in South Knoxville.

What truly sets the Cruzes apart with Pillar To Post Home Inspections is their dedication to their clients, regardless of the property type. Norita shared a meaningful observation about Joseph’s work: “The first inspection I went to with Joey was on a mobile home. He was very thorough and very respectful in walking the potential homebuyers through the report. A few days later, he inspected a mansion with that same level of care and thoroughness. I just loved it when I saw that he works in the same manner no matter what type of home it is. He is just so respectful to everybody.”

This commitment to treating every client with equal respect and care, whether they’re buying a mobile home or a mansion, reflects the Cruzes’ understanding that, for many, homeownership represents such a significant life milestone. As Norita put it, “For us, every time we’re in these homes, it’s for a purpose. If we can help somebody, it’s just beautiful.”

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR



About Michael Selcer

Michael pursued a career in real estate to prioritize his family and take control of his future. His hard work and consistent efforts have swiftly made him a standout in the industry. Known for his dedication, reliability, and commitment to excellence, Michael’s fresh perspective and adaptability have earned him the respect and admiration of clients and colleagues. He has emerged as a valued team member and a leader in the office, further solidifying his reputation in the field.

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“Michael is the first one in the office in the morning working on his real estate business. He is consistent which has produced a consistent business for him. He also volunteers to host Power Hour at the office, where he helps other agents get focused on communicating with their future, current, and past clients.”

Team Leader, J Lewis

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Hey RP community, so school is back in session! Let's review some frequently asked questions about this platform since it launched in Big Orange Country in the spring of 2021.

Q: WHO RECEIVES THE MAGAZINE?

A: This magazine is sent monthly FREE of charge to the top 300 agents in the East TN/Knoxville area based on MLS volume. This is an elite group, and you are each remarkable in your own right. To be in this group is truly a badge of honor!

Q: WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR BEING FEATURED IN THIS MAGAZINE?

A: The process is simple. Every feature you see has first been nominated. You can nominate REALTORS®, agents, affiliates, brokers, owners, or even yourself. Office leaders can also nominate real estate agents. We will consider anyone you bring to our attention because we don't know everyone's story, and we need your help to learn more.

A nomination currently looks like this: Email us at bocrealproducers@gmail.com with the subject line "Nomination: (Name of Nominee)" and explain why you are nominating the individual. Maybe the person has an amazing story, overcame extreme obstacles, is a rising star, is an exceptional leader, has the best customer service, or gives back to the community in a big way. The next step is an interview with us to ensure a good fit, and then we put the wheels in motion for a photo shoot and interview.

Q: WHAT IS THE COST TO FEATURE A REALTOR®, AGENT, OR TEAM?

A: Zero, zilch, zippo, nada, nil. The feature costs nothing, my friends, so nominate away! We are not a pay-to-play model. We share real stories of Real Producers.

Q: WHAT DOES THE PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

A: After someone is nominated we reach out to meet them in person and walk-through the process - from the photo shoot to the final article. Before any work to create a feature story is started it is understood you are not in full control of it. For their photo shoot each feature chooses their hairstyle,

make-up and clothing independently with some guidelines (which is at your discretion to follow or not). Each feature is involved in the photo shoot. Best photos are selected and edited by the design team and can be touched by multiple people to get the best look for the magazine layout. Photos are only given minor edits as we do NOT photo-shop images, create fake backgrounds, or otherwise make major alterations to the images. They are the REAL you!

Q: WHO ARE THE PREFERRED PARTNERS?

A: Anyone listed as a preferred partner in the front of the magazine is a part of this community and will have an ad in every issue of the magazine, attend our quarterly events, and be a part of our online community. We don't just find these businesses off the street, nor do we work with all businesses that approach us. One or many of you have recommended every preferred partner you see in this publication. We vet and get a stamp of approval before allowing businesses to join. Our goal is to create a powerhouse network for the top REALTORS® and best affiliates in the area so we can grow stronger together.

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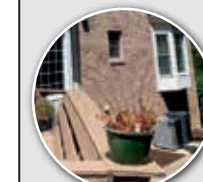
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Heather WOOTEN

EXP Realty LLC

With a career background as diverse as her taste in music, Heather Wooten's journey to becoming a successful REALTOR with EXP Realty is the perfect example of the winding path life can take. "I feel kind of like a cat," she quipped, "like I lived nine lives before getting into real estate."

After graduating from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga with a degree in human ecology and child and family studies with a concentration in early childhood education, Heather spent a year teaching third grade. But she quickly realized that teaching wasn't her calling, so she pivoted to the disability insurance industry, working for Unum in Chattanooga for the next five years.

Life took another turn when she became a mother. Her second child arrived only 20 months later—and her family moved to Knoxville—so she decided to

stay at home with her children while they were young. But even as a stay-at-home mom, Heather exercised her natural inclination toward active involvement. "I really feel like I was building my business for 20 years even though I didn't know it. I was working but just not getting paid," she explained, recounting her leadership in her children's schools, PTA, church activities, and their various sports.

As her children grew older, Heather took on a part-time role in the children's ministry at her church, which eventually became full-time. After eight years there—and as her children approached driving age—she once again felt the need for a change. It was at this crossroads that Heather decided to embark on a completely new adventure in real estate at age 46. "I prayed about it, and my husband was so, so supportive, so I just jumped in with both feet," she recalled.

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“

I REALLY FEEL LIKE I WAS BUILDING MY BUSINESS FOR 20 YEARS EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T KNOW IT.

Now in her fifth year as a REALTOR, Heather can definitely see how the skills from her past experiences have contributed to her current success. In particular, her time in insurance has proven invaluable in real estate. “There’s a lot of overlap in taking contract language and explaining it in a way that’s clear and concise and easy to understand—and there’s teaching and multi-tasking as well,” she noted.

When asked what she’s most proud of, Heather quickly remarked on her ability to build a successful career with her own business—Heather Wooten Homes LLC, under the EXP umbrella—after being a stay-at-home mom for a decade. “I’m just really proud that I’ve been able to apply all the knowledge and experience I’ve accumulated over my life and channel it into my business now,” she said.

Outside of her real estate career, Heather has a lot of interests and hobbies. First, she’s an enthusiastic Jazzercise participant—and she’s quick to laugh away all those outdated notions about the program. “Just come to class!” she encouraged. “You’ll be panting and sweating (and sore the next day), but it’s so much fun. It’s not the Jazzercise of the 80s.”

Heather and her husband are big outdoors people, and they love camping and hiking. Heather is also deeply committed to her volunteer work with the Knoxville chapter of Joni & Friends, a global charity that supports families affected by disability. “I volunteer at their camp every summer,” she explained, “and I’m on their leadership team for camp. I also volunteer every Wednesday morning at a group for adults with disabilities.”



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An avid reader, Heather devours at least 50 books a year, often listening to audiobooks during her drives. The last two books she read were *The Women* by Kristin Hannah and *The Women They Could Not Silence* by Kate Moore. “As far as music goes, I have kind of schizophrenic taste because I like all kinds,” she said, laughing, as she listed genres from current pop to 90s rap to Christian music to country.

At the end of the day, Heather's story proves that it's never too late to chase your dreams and build a successful new career. “Don't pigeonhole yourself,” she said. “You can do all kinds of things, and you never know where you're going to end up!”

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