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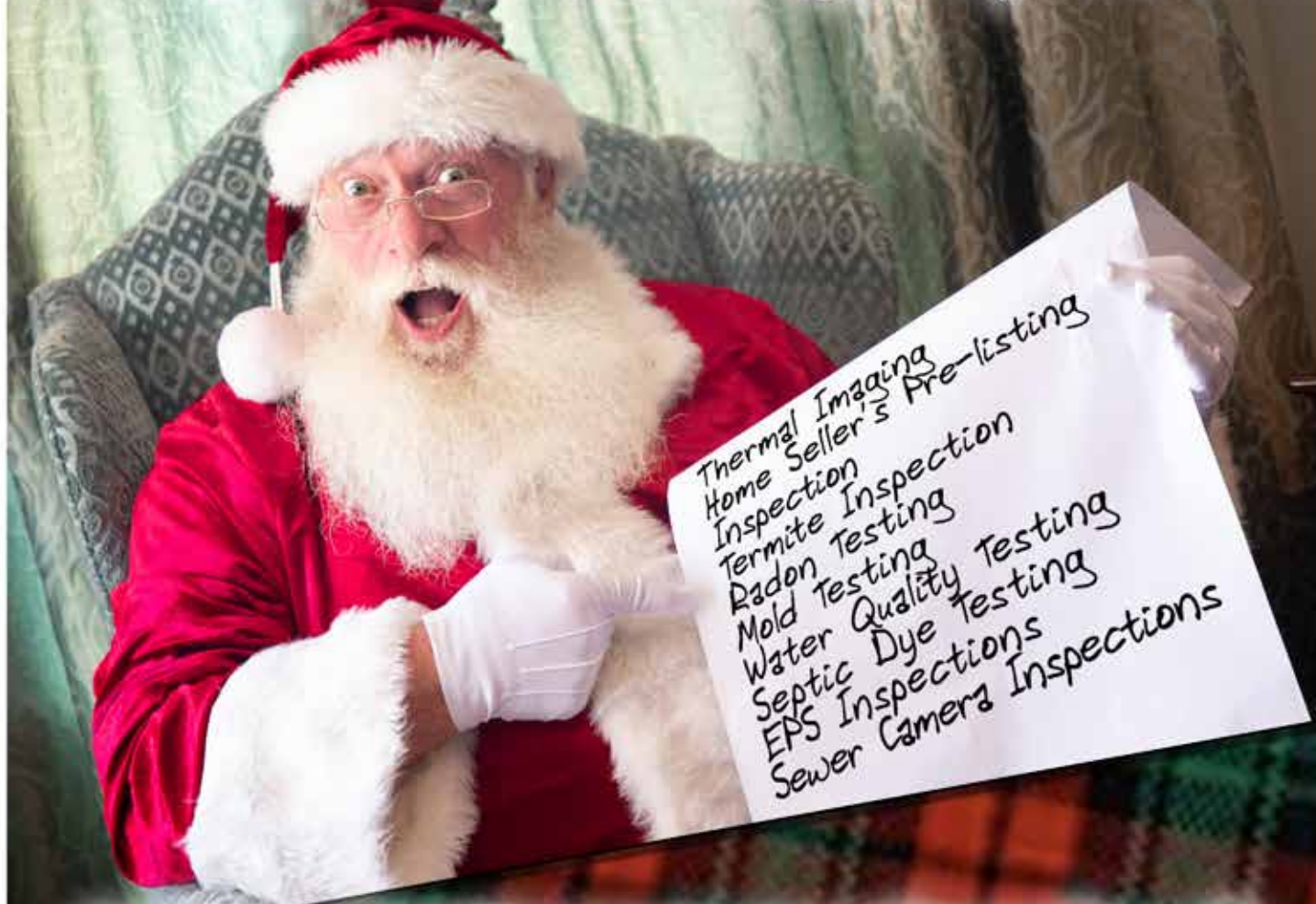
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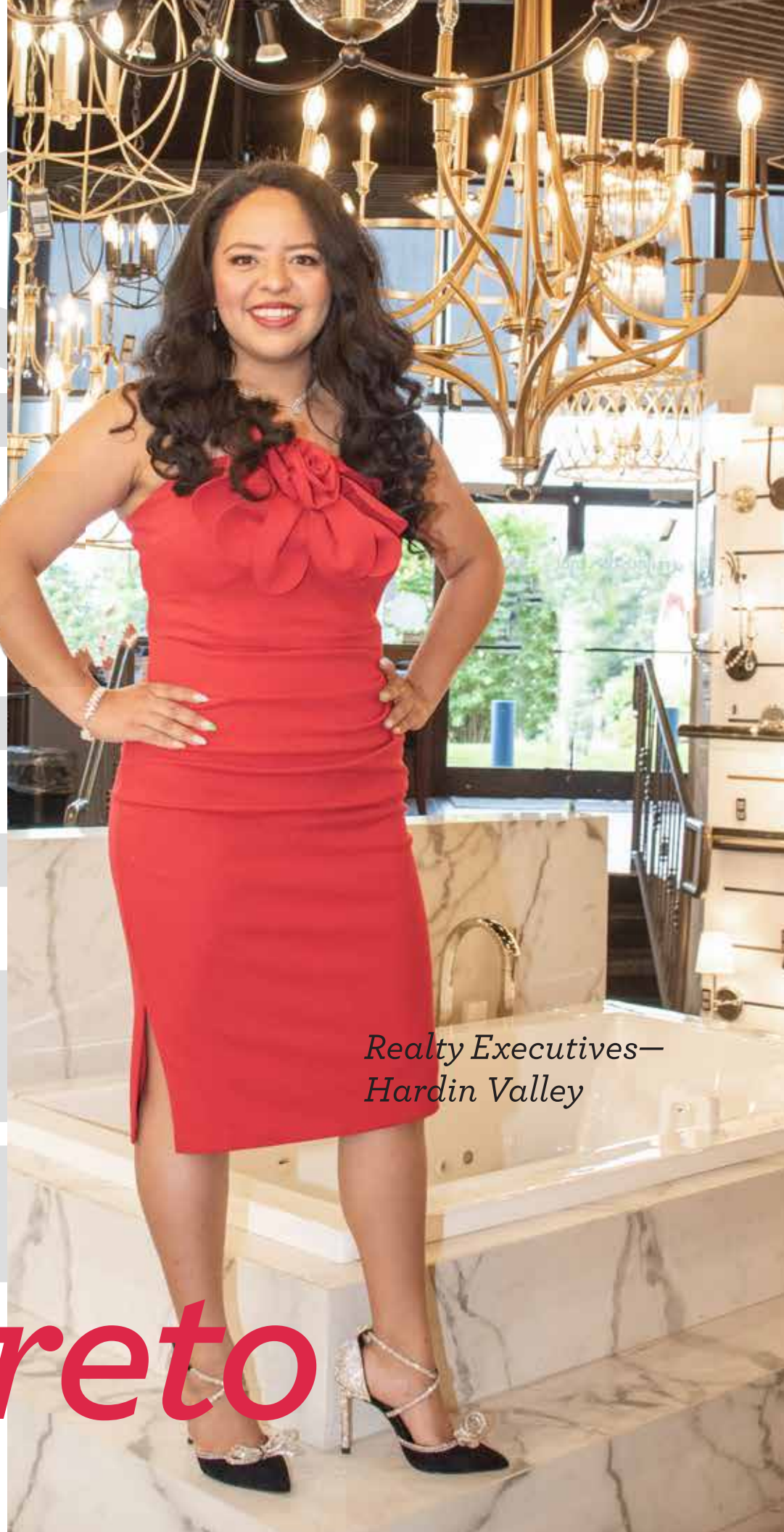


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By Lucy Reynolds
Location: Ferguson
Showroom

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▶▶ rising star

Carreto

LOOKING OUT FOR THE LATINO COMMUNITY

How many years have you been a REALTOR? Almost six years

What is your career volume? \$44 million (and \$10.8 million for 2024)

What are your favorite books or music?

If it's been a very stressful day, I listen to jazz or classical music—no lyrics. And since I'm Latina, I love my Mexican country music as well as pop.

I love reading self-help books and fiction. Recently, I've been reading *Imagine Heaven* by John Burke, about the experiences of people who have died and then come back to life.

When and how did you start your career in real estate?

My mom started investing in real estate when I was 16, and as the oldest child, I was always called on to help her translate documents and talk to contractors and lenders. There were some people who took advantage of her as a Latina, and that motivated me to want to help others in her situation—especially if they don't really understand or speak English very well. I purchased my first house in September 2018, and by the end of that month, I was signed up for real estate classes.

“

I WOULDN'T BE
WHERE I AM TODAY
WITHOUT THE
PEOPLE I HAVE
SURROUNDED
MYSELF WITH.

”

What has been the most rewarding part of your business?

Being an entrepreneur and an extrovert, I love the sense of community. I love connecting with other people and just feeling like I'm a part of something.

What has been your biggest accomplishment since becoming a REALTOR?

Starting Casa Collective in October

2023. We've helped around 43 families so far. I had dreamed about starting a team, and when I found Mayra Guzman, I liked her hard work and dedication and the way she talked about people. She really cares, which is what I was looking for. We've got a solid foundation, and now we can grow. We want to build a bilingual team that can service the Latino





“

HELPING THE LATINO COMMUNITY HAS BEEN MY PASSION SINCE DAY ONE.

”

community that does not get the recognition they need and deserve. That’s been my passion since day one.

What has been your biggest struggle?

Balancing the demands of my business with my personal life. I have other goals and aspirations, but sometimes I’m working until 10pm. I’m always making sure my clients are my number one priority, which is another reason why Casa Collective is perfect, because it has allowed me to have more time for myself and my family versus being out there in the field all day long.

What has contributed to your quicker success?

Honestly, I think it has just been getting to know other agents and

successful entrepreneurs, surrounding myself with the right community— people who want to keep growing just like I do. I wouldn’t be where I am today without the people I have surrounded myself with, and now they’re some of my closest friends.

What advice would you give to someone thinking about becoming a REALTOR?

Educate yourself and build a strong network. Go to every event you can, because you never know who you could meet. Get a mentor who’s willing to show you how to grow your business, and build a referral network with your clients.

How do you spend your time away from real estate?

Outside of work, I’m very boring. I like to spend time at home with my six little fur babies and my boyfriend. We like to relax, have friends over, chill by the pool, or build a bonfire.

If you could start again, would you do anything differently?

I would definitely give myself more grace and not expect perfection. Now, I’m planning to just keep doing what I’m doing, keep educating myself, keep treating my clients the right way, making them my priority, and I know everything else will come along. And I just keep trusting God, trusting that He has a bigger plan than what I see right now. So I have patience and keep the faith that everything will work out. Every single year, I see a little bit higher achievement.

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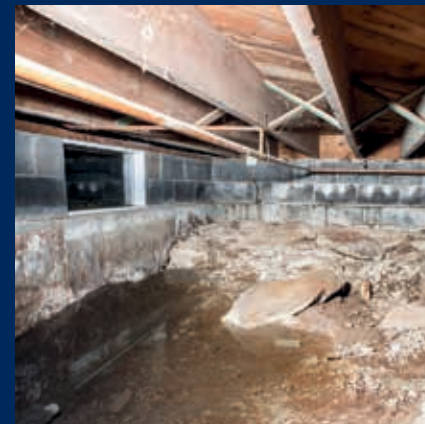
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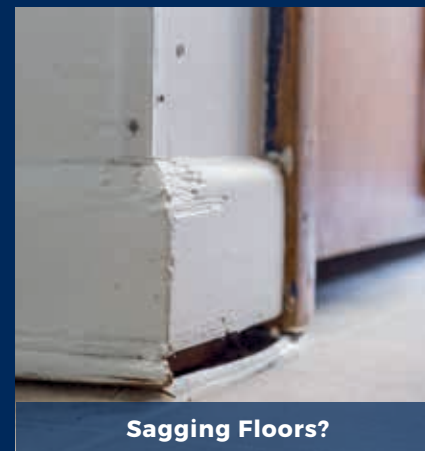
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▶▶ partner spotlight

By Lucy Reynolds
Location: The Manor at Hickory Creek



**DONNIE &
SUSAN BENTLEY**

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As Donnie and Susan Bentley, the husband-wife duo behind Bentley Home Inspection, talk about how they’re guiding their growing business through industry shifts and market demands, it’s clear this couple has found success in balancing their professional and personal lives in a way that works for them.

As CEO, Susan has had to adapt to the increased communication demands that come with growth. “There’s constant communication coming at me,” she acknowledged, “chats, Slack, email, texts, phone calls. It’s a challenge to make sure important things don’t get lost in the noise.”

Bentley Home Inspection aims for their inspectors to conduct two inspections a day, but the logistics of East Tennessee often present a challenge. “It’s

great for the real estate industry that so many homes have been sold and so many people have come into the area,” Susan said, “but our infrastructure hasn’t caught up yet. It takes so much longer to get anywhere. Plus, we’re dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in our Upper

East Tennessee market, where we can’t even get to some of the places we need to go.”

Despite these logistical challenges, the Bentleys find ways to infuse positivity into their work as they also seek to give back to the community. This holiday season, for example, they’re partner-

ing with local organizations to set up “toy shops” in areas impacted by the hurricane, empowering parents to choose gifts for their children rather than just receiving pre-selected items.

“
WE’RE CONTINUALLY
LOOKING FOR WAYS TO
BRING BETTER VALUE
TO OUR REAL ESTATE
AGENT PARTNERS.
”

In the midst of their busyness, the Bentleys' work-life balance is carefully crafted. Mornings start with a shared breakfast, a ritual Donnie insists on as the early riser and primary cook in the household. "If there's ice cream and eggs in our house, I have a happy husband," Susan laughed. "And if there's bourbon, I have a very happy husband."

Apparently Donnie is a big fan of ice cream. (lol) Susan described a sign Donnie has hanging in their house that reads: *Money can't buy happiness, but it can buy cows. And cows make milk, and milk makes ice cream, and ice cream makes happiness.*

At home, the Bentleys have carved out intentional spaces—like their back deck with a hot tub, and their peaceful front porch overlooking a pond that Donnie built—where they can decompress. "It's

our safe space," Susan described, "so we try not to talk about work challenges. We just focus on the growth, how awesome our team is, or what our tomorrow looks like."

“
WE'VE ALWAYS HAD
A VERY SIMPLE
PHILOSOPHY:
DO WHAT'S RIGHT.
”

Donnie is one of the most experienced home inspectors in the state of Tennessee, having founded Bentley Home Inspection in 1997, before licensing requirements even existed. When the licensing act went into effect, he was one of the first to be registered.

From the very beginning, I've had a very simple philosophy: *Do what's right*," he explained. "We've instilled that philosophy in our inspectors, and we've built a great team—our people stay with us. And since Susan took over as CEO, we've doubled in size and capacity in the last four years."



aka Mr. and Mrs. Clause

The Bentleys are also mindful of setting a positive example for their adult children, Shannon and Zach, who are now involved in the family business and looking toward leadership in the future. "We want to show them how to keep their marriage and family first and work second; otherwise, everything is on a slippery slope," Susan emphasized.

Looking ahead, the Bentleys are always focused on taking their business to the next level. This includes offering new services like HomeBinder, a digital home maintenance platform (similar to Carfax, but for houses), and Repair Pricer, an AI-powered tool that provides regional cost estimates for common home repairs.


"We're continually looking for ways to bring better value to our real estate agent partners. If agents are successful, then we're successful," Susan explained. "That's why we're involved in so many industry associations, too. We want to support what supports them."

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This is why Susan and Donnie also value being part of the *Real Producers* community. “Rebecca and her team work very hard in the community and do a great job of connecting people in the industry,” Susan remarked. “It’s such a great platform, bringing high-level conversation and high-level camaraderie. *RP* works with the kind of people we want to do business with.”

As Susan and Donnie navigate the changes and challenges in the home inspection industry, their commitment to their team, their clients, their REALTOR partners, and each other really shines through. By balancing growth, community, and personal well-being, they’ve built a business and a life that works for them just beautifully.

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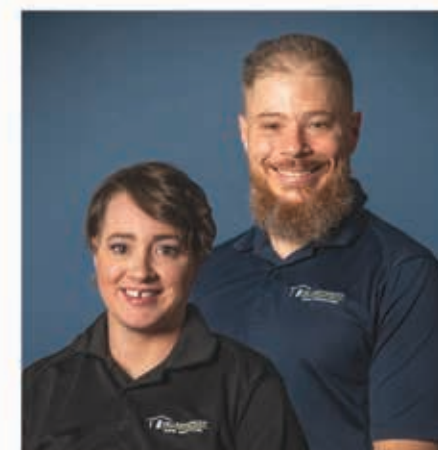
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Q&A

MEET THE REAL ESTATE MEDIA TEAM THAT TOOK KNOXVILLE BY STORM



QUESTION

What inspired the launch of Elevated Media, and how did you grow so quickly?



ANSWER

We saw a gap in the market—real estate media was stuck in the same old routine, and agents needed more than just pretty photos. They needed partners. So, we brought energy, creativity, and a fresh perspective to Knoxville. We focused on getting agents on camera to build their brand, and that's what really allowed our company to take off. Our clients didn't just get great media, they got a new level of confidence and connection with their audience by building their personal brand.

QUESTION

What sets Elevated Media apart from other real estate media companies?

We don't just show up to take pictures; we show up as part of your team. Whether it's coaching agents on-camera, above and beyond customer service, or just making the entire appointment fun, we're fully invested in our clients' success. It's not just about the media—it's about the experience, the relationship, and the wow factor we bring on-site. We strive to make the Elevated Media Experience one of a kind.

ANSWER

QUESTION

Why is video content such a big focus for Elevated Media?



ANSWER

We are a top to bottom real estate marketing agency that does everything you need from listing photography to Matterport 3D tours, but video is where the magic happens. It's personal, powerful, and it builds trust. When agents get on camera, they stop being just names and start being recognizable faces. That connection drives engagement and engagement + relationship building sells homes! We're not just making videos; we're helping agents become local celebrities by building their personal brands. Video is the future of real estate marketing and we are at the forefront of it.

QUESTION

What's next for Elevated Media?

ANSWER

We're just getting started. The goal isn't just to be the biggest—it's to set the standard. We'll keep innovating, keep delivering unmatched experiences, and keep raising the bar for what real estate marketing can be. As we continue to grow our mission will always be finding ways to best serve our clients. Watch out, Knoxville—this is just the beginning...



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By Lucy Reynolds

Ruthie Lyons

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RISING STAR TO TOP PRODUCER: From Dream to Reality

When Ruthie Lyons was featured as the Rising Star in the inaugural issue of *Big Orange Country Real Producers* back in May 2021, she was a promising real estate agent with big dreams. Today, she's a top producer living in her dream home, sending her daughter to college debt-free, and continuing to build a God-centered business that has exceeded her wildest expectations.

"I never anticipated that my little idea to get into real estate would turn into what it has," Ruthie shared. "It has been the biggest blessing to me and to my family. I really love what I do. It's fun every day. It's different every day. It's so rewarding."

Perhaps the most powerful part of Ruthie's success story is how it all began. As some may know, she became a mother at age 20, after her sophomore year of college, forcing her to drop out of school. But rather than viewing this as a setback, she credits her daughter as the catalyst that transformed her life. "She is literally the reason I'm sitting here today," Ruthie acknowledged. "It was

because she came into the world that I really got my life together. I got focused and got everything in order to be the best version of myself for her. We basically grew up together, and she has shaped my life in so many ways."

Now, with her daughter in college and her business thriving, Ruthie's perspective on her success is refreshingly grounded. Her mantra in challenging times? "Always channel your inner Beyoncé." That's what keeps her going when deals fall through or buyers walk away. But beyond that glamorous comparison, Ruthie's approach to business is deeply rooted in faith and authenticity.

"My business is God-centered," she explained, "and when I step out of His will, things don't go right. Everybody wants you to do things, but it's not always meant for you to do, and you have to learn to say no." This spiritual compass has helped her navigate difficult decisions, including walking away from projects that weren't aligned with her purpose, even when others wanted her to pursue them.

Ruthie is candid about the responsibilities that come with success. "There are a lot of taxes involved, there are a lot of bills involved, and people don't realize that," she noted. "The more you grow your life, the

more responsibilities and obligations you have.” As a result, she has learned that “no” does not require an explanation—and she’s very conscious of making wise decisions with the blessings she’s received.

For other real estate agents, Ruthie offered this sage advice: “Build your business the right way. Don’t ever look for shortcuts. Embrace the hard that this business brings you most of the time, because it is trying to shape you into the agent that you need to be. Don’t depend on others to do things for you—learn how to ‘catch your own fish’ and never stop learning.”

Obviously, Ruthie prioritizes personal growth. Her office bookshelves are filled with books she’s actually read, and she recently purchased four

more, including one about forgiveness. “I know I’m a girl boss in the business world, but sometimes you have to sit back and take care of yourself. You’ve got to invest in yourself so you can be a whole, complete person—and then you can show up great in your business.”

At the top of Ruthie’s bucket list is the dream of exploring the western United States in an RV—and if she had time, she’d like to learn how to build homes as a general contractor. She loves 90s music, and if she had to change careers, she’d be working in New York City’s fashion industry, collaborating with designers, attending shows and parties and rubbing elbows with the city’s elite (a dream from her pre-motherhood days).

Perhaps most telling is how Ruthie wants to be remembered: “I want to be known as a woman who literally squeezed the best lemonade with the lemons that life gave her...who, no matter how much she achieved, no matter how far she went, always reached down and helped the next woman—and most importantly, as someone who was a good wife and a good mom.”

As Ruthie reflects on her journey in the real estate industry over the last five years, from that first Rising Star feature to today’s feature as a top producer, she remains grateful and grounded. “I have to remember where I came from,” she said, “because as long as I can hold tight to what I used to be, my true self, I think it helps me stay focused on where I’m going and allows me to continue to dream.”

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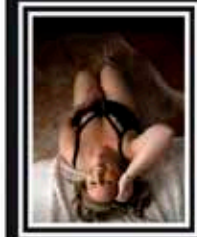
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“This is for you, dear realtor, who is struggling in this tough market. Keep pushing; keep doing the things you know you are supposed to do. I have not been in a market like this, and if you're like me, you might be fearful of what's to come. Take a deep breath, relax, and know that you will not only survive but thrive if you take the necessary actions. Stop buying leads and focus on the people who know and trust you. Pour into the people around you, and come from a place of abundance, not scarcity. A little over 10 years ago, I was homeless, living in my car. Five years ago, I was just starting my journey in real estate. Look at me now, ranked among the top 50 realtors in our community. I am living proof that if you do what you are supposed to, you will be successful! Be kind, and treat other realtors as you would want to be treated. God, family, business.”



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