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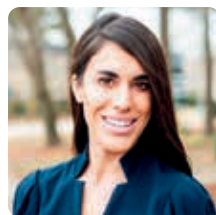
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Cover photo by Mason Murawski, Mason Murawski Photography

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# Raul Mendez

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▲ real producer

Story by Dan Steele  
Photos by Mason Murawski Photography  
Headshots for Erik, Jo, and Adalyeris by  
Lydieh V. Photography

For Raul Mendez, helping people and building connections is the most fulfilling part of working in real estate, and this passion has been a driving force in his success, whether working with clients or colleagues. “That’s been the most fulfilling part: the people I’ve met and the relationships I’ve created,” he says. “I’ve met a lot of different types of people and formed strong relationships with them—cool people I can call, who will answer not just because I’m their REALTOR® but because I’m their friend.”

A linchpin of Raul’s real estate success is his ability to connect with nearly everyone and his sincere interest in helping them succeed. “I think it’s my ability to relate to a diverse group of people and genuinely look out for our clients without pressuring them into a sale,” Raul states. “I’ve built our foundation on being genuine with people, and I can tell them when I don’t feel they should buy something just to make a purchase, which is a good thing.”

Although Raul has excelled in helping people make one of the most important decisions of their lives, he didn’t initially intend to be a REALTOR, having entered the real estate field in 2015 as a way to begin investing. “I got into it to start investing,” he recalls, “but I didn’t have money. I had just gotten out of the Air Force and was starting from zero basically. I thought I needed a lot of money to invest, and I didn’t know where to start.” Like many who become interested in investment via real estate, Raul found a free two-hour workshop purported to teach people how to flip houses with other people’s money. Buoyed by what he learned there, he soon found himself paying to attend another course to learn how to achieve his dream. “I was sold this three-day workshop for \$300, I think, and then at the workshop, they were upselling a \$30-35,000 mastery program,” Raul remembers. “I was trying to figure out how to take a loan out to pay for it, and then I took a step back and said, ‘Wait! What am I doing?’”

After identifying better, more legitimate ways to accomplish his investment goals, Raul began studying, and within 30 days, he had earned his license. “I was working for a security

company at the time because it was the first job offer I got after the military, and it was miserable," he shares. "I hated it, but it gave me a lot of free time, which was helpful because I used that quiet time to study for my pre-licensing course."

Now firmly established, Raul is able to pursue his dream of investing and has made it a cornerstone of his future business plans. "We're developing the growth and scalability of the investment side

of our business, with flips, potential new builds, and rentals, so it's been very cool to see that grow and develop," he reveals. "We're currently working on making the investment side of our business run like a well-oiled machine at a higher capacity than before."

When he isn't helping clients or building his business's future, Raul focuses on spending quality time with his family, working with his wife to homeschool their



Jo Perez, Director of Operations



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““““

I've built our foundation on being genuine with people, and I can tell them when I don't feel they should buy something just to make a purchase, which is a good thing.





10-year-old daughter, ferrying her to softball practice, and keeping up with their 2-year-old son. “Our son is about to turn 3 and is into everything: cars, superheroes, you name it,” Raul shares with a smile. Raul is also passionate about exercise, valuing its benefits for

health, mental balance, and stress relief. “Exercise is a big thing for me,” he says. “Fitness has been my way to stay sane through all the pressures, uncertainties, and stress in this business. I recently ran a marathon, so running and weightlifting is my go-to way to really de-stress.”

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“Growing up, my parents told me, ‘If you’re going to do something, do it wholeheartedly,’” shares Lakisha Brown. This advice has remained a guiding principle throughout her life, one she’s passed down to her four children and five grandchildren. As a teen mom, she paired her parents’ advice with a promise to lead a life her children would be proud of. Born and raised in East Orange, NJ, Lakisha now proudly calls Virginia home, having fallen in love with the strong sense of community the state offers.

Lakisha previously built a thriving cosmetology business with a loyal clientele, including a senior agent from a local real estate firm. Impressed by her people skills and business acumen, the agent suggested Lakisha would make a great REALTOR® and introduced her to Kathleen McKone, Founder and Principal Broker of KW Allegiance, sparking her journey into real estate. The two were instantly drawn to each other, forming a lasting relationship and mentorship that allowed them to stay connected as Lakisha launched her real estate career in Richmond.



Before getting her real estate license, Lakisha had the support of her husband, but shortly after, the couple separated, leaving her without a steady income and facing the uncertainty of a new career. “After that, I knew failure wasn’t an option,” she reflects. Despite the challenges, she was determined to succeed. As a seasoned agent of five years, Lakisha offers clear advice: “A lot of people don’t understand how much work goes into real estate—it’s not for the faint-hearted,” she says. “In anything we do, we get out of it what we put in, and real estate epitomizes that.” She believes everyone has something they can excel at and enjoy in real estate and is committed to helping others find it.

Fast forward to today, Lakisha has earned her broker’s license, closed nearly \$49 million, sold more than 139 homes, and successfully launched a boutique staging company, Center Staged Home Designs. Her story is a powerful testament to how perseverance and hard work lead to extraordinary success, proving that you can achieve anything if you truly want it.

# Lakisha Brown

▶▶ featured agent

Story by Maddie Podish  
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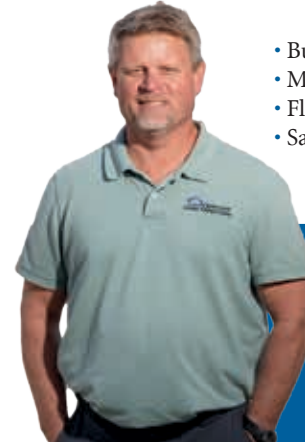


Now, she's ready for her next real estate venture as Principal Broker for Shoreline Realty, the first independent KW Allegiance real estate office unaffiliated with other associations. "At Shoreline, I'm so excited to be a part of something that offers a rich, diverse culture where we can thrive, create new standards, and grow without limitations," she says with a smile. "The fact that I have the honor to team up with Kathleen McKone, who is such a trailblazer, is a dream come true." This excitement stems from her belief that agents must have support, encouragement, and flexibility to build a business that suits their unique styles. While different brokers will run each office, Lakisha proudly announces they will remain one big family with world-class training, educational opportunities, and many future celebrations.

Lakisha's family remains her greatest motivation, and she's not afraid to show her children the value of resilience. She cherishes time with her grandkids, saying, "They all have so much personality and are the most precious little humans. I look forward to any moment with them where I can be still and be present. I love following their agenda of how we're going to spend time together."

Lakisha sees no limits to what she or her agents can achieve. "There will never be a ceiling to what I can accomplish," she says, "but I will always follow what I'm passionate about." Her definition of success is simple yet profound: doing something she loves that empowers her as a woman and a mother without anything ever feeling like a burden. For Lakisha, life is all about choices. "We have a choice to be happy in this one life we've been given," she professes. "It's up to us to choose a life filled with work we truly love."

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# RAFAEL CUBAS

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## ▶ partner spotlight

Story by Dan Steele  
Photos by Mason Murawski Photography



Although Rafael Cubas loves every part of his work, the best part of remodeling a home comes when the customer sees the transformation for the first time. “I enjoy seeing the client’s satisfaction at the end of the project when they look at the residence, whether a new paint job, flooring, or remodel,”

he shares. “I feel the most joy when when they step into the home or the facility and see the same structure but also a whole different home or space.”

Rafael and his team do it all: drywall, painting, finishing, and power-washing, to name a few, and every job they take on receives the same level of care and attention as the others, driven by Rafael’s deep faith in God and dedication to his customers to deliver top-notch workmanship and quality. “The work and quality in everything we do comes from the heart,” Rafael testifies. “We do everything to bless God and from there, to please our customers that we’ve worked so hard to earn to provide what they’re requesting.” The most important thing to remember, both in remodeling and real estate, is not to focus on the financial aspect of the work but, instead, on the customer’s needs. “Always keep the vision, goals, and dreams of the client in mind,” Rafael recommends. “That’s what helps create better bridges between you and the client.”

Rafael’s work allows him to help his clients and his team achieve their dreams. Originally from Honduras, he and his father came to this country about 30 years ago to escape the poverty and hunger they faced there. He hasn’t forgotten the opportunities he received and wants to share that good fortune with others. “I learned to work in this trade, and ever

since then, I've thought about those who come to this county looking for a better life, so I'm glad I can provide a job for them," Rafael explains. "It's the American dream; I'm providing jobs for them and also providing good products for the clients."

Although his clients' appreciation and joy stem from Rafael's skill and hard work, the success he's found comes first and foremost from his faith. "In my perspective, the success comes from having faith in God, trusting in him that everything will be good, that He is our provider, putting in the work," he declares. "Getting in there, seeing what's needed, and getting it done—no excuses—and helping those in need, whether providing a job or a discount for them or just working with them in their circumstances because Jesus asks us to help our neighbors and love them."

Rafael is grateful for his life and the opportunity to be a blessing and help others, and he hopes people remember him for his faith, his craft, and his ever-present smile. He wants to be a reminder to everyone that one can come from somewhere tough and still live the American dream.

When he isn't helping clients achieve their dreams and living his faith, Rafael loves to spend time with his family, whether going to church together, camping, or supporting his son. "We attend a lot of events for him

and encourage him to continue his dream of becoming a professional soccer player," Rafael proudly reveals. "He's going to Madrid for Real Madrid Foundation Soccer Camps, so hopefully something good comes out of that."

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# Top Agents, Great Connections:

## Peninsula Real Producers Fall Event Recap



Riverwalk Restaurant in Yorktown set the perfect stage for this fall's Peninsula Real Producers event, where nearly 100 of the top-performing agents in the Peninsula market gathered for an unforgettable evening. Lively conversations filled the room, and, as always, our invaluable vetted preferred partners were there to make the evening exceptional. Thanks to these dedicated businesses, nearly everything Real Producers does to support top REALTORS®, agents, and brokers comes at no cost. These top-tier partners—handpicked and highly recommended by the best in the business—are the backbone of our community. So, when you encounter them, remember to share your gratitude and confidently refer clients

their way, knowing they provide nothing but the highest quality of service.

The Real Producers team extends a heartfelt thank you to all the brokerages that came out to celebrate the peers we recently spotlighted. Our events thrive on this community's unique "collaboration over competition" spirit, and we're grateful for the integrity and mutual support you bring to these gatherings. It was also a pleasure to welcome some of you for the very first time, and our team looks forward to getting to know you better in the future.

Next month, we'll unveil a new Top 300 list, featuring familiar faces alongside new ones. Some agents will join the ranks for the first time, others will be returning, and a few



will secure their spots for another consecutive year. As we look ahead to our next event in March—a festive "Toast to the Top"—we'll be raising our glasses to those achieving Top 300 status for 2025.

Here's to finishing 2024 strong and welcoming the new year with even more accomplishments together. Cheers!





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# ERIC RUTHERFORD

RE/MAX Peninsula



## ▶▶ featured REALTOR®

Story by Dan Steele  
Photos by Rachel Saddlemire,  
Rachel Saddlemire Photography

**An unforeseen misfortune or change can sometimes lead to a better outcome than anticipated. Eric Rutherford recalls such a scenario his first-time homebuyers experienced. “The night before the closing date, the property’s water heater burst and caused significant damage,” Eric recounts. “Although the buyer was understandably disappointed, a better property in the same neighborhood became available the next day. This new home offered a better location and condition. The buyer purchased this improved property and was thrilled with the outcome, making the initial setback a positive and rewarding experience.”**

Oddly enough, the situation was a metaphor for how Eric began his real estate career. Initially intending to attend law school after he graduated from Hampden-Sydney College in 2011, life took him along a different path, one he has never regretted. “In 2012, I decided to explore a different path and started my career in real estate,” Eric explains. “This transition allowed me to leverage my analytical skills and passion for helping others in a new way. I quickly found that real estate perfectly fits my career aspirations and personal interests.”

Looking back, he notes that his sudden shift into real estate was not that surprising, given his numerous family connections within the industry. “Growing up, I was surrounded by family members who were involved in real estate, which sparked my interest and gave me a firsthand look at the opportunities and challenges of the field,” Eric shares. “I saw the

potential for success in real estate, especially for those who are dedicated, persistent, and hardworking. This background and my ambition and drive led me to pursue a career where I could build on those family experiences and make a meaningful impact.”

Starting with a local RE/MAX-affiliated team, the experience he gained was invaluable, and he was impressed with the support and resources RE/MAX offered; he has stayed connected with them ever since. “Over time, I found that RE/MAX’s reputation for excellence, strong network, and innovative tools perfectly aligned with my professional goals and values,” Eric expounds. “As a result, I chose to continue my affiliation with RE/MAX, as it provides the platform and support I need to best serve my clients and achieve my career objectives.”

Passionate about continually learning and adapting to the ever-changing real estate market, Eric has seen firsthand during his 13 years in real estate how crucial staying ahead of trends and developments is. “Continuing education is pivotal for my personal growth and for providing the best possible service to my clients,” he affirms. “My ability to adjust to market shifts has been key to expanding my business and ensuring I can always meet my clients’ evolving needs.” Ensuring his clients achieve their real estate dreams and goals is paramount. “The most fulfilling part of my work is seeing the smiles on clients’ faces when they achieve their dreams of buying, selling, or renting a home,” he declares. “It’s more than just a transaction; it’s a life-changing moment for them, and being part of that journey is incredibly rewarding.” “Whether helping a first-time buyer find a dream home, assisting a seller in moving on to the next chapter, or guiding an owner managing a property as a rental, those moments of shared joy and accomplishment make all the hard work worthwhile.”



Eric doesn't measure his success in real estate by the number of houses he sells or the monetary figures but by the trust and satisfaction of my clients. "Receiving a referral from a client, family member, or friend is the highest compliment I can receive, as it signifies that I've made a positive impact and exceeded their expectations," Eric declares. "It reflects the quality of my work, the relationships I've built, and the level of trust I've earned. To

me, success is measured by these personal endorsements and the continued growth of my client base through their recommendations."

Although Eric is tireless in passionately serving his clients, he still finds time to enjoy life, and one can often find him playing a few rounds on the golf course with family, friends, and sometimes clients when he has the opportunity. "Golf is a great way to relax and unwind, and it also

offers a wonderful opportunity to build relationships and connect with others outside of the office," he illuminates. "It's a blend of leisure and networking that I really enjoy, and it's always rewarding to share that experience with people close to me." Despite his passion for the sport, Eric prioritizes his family and their time together, ensuring they experience as many cherished moments as a family as possible. "My wife, Anne, is an attorney with the City of Hampton, and we have two wonderful sons, Roger and George," he reveals. "As a family, we love exploring local museums, trying out new restaurants in the area, and making memories during our yearly beach trips to Pawley's Island, SC. These moments of exploration and relaxation are what we cherish most as a family."

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