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WHAT'S INSIDE:**

Cover Story:  
MEGAN FINKE,  
Florida Home Group at eXp

Rising Star:  
JOHN SCHAFER

Partner Spotlight:  
SIMPLY TRAVEL

Letter From Gia Arvin:  
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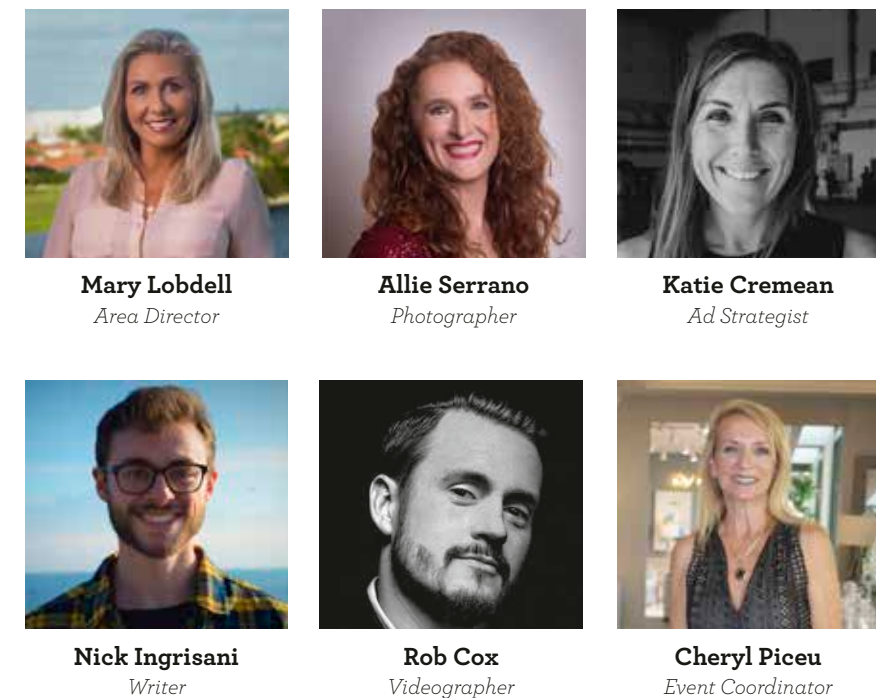
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# MEET THE SARASOTA & MANATEE REAL PRODUCERS TEAM



If you are interested in contributing or nominating REALTORS® for certain stories, please email us at [mary.lobdell@realproducersmag.com](mailto:mary.lobdell@realproducersmag.com).

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# HELLO TOP PRODUCERS! Happy New Year!

The New Year is a time to say goodbye and hello.

This January issue closes out our 2023 top agent distribution list. Will you be receiving the next issue as a top agent? Let's hope so!

Thanks to all who were featured! We can't wait to feature more Top Producers in Sarasota & Manatee this year.

2024 is a clean slate and a fresh beginning. Start the new year off right with a heart of gratitude and an optimistic outlook. Expect good things this year. Shatter sales goals. Break records and make it the best year yet! Make meaningful connections with clients and be grateful for your success.

Get ready for more events this year. Meet more Top Producers, network, and have fun in the process.

It is an honor to be your publisher and meet talented professionals in the Sarasota and Manatee communities. All of you are an inspiration with your work ethic and determination.

Until next month!



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▶ partner spotlight

Written by Nick Ingrisani  
Photography by Allie Serrano

# SIMPLY TRAVEL

## FROM DEDICATED MOTHER TO TRAVEL ENTREPRENEUR

### **SIMPLY TRAVEL OWNER MICHELE WIRTH**

“I tend to find out that a lot of clients have pigeonholed themselves into a certain type of travel. Then they discover when working with a travel advisor who can educate them about the options, pair them up with the correct guides or tours, and support them along the way... it ends up opening an entirely new world of travel for people.”

Michele was born in New York and grew up in New Jersey. She got married a few years out of high school and started having kids at 24 years old. As they grew up, she was very involved in their school programs and development.

While travel had been put on the back burner while their kids were babies, it was always something Michele hoped to experience with her family since travel was not something she was afforded growing up. One early family vacation in Florida was an eye-opener for her, demonstrating the profound positive impact that quality time away from daily responsibilities can have on people. Since that trip, Michele and her husband decided that travel wouldn't be a luxury, but a priority in their lives.

### **STARTING SIMPLY TRAVEL**

By 2010 her three kids were getting older and she realized she wanted to find a new path of fulfillment in life.

“My husband and I brainstormed together as we floated in the Gulf of Mexico and he said, ‘you love to travel and



you're good at planning it – why don't you do it for a living?’. So I spent two years researching and taking courses, then started my travel business under a host agency in 2013.”

Thus Simply Travel was born. Now in 2023, they're celebrating their 10th year in operation and are undergoing a rebrand of the business to Simply Inspired Travel. But the real heart of the rebrand is what happens in their process behind the scenes. And all of it is centered on maximizing the level of attention and detail that each client receives from working with them.

“We're training agents to be more specialized so that when a client comes to us and is looking for something

specific, we have someone that's not only familiar with it but really an expert in that field.”

Simply Inspired Travel sets itself apart from other travel advisors by taking the time to really listen to their clients and learn what they want. But more importantly, it's about honing in on the end result that they're really looking for. Once they figure that out then they're able to curate the best possible experience for them.

“Sometimes clients ask for something they think they want based on what a friend of theirs did only to find out through our questioning that maybe it wouldn't suit them well. Maybe something they haven't considered is a better fit. So the better we get to know our clients the more intuitive we become at helping them plan their travel.”

Michele has some clients who have come to her again and again over the 10 years they've been in business. But whether it's a repeat client with an established relationship or a new client she's never met, it's all about taking a personalized approach, asking a lot of questions, and figuring out what really moves them. Simply Inspired Travel is also affiliated with many different brands and suppliers, so they're able to customize someone's personality with the right brand for a seamless travel experience that matches what they desire.

A motivating factor for Michele's wanting to grow her business was helping more people access the fruits of travel. For example, some families want to travel multi-generationally with parents, grandparents, and kids of all ages on the same trip, but the logistics are too challenging to navigate. Michele and her team aim to simplify the process and make it all possible. "Whether it a destination wedding, family reunion, or a group of 70-something ladies who play weekly Maj jong, I have a heart for the population out there who's reluctant to travel but would if they had the support to do it."

**LIFE OUTSIDE OF SIMPLY INSPIRED TRAVEL**

As one can imagine, when Michele's not working she loves to travel and spend time with her family. Many of her trips these days are visiting her son in Colorado, her daughter in New Jersey, or everyone meeting in Napa for a family get-together. Michele also recently became an honorary "grandmother" and he is "the love and joy of my life."

Michele is always looking forward to what's ahead in travel and is eager to grow her business and help more people benefit from everything that travel has to offer. She's currently hiring for a few remote positions and looking to bring on more people who are eager, motivated, and love to travel.

"It's the one thing that I think helps to heal people after something crazy like COVID. The more people are traveling, the healthier outlook people have. I'm excited to grow, be part of that, and to give more people opportunities to travel."

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Written by Nick Ingrisani  
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# JOHN

# SCHAFFER



## EARLY BEGINNINGS IN LUXURY REAL ESTATE

“I grew up surrounded by it, so luxury real estate is in my blood. It is who I am.”

Born in Baltimore, MD, and migrating to South Florida at just one-year-old, John humorously quips that he decided to retire early to the Sunshine State. He grew up in South Florida – primarily in Ft. Lauderdale and Boca Raton – and became intimately acquainted with the Florida lifestyle and the local luxury real estate market. After high school, he studied at Florida Atlantic University and obtained a double major in Business Economics and Entrepreneurship.

His familial ties run deep in Florida real estate. His mother, Janette Schaffer, built her own luxury real estate brokerage with 40+ agents, and John’s father, John Schaffer IV, has been involved in various aspects of construction for over three decades. During summers and after school, John would work with his mother while also assisting his father. Even

John’s brother, Justin Hamilton, found his niche in real estate.

Surrounded by real estate throughout his life, John decided to explore diverse careers to be sure of his path, including flipping homes with his brother and working as a right-hand man to a luxury real estate developer with a multi-million dollar portfolio. He also excelled in roles at Merrill Lynch and Okta, earning a Global Business Development Rep Award out of all their offices worldwide. Realizing his passion for both office work and community interaction, he relocated to Sarasota in December 2020 to pursue a full-time career in luxury real estate brokerage and investments.

### BECOMING A STAPLE IN SARASOTA’S LUXURY REAL ESTATE MARKET

John’s extensive knowledge of the industry made for a smooth transition into luxury real estate. Upon arriving in Sarasota, he dove right into the community by





“We only sell luxury residential real estate, and only work on exclusives in certain neighborhoods and areas within Sarasota and her islands. I want people to know that we specialize and are masters of our craft. We’re not just general agents.”

John is surrounded by the top real estate teams on the West Coast of Florida within the Coldwell Banker Global Luxury Longboat Key office. The office’s impressive track record and stature boasts over \$5 billion in sales volume since 2021. He has strong relationships with select teams and individual agents, and his network both showcases John’s standards and underscores the caliber of properties he can access for discerning clients. John is also a business partner with his mother, Janette, and leverages her 22+ years of real estate brokerage experience whenever required to meet the needs of their clients. Above all, John sets high standards for his work and values discipline and consistency as the cornerstone of his approach.

“The relationships I foster and develop are everything to me. You never know who you’re going to meet and what they bring to the table. Helping sellers and buyers get what they want is very gratifying to me and this is why I seek out win-wins. To me, that’s how I get deals done.”

#### LIFE OUTSIDE OF REAL ESTATE

When not immersed in his luxury real estate brokerage practice or real estate investments, John finds solace in the Gulf of Mexico beaches, bays, and oceans. Whether he’s out on a boat fishing, watching the world-class sunsets, exploring new restaurants, or golfing with his friends, he embraces the flexibility and lifestyle that real estate offers. He loves to exercise regularly, explore local destinations around Florida, and meet new people from all walks of life.

In a constantly evolving industry, John stands as a testament to the fusion of heritage, innovation, and unwavering commitment, carving out a unique niche in Sarasota’s thriving luxury real estate market.

trying out restaurants, city/county parks, and local retail areas like UTC; he also attended city council meetings and connected with high-performing agents in his leading Coldwell Banker Global Luxury, Longboat Key office. Aware of the importance of a strong network, John began building a network of contacts that included vendors, contractors, attorneys, property owners, and everything in between. He also spent much of his free time getting to know the surrounding areas so he could best inform his clients.

“When I first moved to Sarasota, I drove from Clearwater Beach down to Sanibel Island and Captiva. I wanted to know what the lifestyle was across the Florida west coast so I could help individuals and families find the best

fit for their wants and needs. I’d go to different neighborhoods during the day and at night to know what was happening. I still do this! There is nothing like boots on the ground.”


John jumped into real estate at a time when Sarasota’s luxury market was booming at a rapid pace. As part of the Coldwell Banker Global Luxury office, strategically located in St. Armands Circle, he emphasizes the exclusivity and specialization of their services. He chose to specialize in exclusive listings for residential properties in specific locations, mainly focused on luxury and waterfront properties. John’s unwavering commitment and collaboration with a dedicated support team make him well-positioned as a key player in Sarasota’s luxury real estate landscape.



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# Megan

Written by Nick Ingrisani  
Photography by Allie Serrano

# FLORIDA HOME GROUP AT EXP *Finke,*

## *From Marketing & TV Production to Real Estate Success*

**“Not everyone fits into a cookie-cutter situation, so understanding clients on a deeper level is super important. I think that’s what sets us apart.”**

Megan was born and raised in the Chicago area. After high school, she obtained a degree in marketing from Western Illinois University, she began her career in television production. She worked at ABC7 News in Chicago for a while before transitioning to creating a lifestyle network dedicated to health, fitness, and travel called Live Well Network.

After seven years, the network shut down their lifestyle channel and Megan was forced to re-evaluate her career path. Part of her role in television was producing shows on rehabbing homes, so she decided to take the knowledge she’d gained around that to pivot into rehabbing homes on her own. It proved to be a fruitful transition that provided her with invaluable insights into the intricacies of the real estate industry.

### Starting Her Career in Real Estate

Megan got her real estate license to make the rehabbing process more efficient and her foray in real estate only snowballed from there. She partnered with a company

that gave her leads and quickly became their top agent. It became clear that Megan was much more interested in residential real estate, so she decided to shelve the rehabbing and focus on real estate full-time.

“I have a lot of training on rehabbing. I understand the budgets and timelines, working with contractors, and the financing side... but in the end, I really enjoy residential.

Megan began her full-time real estate journey in Chicago over a decade ago and brought her business and family to Sarasota six years ago. They have family in Clearwater and have been coming to Sarasota for many years. Over time, they simply fell in love with the area and decided to call it home.

Through hard work and determination, Megan was able to quickly ascend in real estate and make a name for herself in the industry. Her approach is centered on getting to know the details, lifestyle, and personality of each person she works with so she can adapt to their particular situation. With so many moving parts in every real estate transaction, it’s essential to be on point with everything at every step of the way.

“The gratification of helping someone find their dream home is very rewarding. Every transaction is different. Every client is different. All have different needs. So it’s

not a mundane task, you really have to adapt to each individual situation, so I enjoy that process of it. In the end, I just love seeing my clients happy.”

Three years ago, Megan began working directly alongside her husband Patrick, who had helped complete many of her rehabbing projects in the past. The duo’s ability to navigate the challenges of running a business while maintaining a strong family bond has been instrumental in their success.

“Working with my Patrick has been great. We’d worked together in the past, and it’s always been wonderful. He’s really enjoyed real estate so far. It is hard work managing a business and a family, but we’ve been able to through the years.”

#### Looking into the Future

Megan is currently leading a team of three agents under the EXP and Florida Home Group umbrella. She recently expanded their operations into the Cape Coral Fort Myers market. The team specializes in helping people relocate to the state – both nationally and internationally – and they provide assistance to clients who are interested in exploring different areas along the coast.

Above all, their focus is particularly on 55+ communities and active adult markets. They’re also new construction certified and can help clients navigate that process as well. Additionally, Megan is certified in luxury real estate, partnering with a network of luxury agents across the country.

Looking ahead, Megan envisions expanding further into the St. Pete/Tampa market within the next six months. She’s planning to extend her team’s reach to the Naples market for now, with the ultimate goal of having a team spread out across the state. Megan would love to focus more of her energy on training and coaching agents to ensure that the team upholds a consistent standard of excellence and service.

Outside of work, Megan loves spending time with her family and taking advantage of all the outdoor activities that Florida has to offer. And now that her kids are entering high school, she and Patrick are on the lookout for more opportunities to give back to their community.

Overall, Megan’s steadfast commitment to her clients, unique marketing background, and attention to detail bring a passionate and personalized approach to the Sarasota real estate market.



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# COVER STORIES



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**Katy McBrayer-Lynch**



JUNE  
**Moriah Taliaferro**



SEPTEMBER  
**Shayla Twit**



OCTOBER  
**Jessica Peterson**



JULY  
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AUGUST  
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2024 FLORIDA REALTORS PRESIDENT,

# GIA ARVIN



▶ from the desk of the president

Written by: Gia Arvin

## A HOMEGROWN VISION FOR FLORIDA REALTORS IN 2024

We enter 2024 at a time when our industry is facing challenges; however, successful professionals turn all challenges into opportunities. At Florida Realtors we are excited to begin this year reminding ourselves that Realtors in Florida enjoy the unique advantage of a state full of hometowns where new homeowners join our communities every day.

Each of our successes begins and ends at home, and our success is just that: homegrown. Florida Realtors is proud to advance our hometowns through advocacy and professionalism and ensure that everyone has a place in our industry.

Advocacy is at the heart of what makes our industry successful; behind every successful real estate transaction are decades upon decades of critical advocacy work that made that deal possible. Realtor advocacy efforts are

also essential in blocking harmful laws and other measures that could threaten our profession, our livelihood, and the growth of our communities.

As Realtors, we understand the need to protect our businesses but also cherish the importance of our relationships with each other. We intentionally cooperate with our competitors, and to do so successfully, we must adhere to our Code of Ethics and protect the professional environment in which we work together in. As your President, I am dedicated to promoting products and tools to increase our efforts as professionals.

Last month, this magazine featured an introduction to a new product available to ALL Realtors: Forewarn. Forewarn is an intuitive, easy-to-use identity verification and risk assessment tool designed to enhance your safety. To

take advantage of this new FREE product just visit [Floridarealtors.org](http://Floridarealtors.org).

As we celebrate our hometowns, we also remind ourselves that our real estate story does not end at our borders. The appeal of owning a piece of paradise extends far beyond. According to the National Association of Realtors' 2023 Profile of International transactions in the US, 23% of all foreign buyers purchased property in Florida.

We are a global family and I am proud to lead an inclusive environment that includes all of our practitioners whether residential or commercial.

I encourage anyone with questions to reach out to us and let us know how we can further your business. Individually, we are one voice – together, we are a strong power of influence and progress.

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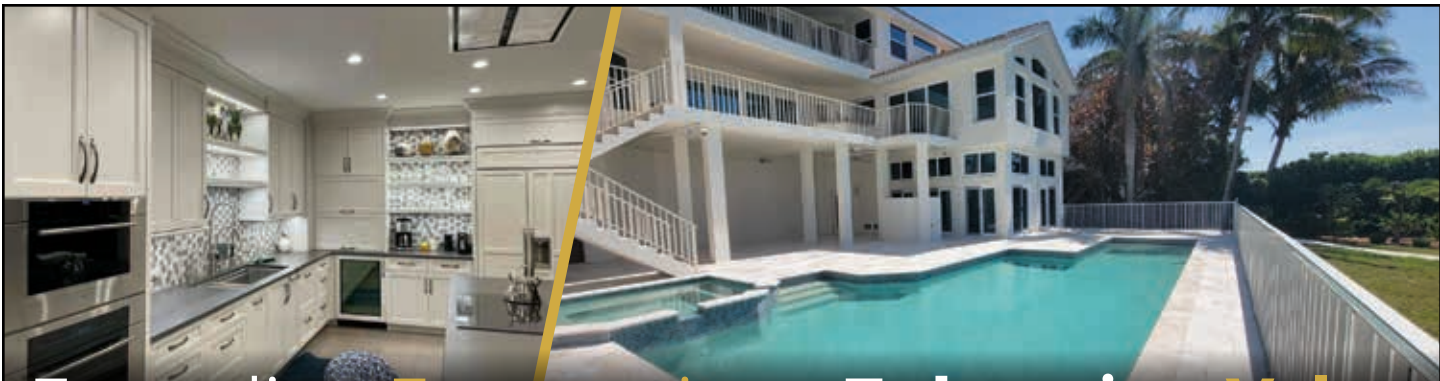
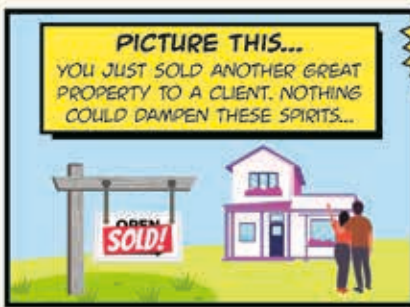


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