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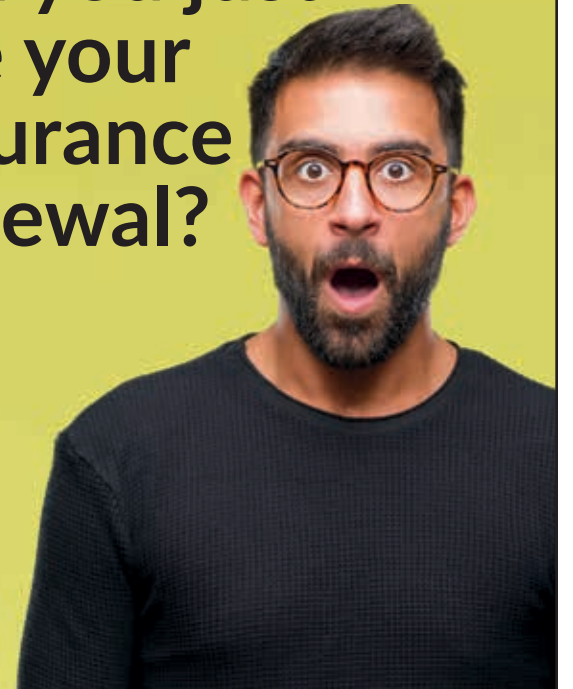
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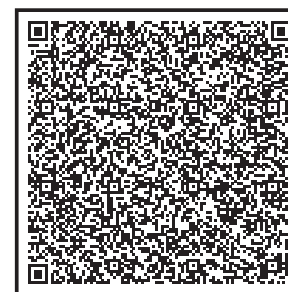
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# LEE CARNIS

## FIREMAN HOME INSPECTIONS

▶▶ partner spotlight

By Lindsey Wells | Photos by Liz Lopez

Providing homebuyers with peace of mind is at the center of the mission for Fireman Home Inspections. Owner Lee Carnis and his team of professionals thoroughly examine homes using the latest equipment and technology while providing clients with a comprehensive inspection report. After all, a home is one of the biggest investments most people will ever make. Fireman Home Inspections understands the importance of knowing and understanding the condition of that investment.

First responders are the unsung heroes; when everyone else runs away from danger, they run into it. At 16 years old, Lee Carnis, desperate to get out and help those in need, began volunteering at a fire department. “I

have always enjoyed helping people,” he said, “and I wanted to be a fireman, but I couldn’t afford to go to school for it. So, I joined the military.” Lee was a firefighter in the military for 15-and-a-half years. Some of his military time was spent as an instructor at a fire academy, where he taught service members from all over the United States and even foreign countries.

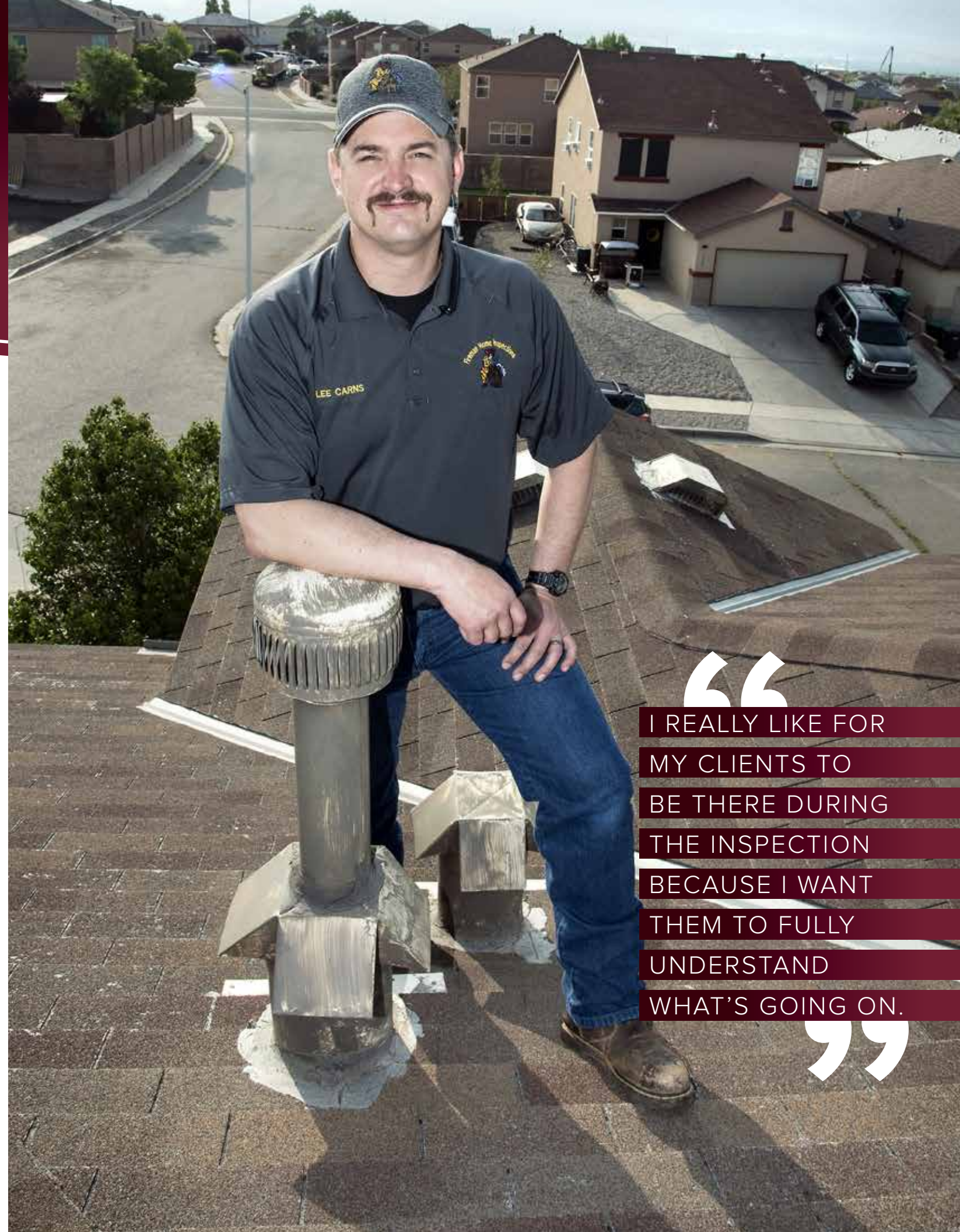
Growing up with a father who was a licensed roofer for 35 years, Lee has always been involved in construction. He built custom homes in Texas, performing everything from digging the foundations, setting the sewer and water lines, doing electrical and plumbing work—you name it, he’s done it. He worked for a company before going off on his own

and starting a handyman service on his days off from military service. “I did that forever, pretty much all over the country. Wherever we moved, I would start up a little business,” Lee said. “I’m the type of guy that can’t stay idle.”

Lee’s last five-and-a-half years in the military were spent overseas in England working with British contractors. “I would work on properties that were 250 years old, that had no steel in them; they were put together with wooden pegs and things like that,” Lee recalled. “That was a neat experience.” When he retired from the military and his family moved back to the U.S., Lee applied for and accepted a fire service job in New Mexico.

After settling in New Mexico, Lee began working with foreclosed properties. In doing so, he started thinking of ways to prevent families and individuals from being in a position to lose their homes to foreclosure. After some urging from a friend to get into the home inspection business, Lee went to school (even though it wasn’t required at the time) and became certified. Fireman Home Inspections was born in 2017.

Now, Lee is passionate about educating people on their investments. “Buying a home is one of the scariest things you’re ever going to do in life, and it’s going to take a major commitment. Suppose I can get in there



“ I REALLY LIKE FOR MY CLIENTS TO BE THERE DURING THE INSPECTION BECAUSE I WANT THEM TO FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT’S GOING ON. ”



and educate people on the property's condition that they're looking to buy and what they might expect in the next 3-5 years as far as major maintenance. In that case, they can make well-informed and educated decisions on what's best for their family," Lee said.

Fireman Home Inspections uses a thermal imaging camera on all inspections, which is included in the inspection price. As a result, clients of Fireman Home Inspections can rest assured that no hidden fees will pop up at the end of the service. Lee also offers pre-sale inspections to equip sellers with the information needed for prospective buyers. Something else that sets this company apart is that inspections are performed six days per week. "I really like for my clients to be there during the inspection because I want them to

“ I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO LEAVE YOUR MARK ON THINGS IN A POSITIVE WAY. ”



fully understand what's going on. Then, I make myself available to my clients six days a week going forward," Lee said.

Lee and his wife, Rachel, will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary this month. They have three children, ages 24, 22, and 19. While he doesn't have a lot of free time, when Lee can steal a few hours away from inspections, he is an avid outdoors enthusiast and likes to work with his hands. "I've always liked to build things, being in construction. It was always nice to drive around town and say, 'Oh, I put the roof on that house,' or, 'I put the water heater in that house.' I think it's important to leave your mark on things in a positive way," he said.

**Fireman Home Inspections offers 25 percent off all services to first responders, military, and retired military members. Call 505-353-2979 or visit [www.firemanhomeinspections.com](http://www.firemanhomeinspections.com) for more information.**



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# JENN CODY



## GOLD KEY REALTY

### HEART & HUSTLE

“I am going to work hard, save my money, and learn.” These are the three principles that Jenn Cody’s father instilled in her from a young age. Every day before preschool, Jenn would repeat these words, little knowing how profoundly they would shape her future. Today, as a top producer with Gold Key Realty, Jenn reflects on how these early lessons still drive her.

Entrepreneurship runs deep in Jenn’s family. Her great-grandfather started a machine shop, and her father continued the family tradition by owning his own business. “My dad was an entrepreneur, and my mom was an operating room nurse involved in complex surgeries. They both demonstrated the value of hard work,” Jenn recalls. The importance of integrity and a firm handshake, values she learned from her parents, are now cornerstones of her real estate career.

For Jenn, success in real estate is about more than just financial gain. “I’m not financially driven anymore,” she confesses. “It’s about doing the right thing and creating a legacy of kindness.”

#### Rooted in Albuquerque

Born in Albuquerque, Jenn is thankful for her idyllic childhood. Raised alongside her brother, she attended great schools and spent summers with her grandparents in Missouri. These experiences, particularly working on the family farm and in the machine shop, taught her the value of hard work. “I learned about farming, welding, and a different way of living,” she comments.

In her teen years, Jenn was a high achiever, participating in competitive sports like soccer, swimming, softball, and staying actively involved in school activities such as yearbook. Her love for travel began in high school, with trips to Panama and a summer spent in Honduras doing hurricane restoration work. These international experiences broadened her perspective and instilled a deep appreciation for what she had.

#### Discovering Her Passion

Initially, Jenn thought she would pursue a career in education. “I’ve always had a thirst for knowledge and always asked questions. My goal when graduating high school was to be that quirky teacher who would teach you something you would remember for the rest of your life.”

However, life had other plans. After earning a degree in international economics and finance, she worked in economic development in Sydney, Australia, focusing on wind farms and entrepreneurial initiatives. When her grandmother fell ill, Jenn returned to Albuquerque, where her father suggested she try real estate as a temporary job. “Little did I know that a temporary job would take me where I am today,” she says, now celebrating 19 years in the business.

“

It’s about doing the right thing and creating a legacy of kindness.





“

When I leave the real estate industry, I want to know that I left it better than I found it. That’s more valuable to me than money, accolades, or fame.

Jenn’s early years in real estate were challenging. “I was thrown to the wolves and told to figure it out,” she recalls. As a young broker, she often felt underestimated and had to prove her capabilities in an industry dominated by more experienced professionals.

“I was often talked down to, but I was a sponge for information,” she remembers. She overcame these challenges with her drive and determination. Tackling challenges head-on, she sought

to learn as much as she could, asked a lot of questions, attended inspections, and engaged with lenders to understand the intricacies of transactions.

In 2020, Jenn combined her love of education with real estate, becoming a certified real estate instructor.

**What’s Next?**

Looking ahead, Jenn wants to lead a life rich with love and laughter with her husband, Brandon. She dreams of having a family, traveling internationally once a year, and enjoying simple pleasures like great conversations and experiences over material possessions. “I don’t care about a 10,000-square-foot house or a Lamborghini. I’d rather live a simple, happy life,” she says.

Outside of work, Jenn loves sports and travel. She has visited 45 countries and lived in three, experiencing diverse cultures and lifestyles. Her favorite countries to visit are Finland and Montenegro. She loves cooking, whitewater rafting, kayaking, and spending time with family. She also values connections. “A good bottle of bourbon and a conversation is more valuable than going to concerts with millions of people,” she points out.

**Living with Impact**

“When I leave the real estate industry, I want to know that I left it better than I found it. That’s more valuable to me than money, accolades, or fame,” says Jenn. She is dedicated to making a lasting impact on the real estate industry and beyond.

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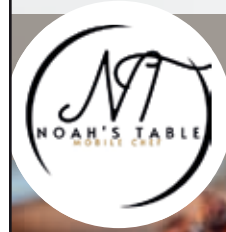
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▶▶ making a difference

By Dave Danielson  
Photos by Angela Adkins

## CLOSING IN ON NEW CHAPTERS

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Amber Ortega delivers that same important difference.

### TURNING NEW PAGES

As a REALTOR® with Coldwell Banker Legacy, Amber helps her clients reach the closing table—while they turn a new page in their lives.

“My niche is helping first-time homebuyers. I work with a lot of younger clients. It brings me joy to work with them,” Amber says.

“It’s a stressful industry, but it means a lot when you are able to help them through the process. Recently I had a 20-year-old who was buying a home and I got teary eyed. Here he was, not old enough to be able to legally drink, but he had reached the point where he was buying his own home.”

### CROSSING NEW THRESHOLDS

Before getting into real estate, Amber was a stay-at-home mother with her three children for 10 years. Along the way, she decided to share her thoughts and experiences with the world through a blog.

“It was a ‘mommy blog’ that really started to take off. At one point, I had 100,000 views in a month. I was working for companies like Disney, Lowes, Britax and P&G,” Amber remembers.

In the meantime, Amber’s skills had gained the attention of a local REALTOR® who hired her to produce some content for him, including his website.

Through time, Amber found herself doing tasks that moved closer and closer to the real estate function, so she made the decision to earn her license in October 2014.

Through the process of building her online community, Amber grew an audience that appreciated her good, emerging work in real estate.

“I transitioned that to real estate,” she remembers. “Clients came to me through the same medium I had been using.”

Through time Amber continued to grow her business and gain ground—recording around \$7.4 million in sales volume, representing 24 units in 2023.

### DRIVING HER SUCCESS

The fuel for her results is the people that she guides through the real estate process.

“I like helping people that maybe didn’t think they could buy a house,” Amber says. “It’s a great feeling when they tell me that it wasn’t nearly as hard as they thought it would be.”

Today, Amber gets a substantial portion of her clients from her content that she produces on TikTok. She consistently posts video content.

“I try to post every day. That’s my prospecting, primarily focusing on education to help the public understand our dynamic industry,” Amber says.





I THINK IT'S GOOD TO TRY DIFFERENT APPROACHES, BUT FIND WHERE YOUR PASSION IS AND TRY TO BE UNIQUE TO WHAT IS YOU.

"I really stay focused on educating first-time homebuyers on fixing credit, what their credit needs to be, how much money they need and more ... so they come to me with a good understanding of what to expect in the process."

the history and the whole environment," she says.

"We're also planning a trip to Arizona to watch the Phillies play the Diamondbacks."

**WHAT MATTERS MOST**

Amber's world is made much richer by her family, including her fiancé, Oscar, and her three children—23-year-old son, Robert; 21-year-old daughter, Kylie; and 18-year-old son, Diego.

When it comes to giving back, Amber has a big place in her heart for East Mountain Companion and their ongoing mission to help the local animal population. In fact, Amber and her family got their puppies from the organization.

**AN EXAMPLE OF LEADERSHIP**

As she continues moving ahead with her own career, Amber takes time to help others who are trying to start and sustain their own real estate businesses.

In their free time, Amber and her family have a love of sports, including watching sports events and traveling to watch their favorite teams, including the Philadelphia Eagles and the Philadelphia Phillies.

"We like to travel to see at least one NFL game a year. Oscar really taught me the game of football and introduced me to the Eagles. I remember when he took me to Philadelphia. It was fantastic getting to experience the city,

"I think it's good to try different approaches, but find where your passion is and try to be unique to what is you. So many people try to follow playbooks and follow what other people are doing," she says.

"For example, people have told me that I need to make phone calls, but that isn't who I am. I enjoy what I'm doing, rather than forcing myself to do something that I hate. So my advice is really to lean into what works for you."

Those who get to know and work with Amber often become her close friends—inviting her to baby showers, weddings and other family gatherings. They know that they can count on her honest and genuine nature in real estate and life.

Congratulations to Amber Ortega for the real impact she creates in the lives of those around her ... in turn, helping them close in on new chapters in their lives.

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By Beth McCabe  
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## Crafting a Career in Real Estate and Community Service

# KURSTIN JOHNSON

Real estate was never on the radar for Kurstin Johnson, Qualifying Broker at Vista Encantada REALTORS®. “I studied journalism, intending on becoming a television reporter,” she says. Now she is making her own headlines in real estate.



Describing real estate as a “happy accident,” Kurstin put herself through college by working at a real estate office and got her license at the age of 18.

“When I graduated college, I realized it was going to be very difficult to make a living in television journalism unless you are able to go to a small community to start,” she candidly comments. “The starting salary in 1991 was \$11,000 a year.” Realizing that she couldn’t live on such a meager salary, she pursued real estate.

At the time, her boyfriend’s mother needed help in model homes. “She worked for a builder called Leslie Homes and they hired me to be a hostess.” Kurstin was soon promoted, managing the real estate office, dressing up in suits and heels for a professional appearance.

A local expert, Kurstin knows all about Albuquerque since she has spent her entire life in the Land of Enchantment. Growing up in the North Valley, Kurstin enjoyed an idyllic childhood filled with outdoor adventures. “I played on the ditch banks and the Bosque, rode bikes all over, and played late into the summer nights until it got dark. Then I went to bed and did it all over again the next day,” she smiles.

Vista Encantada REALTORS®



Kurstin, along with her Listing Manager, Connie Ryan, and Transaction Coordinator, Pam Highstrete.



Kurstin speaking to a women's political luncheon

Little did she know that years later, she would be telling clients about the local area that she loves. Real estate, however, wasn't easy, especially adopting to different markets.

**TACKLING CHALLENGES**

"The crash of 2008 was a shock," she admits. "My phone went from very busy to not ringing anymore. I had to keep my office open, but didn't take a paycheck for all of 2008 and 2009." I had to learn how to do short sales and foreclosures, which was difficult.

The pandemic was another hurdle, but Kurstin was resilient. "The first thing you learn in real estate is how to pivot," she points out. "We are conditioned from the very beginning on how to evolve quickly and adapt to the changing market."

How does she do it? "I'm like a duck," she laughs. "I look calm on the outside, but I'm paddling like crazy. Usually, my stomach is turning somersaults." Her calm exterior, coupled with her heart for her clients, is a winning combination.

Licensed since 1987, Kurstin has made a name for herself. Currently, she owns a small boutique real estate company. "I have twenty people who work here. My goal is to make sure that they have a safe place to grow, thrive and feel supported and valued in any changing market."

**A HEART OF SERVICE**

What makes Kurstin stand out is her heart of service, volunteering since the young age of 18. "I have volunteered in many capacities in the REALTOR® organization," says Kurstin. In addition to being a real estate commissioner, she has also been President of the Board of REALTORS®. "That has really given me a love of making a difference."



Interview on New Mexico Living about the Heart Gallery

Currently, Kurstin is running for the State Senate. "It's giving me an opportunity to meet New Mexicans and see what's on their minds," she says. Besides running for office, she works on a board called the Heart Gallery New Mexico Foundation. "We empower foster children," she says. An adopted child herself, she understands the importance of a loving household. "I was lucky to be adopted into a loving home." Now she wants to raise money for things that foster kids need, making a difference in the process.

**FAMILY + FUN**

When not working, it's all about family to Kurstin. "I am married to a wonderful man named Wayne," she raves. They met decades ago when Wayne was working next door. Their love has stood the test of time.

To relax, Kurstin loves to read. "It's a great escape for me," she comments. "I love mysteries and I'm currently reading the Tony Hillerman books. They are all set in New Mexico and they're wonderful."

A gardener, Kurstin also likes to recharge by pulling weeds, tending to roses, and seeing the hummingbirds



SECRETARY

Kurstin testifying for the Real Estate Commission at the Legislature

buzzing about. She appreciates the small and precious moments of life that we are given every day. "Never take them for granted."

**A GIVING HEART**

From the time she started at age 18, Kurstin has always given back to others. That is her motivation in her career. "What a rewarding thing it is to give," she reflects. Her focus on a life of service defines her both personally and professionally, making her an inspiring leader here in Albuquerque.

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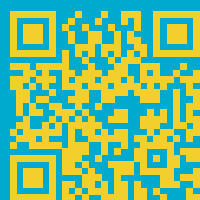


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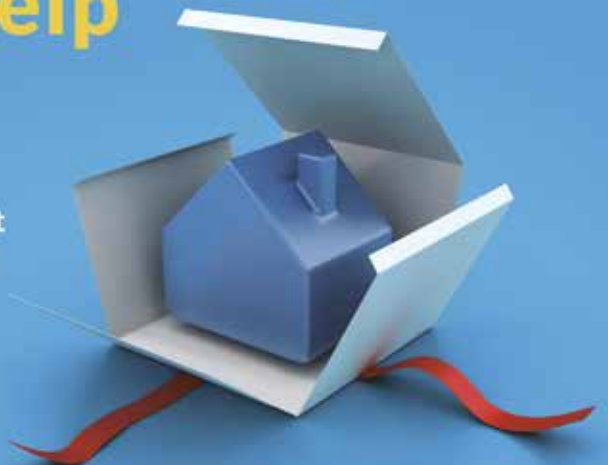
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