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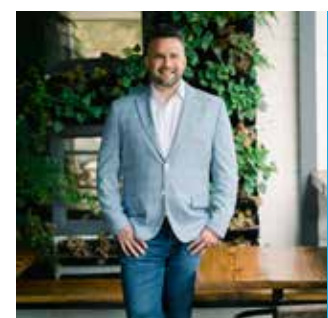


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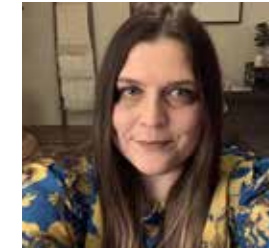
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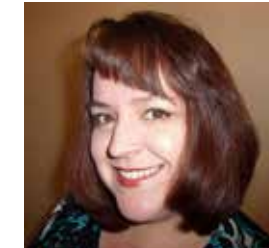
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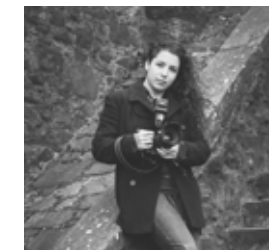
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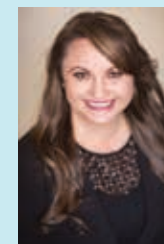
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▶ event recap

Photos by Ashley Maxwell Photography

COCKTAILS & CONVOS

We had such an amazing night at our Cocktails and Convos Silicon Valley Real Producers Event. We were so honored to Coco Home for hosting the event at her beautiful warehouse. Thank you to Jora for the delicious food and drinks for the evening. A special thank you to Nathan Fuller with Fuller Moving and Mark Landis with Mark Landis Insurance Agency - Farmers Insurance, for being co-sponsors of the evening. Thank you to Jordan Mott, Roxy Laufer, Nancy Reynolds, Denise Laugesen, and Coco Silver for the amazing conversations. Also a huge shout out to all of you Real Producers who were able to show up and support us. I love getting to network in person and grow this community. We can't wait to see you all for our summer event. Stay tuned for more information on that.



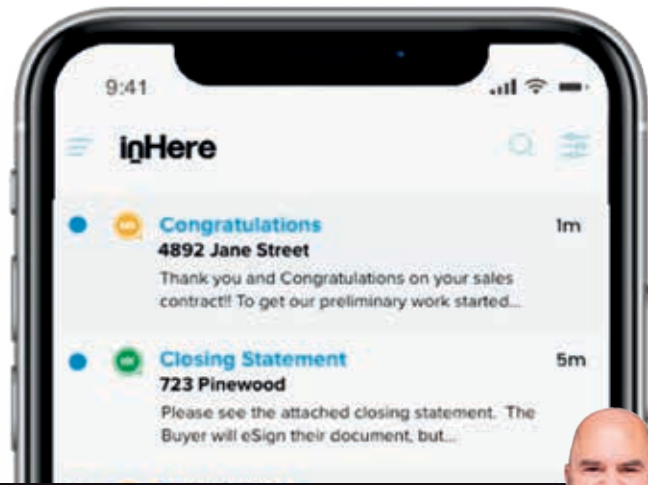


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▶ star on the rise

By David Cornwell
Photos by Ashley
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JOSEPH KARAKAS

SOARING WITH EAGLES

For REALTOR® Joseph Karakas, success can be measured by the human connections he’s made as well as it can by listings, transactions, or volume.

“I prioritize getting to know a potential client as a person first,” says the agent from Keller Williams Bay Area Estates. “I get to know about their family, their interests, and their long and short-term goals.”

His personal approach to the business has paid off.

An agent for just under three years, Joseph was the rookie agent of the year and quickly shot past \$20

million in annual sales, not surprising since he came from a sales and hospitality background.

“I started working at my father’s restaurant, the Chateau La Cresta at The Mountain Winery when I was 13,” he says, referring to his dad’s business in Saratoga. “Watching my dad work, I realized how he connected with people and how those connections often turned into business relationships and then into friendships.”

The same holds true today for him, Joseph says. “Many of my clients attend my child’s birthday parties. We regularly have dinner together with

many, who also attend events or wine tastings I host at my brokerage.”

“Getting to meet new people every day is one of the things I love the most about being a real estate agent.”

Joseph’s love of people followed him into real estate from the wine and hospitality industry where he had been the national sales manager for Marimar Estate Vineyards and Winery in Sonoma.

Prior to that, he had been national sales manager for two distilleries he helped open and worked in the high-profile positions of maitre’d and sommelier of The Plumed Horse, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Saratoga.

“GETTING TO MEET NEW PEOPLE EVERY DAY IS ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE THE MOST ABOUT BEING A REAL ESTATE AGENT.”

Away from the office, Joseph and his wife, Shar, are parents to one son, Elias, soon to celebrate his second birthday. “Getting married and having a child has been so incredibly life-changing,” he says. “My life couldn’t be better with the two of them and even when I’m having a bad day, I can’t help but still feel blessed.”

At this stage of his life, Joseph says his perfect Saturday might involve a visit to Home Depot to pick up items for one of several home projects he’s working on. Later, he’d go grocery shopping and prepare a gourmet dinner for the family, maybe barbecuing on his Santa Maria-style grill. “I also like to be as active as possible.

I am not a guy that can just sit on the couch,” he says.

Among his off-the-couch activities are playing on his local USTA men’s tennis team and working out and cycling when time allows. He’s also involved with the KW Cares program and plays in the annual brokerage softball tournament to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

As for his future in the business, Joseph would like to parlay his present success into becoming a mega-agent one day and sees no reason that won’t happen if he continues to build and strengthen his connections with existing clients and

professionals and foster relationships with new ones.

For would-be and beginning REALTORS®, his advice for getting started is simple. “If you want to soar with eagles, then don’t hang out with turkeys,” Joseph says. “In other words, surround yourself with successful people who are doing what you want to be doing.”

He also advises new agents looking for a brokerage not just to go with the one with the biggest split but, like he did with Keller Williams, find the one that offers the best classes and education. “Don’t make that decision hastily,” he says. “Long-term growth is based on a variety of factors and finding the right fit for yourself at first is so important to your future.”

And his final piece of advice — with Joseph assuring everyone that he’s unequivocally a loyal 49ers fan and dutifully hates the Cowboys — comes from Cowboy running back Emmitt Smith via Joseph’s mentor, Chuck Nunnally. “Some days I may win and some days I may lose, but I will never be defeated.”

“This industry can be so lucrative and the fact that there’s really no limit to financial success is a huge motivator,” Joseph says. “Opportunity is everywhere and being in a career where I can constantly seek the next goal and the next challenge is my favorite part.”

“It’s the endless potential to climb that keeps me motivated to push harder and harder every day.”



joseph karakas

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▶ partner spotlight

By David Cornwell
Photos by Ashley Maxwell Photography



Freemodel

A New Take On Pre-Sales Renovations

For John Garner, there's only one way to truly fail and that's not to try.



An entrepreneur's entrepreneur, John is CEO and co-founder of Freemodel, his seventh successful Silicon Valley start-up. Launched in 2020, the pre-sales real estate renovation company now operates in California, Texas and Florida.

John says the concept of Freemodel is simple: help sellers maximize the sale price of their homes by providing a turnkey pre-sales renovation service, the secret sauce of which is its project directors.

"I know firsthand the pure agony of managing renovation projects," John says, referring to his years as a developer and agent. Among his other business concerns, he's currently the principal of Rise 8 Properties, a property acquisition and management firm.

"That's one of the reasons I started Freemodel, to make it easy for agents to help their homeowner clients do profitable pre-sales renovations."

As for that secret sauce, John has said, "We originally thought we just needed guys with tool belts, but it turned out what we needed was designers with iPads."



In setting up the business, he says his team soon found designers with their own established businesses were not only very talented but welcomed the opportunity to continue to have autonomy and creative control over their designs while making more money. As a result, John says Freemodel has been able to attract the best of the best.

He says the Freemodel process works like this:

The project director first meets in person with the agent or client, collaborates on the design including finishes and other details, drafts the scope of the project and hires highly trusted and vetted subcontractors.

Once finished, the project director takes care of all inspections. There's no upfront cost and payment can be deferred until the house sells, he says.

One of the best features of the process, he says, is Freemodel's proprietary technology platform that helps empower project directors to manage renovations more effectively and efficiently.

"The project director is the single point of contact who has the responsibility and authority to make sure things go right," John says. "So clients always know where to turn for accountability."



“I would say we are the general contractor, designer and project manager all rolled into one.”

Calling the Bay Area home since the mid-90s, Laura had studied to become a physical therapist but ended up in pharmaceutical sales for 20 years instead before joining Freemodel.

Outside the office, she says you might find her playing pickleball, taking in live music, trying out new restaurants, or just chilling on the couch at home.

Debbie Lewis, Project Director - Santa Clara

A Bay Area native and graduate of the West Valley Interior Design Program, Debbie brings more than a dozen years of industry experience to Freemodel.

Like all project directors, she says, one of her primary goals is making the process as smooth and seamless as possible. Key to that, she says, is a project director’s ability to coordinate the talents of those working to meet client goals.

She says her greatest joy comes in creating solutions for spaces that clients have struggled with, saying “Their worst spaces are often my best projects.”

When not working, she says she enjoys spending time with family and friends and taking in “her ultimate escape—nature” any chance she gets with her two favorite people in the world, her children, Ellie and Tyler.

Pandora Chok, Project Director - Santa Clara

Pandora says another key to a project manager’s job is being able to work well with clients and really understand what they want.

“I love working closely with clients to understand their unique needs and preferences and then use my expertise to deliver interior spaces that exceed their expectations,” she says.

“Freemodel project directors all offer a high level of creativity, attention to detail and professionalism,” she says, adding each is also skilled at managing projects from start to finish.

In her spare time she enjoys time with her family and exploring different cultures and foods.

Korey McKean, Project Director - San Mateo

Korey’s family has gone to the dogs, literally. They’re involved in the Beagle Freedom Project, which rehuses beagles from around the world,

““””

I wanted to be in control of my own destiny and pushed myself to start my own business.

and they’ve also served as Puppy Raisers for Guide Dogs for the Blind in the past.

With a degree in interior design, she first pursued a teaching career but eventually circled back to design, she says, and started her own successful interior design firm before joining Freemodel.

As a project director, she says a goal is to always use creativity and logic to solve design problems. “The best part of working in design and renovation is creating a space that is functional, aesthetically pleasing and improves the quality of life for the people who occupy the space.”



Born and raised in Southern California, John has a BA from the University of California, Berkeley and an MBA from the UCLA Anderson School of Management.

He became a highly successful entrepreneur after a career in data networking sales and management and then mortgages. Then one day, he says “I reached a point where I realized the job I had at that time would be the last in which I worked for anyone else.”

“I wanted to be in control of my own destiny and pushed myself to start my own business.”

Married to his wife Sylvie since February 29, 2008, he jokes that because of the date he only has to buy an anniversary gift every four years.

His interests away from Freemodel include tennis, surfing, skiing and snowboarding, to mention a few. And anything he gets a chance to do with 13-year-old daughter Revell, “our pride and joy,” is extra special, he says.

Freemodel’s secret sauce

Here are a few of the folks who make Freemodel work:

Laura Klein – Director of Partnerships, Northern California

“I love that we help homeowners flip their own houses and reap the rewards instead of an investor doing it and taking all the profits,” Laura says. “It’s a win-win for everyone—the agent, homeowner and the local subs.”

► cover story

By Zachary Cohen
Photos and Cover Photo by
Ashley Maxwell Photography



JULIE WYSS

A FAMILY AFFAIR

When Julie Wyss began her real estate sales career in 2008, her vision was to grow her individual business as much as possible, bring the rewards back to her family, and enjoy an amazing lifestyle. Over the following years, she made that dream a reality, building her business despite the challenging years of the Great Recession.

Julie had achieved her dream in real estate, seemingly reaching the top of the mountain. And yet, there was even more fulfillment to be uncovered. In 2016, her business became a family affair when her daughter, Bianca, and husband, Mark, came aboard. With the team's latest family addition — Julie and Mark's youngest son, Kyle — Wyss Group Real Estate Professionals has settled into its identity as a bonafide family business.

So, what's it like for Julie to lead a family team that's also one of Silicon Valley's best?

"It brings tears to my eyes, which is unusual because I'm not a super sentimental person," she shares. "When you're raising a family, and you're really all in, there's nothing you want more than to do a great job with your family, to spend time, and to watch them thrive. I called my family my life's work. When I look at my kids and feel, damn, I did a good job, it's one of the most incredible things in the world. And now, to have them close on a

professional level, it's about as good as it gets. It's the biggest gift I could ever imagine."

Building the Team

Julie's professional background includes several years as a fitness center owner, an 8-year stretch in mortgage lending, and 16 years as a real estate sales professional.

Julie started selling real estate when many professionals were struggling or leaving the business altogether. She began at the bottom

of the industry, slowly climbing her way to success.

After a four-year stint with Compass, Julie returned to Keller Williams in 2022. Her team includes her daughter, Bianca, the group's Business Manager, and her husband, Mark, an active REALTOR® and Julie's business partner.

"Bianca knows the business inside and out. She's my right-hand person," Julie boasts. "She keeps us on track with business planning, tasks, and reaching out to past clients. She's absolutely incredible."





WHEN I FIRST GOT INTO IT I NEVER WOULD'VE GUESSED IT'D TURN INTO A FAMILY BUSINESS. **I LOVE IT SO MUCH.**

for being a great family person, a great friend, and being super healthy and fit. I also want to be known for majorly loving life and living it to its fullest," Julie smiles.

As Julie reflects on her journey, she marvels at the state of her business. Earlier in her real estate career, she

imagined she would retire young. But as her business has evolved, so have her dreams. Now, she can't wait to continue growing the team alongside Mark, Bianca, and Kyle.

"When I first got into it, I never would've guessed it'd turn into a family business. I love it so much."



"And my husband, Mark, joined me the same year Bianca did. He retired as a Captain of the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department. His role is very important. He works best with buyers and is great with walking people through the process and helping them feel safe. He's also in charge of the business finances and our personal finances. He takes a lot of weight off my shoulders so I can focus on producing."

Julie's youngest son, Kyle, recently graduated from college and joined the

team as a full-time agent. Marketing Director Roxanne Reese and Transaction Coordinators Katie Piro and Trina Hunt complete the group.

"I just want to have fun with Kyle on the team. I just love him. He's one of my favorite people on the planet. Enjoying time with him in a new way — that excites me," Julie says.

Vision and Gratitude

Julie's family has long been her top priority. Now, she has the gift of living and working alongside most of them.

Although Julie's middle son, Marcel, is on his own career path in the tech industry, she wishes she could hire him, too.

"I definitely tried to hire him because he is a badass," she laughs.

When she's not working, you'll find Julie exercising, exploring the natural world, enjoying fine dining and wine, and spending time with friends.

"I want to be known for my gratitude, generosity, for kicking butt,

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