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TABLE OF CONTENTS



08

Meet Our Preferred Partners



12

Event Recap: 5-Year Anniversary Celebration



16

Partner Spotlight: First American Title Insurance



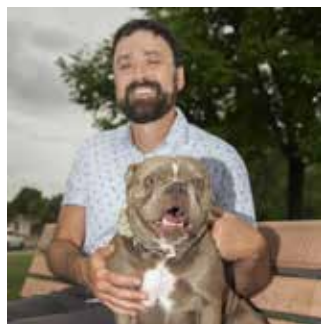
22

Overcomer: Laurel Leisher



28

Overcomer: Joi Banks Schmidt



34

Cover Story: Kyle Deacon

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►► nominations and recommendations!

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▶▶ event recap

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Sally Taylor, Teresa Manzanaras, and John Kelly

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With a career spanning 30 years in the title industry, Teresa Manzanaras, Vice President and State Business Development Manager at First American Title Insurance Company, has consistently proven herself a leader in the field. Starting at just 17 years old, Teresa will celebrate her 47th birthday next month. Her role, overseeing the entire state of New Mexico, is not just a job—it's a calling.

"I am resilient," Teresa proudly shares, reflecting on her extensive career. "I love my job. I feel very much at home at this company. I feel like I'm truly myself in this role."

At First American Title, Teresa's work revolves around relationships and strategy. Her responsibilities include pairing prospective clients with escrow officers and ensuring a seamless process for clearing marketable title. "What we do is relationship-based," Teresa explains. "We insure title to provide clear and marketable title, facilitate third-party escrow, and help get our REALTORS® to the closing table."



Teresa Manzanares and Kylie Coffman-Ohrt

“

What we do is relationship-based. We insure title to provide clear and marketable title, facilitate third-party escrow, and help get our REALTORS® to the closing table.



With 30 escrow officers across New Mexico, Teresa’s reach extends from Las Cruces to Hobbs, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque. She is especially excited about the executive team at First American Title, which includes her partner in operations, John Kelly, Vice President and State Operations Manager. Together, they’ve cultivated a strong culture within the company, one built on collaboration and a focus on work-life balance.

“Our operation is smoothly functioning, efficient, and effective,” Teresa says of her collaboration with John. “He works on the operations side, and I work on the marketing side. We work hard to protect the culture we’ve built—one that is collaborative, where work doesn’t have to be miserable.

This supportive environment extends beyond mere words. Teresa takes pride in how her team steps in for one another when someone needs time off, something she acknowledges is not common in the title world. “We definitely take good care of each other,” she notes.

“

Our technology enables us to deliver faster than our competitors. The investment that our corporate company has made in us gives us sure footing in the industry.

Teresa is also enthusiastic about welcoming Sally Taylor to the team. Coming from Kansas City, Sally will oversee escrow production, contributing to the company’s robust growth and culture. She is also proud of Business Development Officer Kylie Coffman-Ohrt and Bree Franchini, who offers marketing support.

SETTING THEMSELVES APART

First American Title’s tools, technology, and resources also distinguish them from the competition. Teresa emphasizes the company’s commitment to staying ahead of industry trends and anticipating client needs. “Our technology enables us to deliver faster than our competitors,” Teresa says. “The investment that our corporate company has made in us gives us sure footing in the industry.”

Looking to the future, Teresa is focused on navigating the

ever-evolving real estate industry. “It is essential that we are adaptable to change,” she remarks. “Our goal is to stay ahead of the trends and be prepared to meet our clients’ needs.”

Teresa’s passion for her work is matched by her commitment to fostering an inclusive, people-first culture at First American Title. The company’s dedication to its employees has earned it a place on Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” list for nine consecutive years.

To further strengthen its brand and stand out in a competitive market, First American Title recently introduced a new purpose statement: “First American delivers certainty and trust to power seamless real estate transactions.” This statement reflects the company’s core mission of serving customers with reliability and trustworthiness.

As Teresa looks ahead, she remains energized by her role and the people she works with. “I am passionate about what I do, and I am equally passionate about fostering an environment where all feel welcome, supported, and empowered to be innovative and reach their full potential,” she says. “I have never been more excited for the future!”

For More Information:
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LAUREL LEISHER

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Waking up is a gift, not a guarantee. Laurel Leisher knows this a little better than most. With the obstacles she has had to overcome, she has learned to cherish every sunrise. And now, she is able to channel that gratitude into helping others find their own way in the world, one home at a time.

“

Surviving a life-threatening situation gives you a new perspective. You realize that every day is truly a gift.



► overcomer

By Dan Clark
Photos by Ponie Photography

With a background in massage therapy of twenty-two years, Laurel has honed her ability to read situations and recognize the subtle details that can make all the difference. It is that very background that fuels her approach in assisting her clients. “I like wading in the trenches with my clients – when I have a listing, I’m right beside them cleaning, being hands-on. I just like to be involved with the process,” she laughs.

Those years spent massaging weary souls and training aspiring therapists perfected her communication skills and instilled a deep appreciation for the power of human touch. But when the COVID pandemic hit, her business came to a screeching halt. As a result, Laurel found herself at a crossroads. Should she try to find a way to make

it work or pivot to concentrate on her real estate career?

With a small investment from her mother-in-law and a newfound sense of purpose, Laurel focused on the latter journey. Her path, however, has been paved with challenges that few could imagine.

Ten years ago, Laurel faced a challenge no one cares to encounter, and even fewer emerge victorious after facing: stage 4 B-Cell Lymphoma cancer. The diagnosis came as a shock, a silent tumor lurking beneath the surface, but Laurel, armed with her determined spirit, confronted the disease head on.

“It was a game-changer,” Laurel reflects – her eyes sparkling with

gratitude. “Surviving a life-threatening situation gives you a new perspective. You realize that every day is truly a gift.” Laurel’s cancer journey not only strengthened her resolve but also fostered a profound regard for how fragile life can be. It was this appreciation that fueled her passion for helping others find their sanctuary, their place of belonging.

Laurel’s dedication to her clients is unparalleled. She isn’t just a realtor; she is a self-proclaimed confidante, problem-solver and friend. Her willingness to join her clients toiling away to prepare a listing and go the extra mile sets her apart. Whether it’s cleaning a home to prepare for the market, offering staging advice, or simply lending a listening ear, Laurel is there for her clients every step of the way.

“

I like wading in the trenches with my clients – when I have a listing, I’m right beside them cleaning, being hands-on. I just like to be involved with the process.



Her unique background and life experiences have shaped her into a compassionate, empathetic REALTOR®. She understands the emotional rollercoaster of buying or selling a home, having navigated her own challenges with grace and resilience. Her clients aren’t just transactions; they’re individuals with stories, dreams, and aspirations.

Laurel loves her hometown of Albuquerque and it is quite evident in her work. She is in awe of the city’s rich cultural tapestry, its diverse neighborhoods, and its ever-evolving landscape. She is a champion of local businesses, often championing local small businesses and incorporating their fare into her thoughtful closing gifts.

Beyond her real estate endeavors, Laurel finds comfort in her hobbies and her loving relationship with her husband, Aaron. They share a passion for swing dancing, exploring new restaurants, and embarking on adventures in their camper. Laurel’s love for animals is also apparent, her home filled with two playful kittens and the ever-present clucking of ten chickens.

“My life is what I’m most grateful for,” Laurel exclaims. “Aaron is just the sweetest man, and if I weren’t alive, we wouldn’t be able to experience all the wonderful things together that life has to offer.”

Laurel’s story is a testament to the power of resilience, the importance of human connection, and the unwavering pursuit of one’s dreams. She is a beacon of hope, reminding us that even in the face of adversity, we can find strength, purpose, and a profound appreciation for the gift of life.

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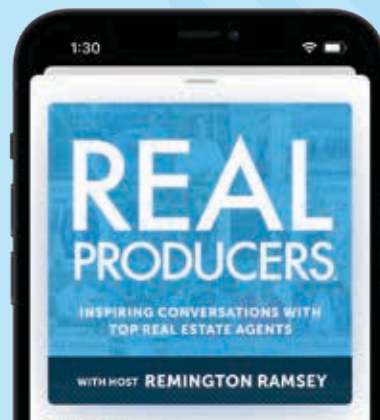
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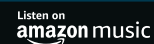


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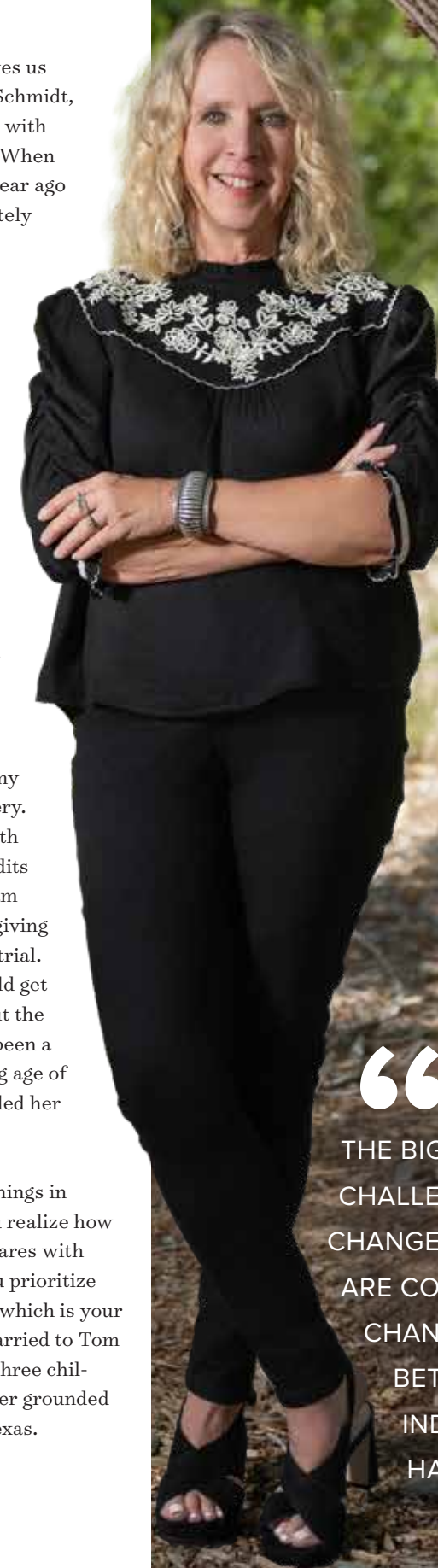
CONQUERING CANCER AND RISING IN RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE

What doesn't kill us makes us stronger. For Joi Banks Schmidt, she overcomes obstacles with courage and confidence. When she got breast cancer a year ago in January, she immediately took action.

"I caught it early," she shares. Her sisters both had breast cancer in their 40s, and it happened to recur at the same time that Joi was diagnosed. "This past year has been quite a journey for my family and me doing the research, collecting opinions, and making time to contemplate my new reality."

Joi took action, deciding upon a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. "I couldn't be happier with that treatment." She credits her skilled treatment team and her faith in God for giving her strength during this trial. "I don't know how I would get through anything without the Lord," she says. Joi has been a Christian since the young age of 12, and her faith has guided her through the years.

Having cancer also put things in perspective for her. "You realize how important life is," she shares with a heart of gratitude. "You prioritize what's really important, which is your family." Joi is happily married to Tom Schmidt, and they have three children. Her family keeps her grounded as well as her roots in Texas.



“

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TEXAS PROUD

"I grew up in the small town of Farwell, Texas," recalls Joi. "My childhood was wonderful, safe, and carefree. We left our doors unlocked, went to the local baseball games, swam in the pool all day, and rode our bikes through town," says Joi. Life was simple in the Lone Star State. Joi attended college at Lubbock Christian College. "Then I ended up going into barbering," she says. "I cut hair in Lubbock for fifteen years." In 1985, Joi moved to Albuquerque. "My past husband and I first got involved in real estate through a Homes & Land Magazine franchise." Little did she know that this would spark a career in real estate.

LOVING REAL ESTATE

In 1993, Joi got her real estate license. Since she started her

career, she has remained in the same office at Coldwell Banker Legacy and worked under various brokers, including Dennis Fish and now Mary Kay Gutierrez, whom she praises as a wonderful leader and mentor. "Mary Kay is wonderful. She is a great broker and even got Broker of the Year this last year," Joi shares proudly.

Joi's career has not been without its challenges, particularly the constant changes in technology and forms. "The biggest challenge is change. Things are constantly changing to better our industry. You have to adapt," she says. Despite these challenges, Joi has persevered and conquered any challenge thrown her way.

FAMILY AND FUN

Joi's family is her greatest source of joy. She is proud of her three children: Ryan, Bailie, and Harrison. Ryan, a captain at the Sheriff's Department, is married to Miranda, a pharmacist, and they have two children, Emory Kate and Caden Thomas. "We keep the grandchildren every Tuesday afternoon - it's the highlight of my week. They are the sweetest children and so well-behaved. We have been so blessed," Joi smiles.

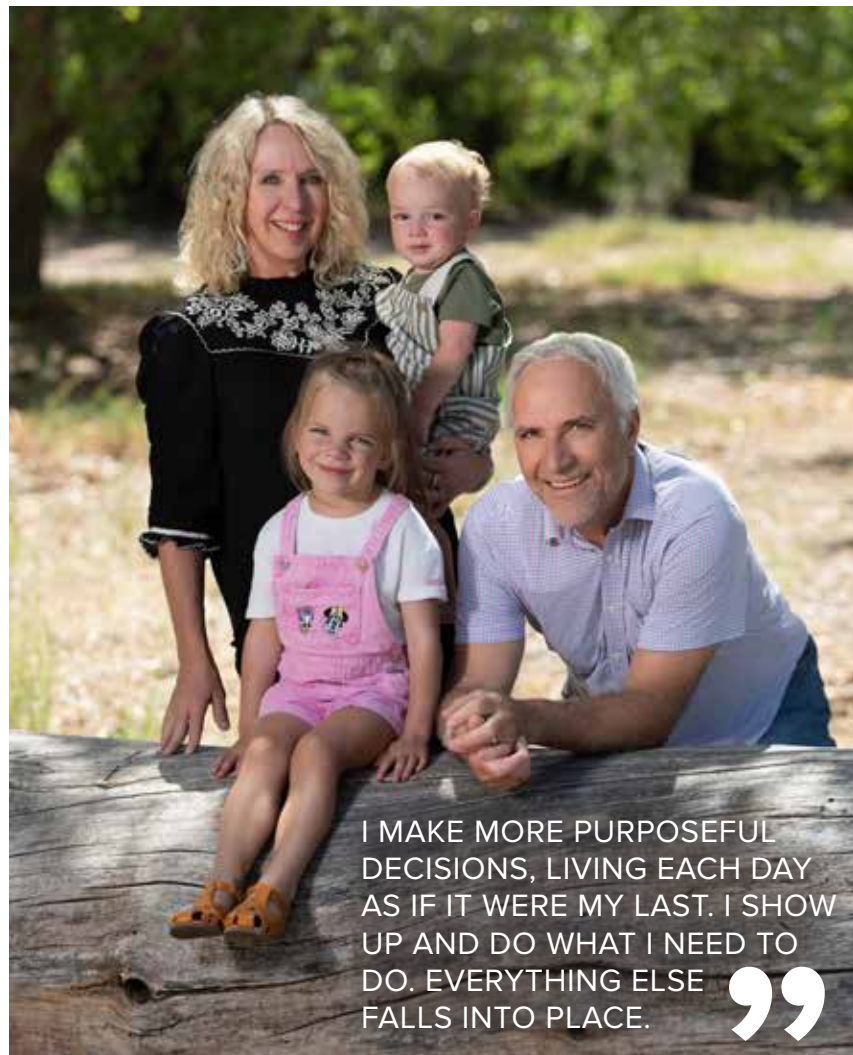
Her daughter, Bailie, is engaged to Adam, and they are partners at Zinc Restaurant. Her youngest son, Harrison, recently graduated from Concordia University Irvine with a biology degree and is currently studying nursing in preparation for a career as a CRNA. "I had Harrison when I was 47," Joi adds, reflecting on the blessings of motherhood later in life.

Outside of work, Joi and her husband enjoy hiking, finding unique hot springs, and visiting Durango. They own jet skis but admit they don't use them as often as they'd like. Camping is also on the horizon. "My husband wants me to go camping in a tent - I'm not ready for that yet, but someday," she laughs.

LOOKING FORWARD

After overcoming cancer, Joi adopted a new outlook on life. "Live life to the fullest and be present," she advises. Her experience with cancer has deepened her connections with her clients, making the process of helping them find homes even more rewarding. "I make more purposeful decisions, living each day as if it were my last. I show up and do what I need to do. Everything else falls into place," she says.

Joi is an inspiration. Her faith has helped her through the twists and turns of life. She is a true survivor, facing life's challenges with grace and emerging stronger on the other side. This REALTOR® brings joy to others through her service, changing people's lives through homeownership.



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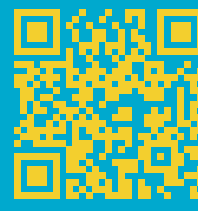


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BLENDING PASSIONS

Kyle Deacon was born into real estate. Having been born into a family deeply rooted in the foundations of real estate, it seemed he was destined to follow in both his father's AND his grandfather's footsteps. Kyle decided to follow his heart down a different path initially, though – creative writing, earning an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) in creative writing, taught poetry and short fiction, and reveled in literary creation. However, the pull of real estate proved too strong. Keeping his real estate license active throughout his graduate studies, Kyle decided to merge his passion for investing with his professional life.

Kyle and his wife, Tiffany, had always sought out homes in walkable neighborhoods near universities. “I’ve always had a passion for real estate investing,” Kyle confesses. His journey into the world of property management began early, fueled by a desire to be in an accessible, convenient environment. “My wife and I, as we were getting together and kind of figuring out life... in every city we lived in, we would try to buy a home in a really walkable area.

We would buy the house, live in it, and then generally fix it up and rent it.” By following this business plan, they have been able to build a small portfolio along the way.

It was this hands-on experience that ignited Kyle’s desire to specialize in multifamily properties.

Returning to his hometown of Albuquerque, Kyle focused on the area surrounding the campus of the University of New Mexico where he grew up. He was drawn to its familiar walkability and the potential for solid returns, but he also appreciates the unique blend of culture, education, and community.

Over time, Kyle’s expertise has grown, and he has been able to find his niche in managing and selling smaller multifamily complexes – anything from duplexes on up to 80-unit buildings. His reputation as a quality property manager attracts clients who trust him implicitly. Many of them





– investors themselves – see Kyle as a valuable resource, someone who understands their goals and can help them achieve those desired outcomes.

Learning the ropes through trial and error, Kyle immersed himself in the world of property management. He recalls, “I learned it kind of trial by fire and fell in love with it more and more.” By concentrating on the less emotional, numbers-driven aspects of multifamily and commercial real estate, Kyle relishes the opportunity to delve into the nitty-gritty details.

While Kyle’s approach to business is transparent and collaborative, his approach to property management is unique. He relies on a “robust staff” and a network of trusted local professionals to ensure properties operate efficiently and tenants’ needs are met promptly. “A lot of it is just like any other business,” he explains. “It’s communication, communication, communication and set realistic expectations.”

Beyond real estate, Kyle’s life revolves around his family – his wife Tiffany, who serves as the CFO of their company, and their three children. His other passion? Music – and he has amassed a vast collection of vinyl records over the years – a collection he started at the young age of 15. He and Tiffany often travel to concerts, taking at least a couple trips a year to the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheatre, where they get the opportunity to experience the thrill of live music amidst the breathtaking scenery. He emphasizes the beauty of the venue, “There’s a certain level of intimacy and mystique to it. People literally travel from all over the world, just to see their favorite band there.”

Kyle’s journey is a testament to how the power of passion can impact one’s timeline, especially when it takes unexpected detours. From the world of words to the realm of real estate, his story underscores the importance of authenticity, collaboration, and unwavering integrity. Whether guiding clients toward their investment dreams or sharing his expertise with fellow professionals, Kyle Deacon embodies the spirit of Albuquerque - vibrant, genuine, and always reaching for new horizons.



“A lot of it is just like any other business. It’s communication, communication, communication and set realistic expectations.”

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Meet **Sharon Akauola**, who has been in the title industry a total of 32 years, 27 of those years with First American Title. She is a Native of New Mexico and started her career in the business as a courier and worked her way to becoming an Escrow Officer. Sharon's favorite part of her job is "being surrounded by all of the emotions with first time home buyers at the closing table." Sharon finds her career to be quite fulfilling and enjoys being able to assist people in achieving their dream of home ownership.

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