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Jessica Daviston

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Lauren Preston

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

Bumble Bee Blinds
of Birmingham

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INSIDE!

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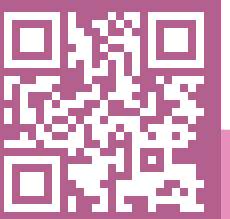
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RP

2023

BY THE NUMBERS

HERE'S WHAT THE TOP AGENTS IN BIRMINGHAM SOLD IN 2023...



\$3,569,021,132

SALE VOLUME



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JEFF & MANDY SWEATT

of Bumble Bee Blinds of Birmingham

From TV Advertising To
**LAUNCHING A
SUCCESSFUL FRANCHISE**





Jeff and Mandy began exploring different franchise opportunities, meticulously evaluating their options before finally deciding on Bumble Bee Blinds.

“We looked for red flags every step of the way but just never found one with these guys. We were on the same page with their leadership, the support they offer, and the market potential. Everything fell into place.”

A year ago, Jeff and Mandy never would have guessed they'd own a company specializing in blinds, shades, and shutters. But once they committed, they jumped in and hit the ground running. Their plan was always for Jeff to handle the day-to-day operations of the business, so in January 2024, Jeff was immersed in intensive training, learning the ropes of the new industry, purchasing products and vans, finding an office location, and setting up the business infrastructure. Within 90 days, Bumble Bee Blinds of Birmingham was launched, and the company took off like a rocket.

In just their third full month of operation, Jeff's team led the franchise group in sales across the country, outperforming 36 other franchise owners. He attributes this rapid success to several factors including tapping into a niche in the market and being proactive about networking, building relationships, and getting their name out there.

“People trust us because they know I'm committed to doing business the right way and treating people right.”

A significant part of Jeff's strategy involves working closely with real estate agents through a referral system. “When real estate agents sell a home that needs window

treatments, they refer their clients to us. We can then provide personalized recommendations that fit both the aesthetic and practical needs of the new homeowners,” Jeff explains. This partnership has been mutually beneficial; it's helped Bumble Bee Blinds of Birmingham quickly establish a foothold in the real estate market and has given real estate agents more tools to meet their clients' needs in a quick, professional manner.

Looking ahead, Jeff is focused on growth and expanding the business by adding more salespeople and vehicles. This will ensure that they can meet the increasing demand while maintaining their high standards of service.

“Our vision for the business is built around quality—quality work, quality products, and quality people. We're not just chasing dollars; we're focused on building a brand that people can trust.”

Outside of work, Jeff and Mandy share a love for travel and sports. They are big fans of Alabama football and enjoy exploring new places and experiencing new cultures. “We don't want to be people who say, ‘We wish we could do this or that.’ We've always made a goal and put a plan in place to make it happen,” Jeff says.

Married on St. Patrick's Day in 2010, Jeff and Mandy are celebrating 14 years of marriage—their 2024 anniversary coincidentally aligned with their final day of training at Bumble Bee Blinds. Jeff sees these synchronicities as more than just coincidences; they are symbolic of the harmony and alignment he seeks in both his personal and professional life.

Jeff's journey from broadcast journalism to becoming a successful franchise owner with Bumble Bee Blinds is a testament to his adaptability, commitment to quality, and dedication to treating people with kindness and respect. As he continues to grow the business, Jeff remains focused on the core values that have guided him throughout his career: integrity, hard work, and a genuine desire to help others.

“I've been in sales for 20+ years. It really comes down to what the customer needs, what they want, their pain points, and making sure you can provide a solution.”

Jeff and Mandy Sweatt both grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, and both attended the University of Alabama although they didn't meet until years later. Jeff initially pursued a degree in broadcast journalism with a minor in marketing, while Mandy studied political science before moving on to law school at Mississippi College. As he neared graduation, Jeff realized that his true passion lay in marketing and sales rather than journalism. He quickly pivoted and landed his first job in TV advertising sales in 2002.

After four years learning the TV advertising business, Jeff accepted a role in May 2006 with CBS 42 and then spent an impressive seventeen-and-a-half years, honing his skills and building a successful career. After just over two decades in the business, Jeff felt it was time for a change.

“I wanted to do something else and wanted to have a bit more ownership. For 25 years, I was an employee, so I wanted to have control over something of my own.”

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Written by Zachary Cohen
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Overcoming the Odds

J E S S I C A

According to the National Association of REALTORS®, 75% of real estate agents fail within the first year of entering the industry, and 87% are out of the business after five years. However, when Jessica Daviston launched her career in 2015, she had no choice; she had to succeed.

Jessica launched her real estate career at 32 years old. While starting a new career is a time of change and growth for most people, it held a particular meaning for Jessica. By then, she had been a stay-at-home mom for nearly a decade, raising her three daughters and focusing on family life, but she had never worked in a professional environment or established a career.

“After I got divorced, I looked at myself in the mirror and knew I needed to make money. I was very green in many ways when it came to adult life. I didn’t have a career or any work experience. I didn’t even know how to log online and pay bills. I was sheltered. I was a great mom and volunteered any way I knew how, but professionally, I was very green,” Jessica shares humbly. “I got married young and started my adult life a little younger than planned, so moving into the workforce was a big change for me.”

While Jessica lacked experience, she had the drive to succeed. So, she set out to rebuild a life for herself and her family. As she assessed her options, real estate caught her attention. It didn’t require a long, formal education, offered the potential for flexibility, and matched her skills well.

“I’m good with people, I’ve moved around a lot, and I knew sales would be a good fit. Real estate seemed to be a natural place for me,” Jessica continues.

Jessica officially began her real estate career in 2015. Although it took her three months to close her first deal, her business took off from there. She ended up closing ten transactions in year one.

“I had a huge drive, good mentors, and great resources. I had to sell. I didn’t have a backup plan. There was no safety net, husband, or family money, but I had the need to succeed, and I had faith in myself that I could make it work.”

Fast-forward to 2024, and Jessica has become one of Alabama’s top REALTORS®. She’s patient, intuitive, and driven. By combining a

soft personal approach with fierce negotiation tactics, she's able to deliver the best of both worlds for her clients. Her clients also take note of her authentic approach to life and business.

"I try to have a little fun when possible," Jessica smiles. "This can be a stressful time for people."

Jessica closed an impressive 27 transactions for nearly \$13 million with LAH Sotheby's International Realty in 2023. She's also been featured on HGTV's House Hunters twice.

"I've found my groove," she continues. "My daughters are older, and home life is a bit easier without small children. I rely on past client referrals and word of mouth. I know how many transactions I can take on at one time."

Jessica's twin daughters, Amilia and Bella (19), are in their first year at Auburn, while her youngest, Charlotte (14), is entering her teenage years. When she's not selling real estate, you'll find Jessica enjoying a musical with her daughters, looking at art, seeing live music, or eating and drinking her way through Birmingham. She's a creative at heart with a passion for making life enjoyable.

"I hope people remember me as kind and fun. I hope I made them laugh from time to time. And I want to be a really good role model



to my daughters and other women out there who are afraid to take initiative," Jessica shares. "I don't fit the cookie-cutter thing, and I think my clients like that authenticity. I'm not a five or ten-year plan person. As a matter of fact, I hope my plans change. I like excitement in life."

I HAD A HUGE DRIVE, GOOD MENTORS, AND GREAT RESOURCES.

I had to sell. I didn't have a backup plan. There was no safety net, husband, or family money, but I had the need to succeed, and I had faith in myself that I could make it work.



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Lauren PRESTON

*Gifts Her Short-Term
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Written by Elizabeth McCabe
Photos by Brendon Pinola Photography

“It truly does fill my cup to give and serve others,” says REALTOR® Lauren Preston with Keller Williams Vestavia. Her heart to help others in this way started when she and her husband, Rob, purchased their first short-term rental property in August 2022. This waterfront, three-bedroom, two-bathroom home is in Riverside, Alabama, known as “Riverside Retreat.”

“We renovated it from top to bottom,” says Lauren, “and as we were finishing up, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude. It was the first vacation home that our family had ever had.” She especially looked forward to spending time there with their extended family.

“I wanted to use it as a tool to bless people with as much as we could,” she says. She references the scripture James 1:17, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (NIV).” Lauren adds, “I’m just really thankful.”

The first opportunity came unexpectedly. “About that time in 2022, there was a mom who had just fought her way through triple negative breast cancer and had three kids. We were friends in high school,” Lauren shares. “I was sitting there thinking about how my kids are healthy and we had this

beautiful lake house. I wanted her to enjoy her time there and make memories with her kids, too.” This heartfelt gesture marked the beginning of their mission to give back.

“Since then, we’ve continued to give as much as we can,” Lauren says with tears of joy. They have donated time to families facing medical challenges, those in foster care unable to cross state lines, and individuals with severe special needs who struggle with long car rides. “It’s about allowing families to unplug, unwind, and reconnect with their loved ones,” she emphasizes.

Their generosity extends beyond individuals to include support for numerous international and domestic fundraisers and school auctions, and they have committed time to local nonprofits, such as the Greater Birmingham Humane Society and the Bell Center. “We feel privileged to support these organizations,” Lauren remarks warmly.

Among their initiatives, Lauren and her family also honor veterans by offering discounted stays to help them relax and rejuvenate. “One of the major reasons we are able to support families and the community in this way is because of all the support I receive from my friends and family in my career,” she humbly acknowledges. “I couldn’t do it without them.”

Road to Real Estate

Lauren’s journey into real estate began in late 2019, shortly after the birth of her second child. With a background in psychology and social work, including seven years in adoption and foster care services, she found her calling in helping others through real estate. Since 2020, she has consistently ranked in the top percentage of agents in Alabama, having sold over \$48 million in real estate, with \$14 million in sales in 2023 alone amidst a shifting market. She ranks in the top 1% of REALTORS® in the entire state of Alabama.

“When I started in real estate, we were a young family barely making ends meet,” Lauren reflects. “My husband, a teacher, and I, a social worker, took a leap into investment properties, renovating and learning as we went.” Their journey of flipping houses not only fueled their passion for real estate but also their desire to give back.

Lauren credits her success to her strong network of friends, family, and clients who have supported her journey. “I don’t pay for leads or cold calls; it’s all about relationships and referrals,” she explains gratefully.

Lauren attributes much of her growth and success to Keller Williams Vestavia, praising the brokerage for its training and support under leaders like Jennifer Reeder-Toomer Hay



(whom Lauren says is the “ultimate teacher and supporter”) and Aaron Sims, who goes to bat for us. My favorite part of real estate is building relationships and negotiating contracts,” she reveals with enthusiasm.

She adds, “I’m good at reading and connecting with others and knowing how to get my clients what they want. I’m not good at a lot of things,” she jokes, “but I am a great REALTOR®. It just clicks. It is truly where I’m meant to be.”

Focusing on Family

As a family-oriented REALTOR®, Lauren involves Rob and their three daughters (Nora, 9; Nealy, 5; and Margot, 2) in their real estate ventures. Together, they teach them about financial literacy and sharing their love for helping others. “Rob just got his real estate license and it’s already coming in handy as an added support to my clients and our personal flipping business,” points out Lauren.

When not working, it’s all about family time. “We enjoy making memories at our lake house when it’s not rented, and honestly, just being home together,” she says.

Reflecting on her upbringing, Lauren acknowledges the influence of her parents and



“One of the major reasons we are able to support families and the community in this way is because of all the support I receive from my friends and family in my career.”

grandmother, who instilled in her values of kindness, hard work, and creativity for solving problems. “My dad has a heart of gold and can fix anything; my mom showed kindness to everyone, and my grandmother has played a big role not only in my life, but also in making the kitchen at Riverside a chef’s dream,” she shares fondly.

Making a Positive Impact

Lauren is an inspiration using her vacation rental to help raise funds for important causes and allow others to spend quality time together. As she continues to expand her real estate career, Lauren remains steadfast in her commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of others. This top producer wouldn’t have it any other way.

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Photos by David Graves Photography

On August 22, *Birmingham Real Producers* hosted our Vineyard Vibes Social at the stunning new Homewood branch of Southpoint Bank. The event brought together top REALTORS® and our valued partners to celebrate the featured REALTORS® from our latest magazine issue. Guests enjoyed wine and a delectable charcuterie spread courtesy of Rolls Bakery, and Lambert Agency Insurance presented our featured REALTORS® with a special wine gift. The atmosphere was relaxed yet vibrant, with a great turnout that allowed everyone to connect, collaborate, and enjoy each other's company. We sincerely appreciate everyone who attended and made the night unforgettable.

A special thank you to the sponsors of this event:





▶ cover story

Written by Elizabeth McCabe
Photos by Brendon Pinola Photography

Photo by Angela Blake

Drew TAYLOR

COMPETITIVE DRIVE TO THRIVE

Never underestimate the discipline of sports to teach life lessons off the field. For Drew Taylor, this was a truth he carried with him from the courts and fields of his youth into a thriving career in real estate. “Playing sports throughout my youth, high school, and beyond taught me mental toughness and the value of relentless effort. I was never the most talented or the most athletic person on my teams, but I was never going to be outworked.” Drew believes that the grit and determination he learned through coaching and playing sports have been the driving forces behind his success in the Birmingham real estate scene.

Drew grew up in the Hoover area of Alabama, living what he describes as the quintessential 80s and 90s childhood. “I lived the typical American life, playing baseball and basketball religiously,” he recalls. His early experiences laid the groundwork for the competitive spirit that would later fuel his professional success. After graduating from Shades Mountain Christian High School in 1997, Drew went on to study Business Finance at Samford University.

In 2005, after a brief stint as a pharmaceutical sales representative, Drew felt a calling to join the family business—real estate. His mother, Di Anne Taylor, had been a successful REALTOR® for 28 years at the time, and Drew admired her achievements. “Growing up, I watched her consistently hit sales volumes that had never been reached in Birmingham. She was one of the top producers in the area, and I wanted to be a part of that legacy,” Drew shares.

So, Team Taylor at eXp Realty was born. Di Anne, now with 47 years in the business, remains an active and integral part of the team. “She’s not only a wonderful grandmother to her seven grandkids but also continues to enjoy actively selling and mentoring the team,” Drew says with pride.

Meet Kimberly Taylor

Today, Team Taylor consists of eight members, including Drew’s wife, Kimberly Taylor. Kimberly, a talented interior designer, joined the team six months ago, bringing her expertise to enhance their real estate services.

Kimberly, who grew up in the Indian Springs area of North Shelby County, attended Briarwood Christian School. She also attended Samford University, where she majored in Interior Design and was a cheerleader all four years.

“We met during our senior year of college,” Drew recalls fondly. “We married soon after we graduated in 2002.” Kimberly enjoyed a successful career in interior design, which was ideal for a mother of four children (Caleb, 16; twins Ben and Libby, 13; and Anna Grace, 12). However, this past spring, she felt called to work in real estate with Drew. She is an asset to Team Taylor, where she is also co-owner.

Kimberly provides interior design expertise to all clients. Drew explains, “Every listing needs a personal touch from an artistic viewpoint. With each listing, she

gives her perspective for flow, décor, and prepping for photos.” Whether hanging a couple of pieces of artwork or bringing in a kitchen table and chairs, Kimberly makes a genuine difference with her expertise.

“We’re excited to expand the staging aspect of our team,” Drew explains. He is thrilled that his wife joined him in real estate, which has helped Team Taylor become better than before.

Tasting Sweet Success

Team Taylor has blazed an incredible trail of success, overcoming obstacles in their path with grit and grace.

Throughout his 19 years in real estate, Drew has tackled challenges head-on, including the Great Recession of 2008. “The downturn taught us how to adapt, be creative, and truly be advisors to our clients during tough situations,” Drew notes. This optimist believes that overcoming such

obstacles has made him and his team more resilient and better equipped to handle the ever-changing real estate market. “We definitely aren’t scared of challenges,” he comments. Even with the recent NAR rules, Drew knows that it’s just another reason to shine in real estate.

“Experienced agents are valuable,” he says. “It reinforces why we are valuable to the consumer.”

Through his career in real estate, Drew has raised the bar. “We’ve been very blessed,” says Drew in a moment of reflection. His team recently switched brokerages to Keller Williams - Vestavia, and he couldn’t be happier about the transition, reconnecting with 400 other real estate professionals in the process that he knows from his rich history in real estate.

Team Taylor has also risen in residential real estate to be one of the

top teams in Alabama, showing that there is no substitute for hard work and dedication.

“We do the best job that we can for clients in every transaction,” says Drew. “We treat everyone like it’s the most important deal that we have.” Team Taylor sets the standard when it comes to service, which is why they have been able to excel in sales.

Family First

When Drew and Kimberly aren’t leading Team Taylor, they savor time with their four children.

Drew emphasizes the importance of being



Photo by Angela Blake

present in his children’s lives. “Outside of work, being a dad and husband is my greatest calling. I pride myself on never missing a game, practice, or tournament. We find the most joy in watching our kids succeed in sports,” he says.

When it comes to what he wants to be remembered for, Drew’s answer is clear: “I want to be known as one of the most charitable people in the industry—not just with the money I’ve been blessed to earn, but also with my knowledge and time.” Drew and Kimberly are active supporters of their local church and YoungLife, a national high school ministry. They have a heart to help others.

Leading the Way

Drew’s success in real estate is evident by his solid work ethic, drive, determination, and putting others first. He and Kimberly are committed to their clients, their colleagues, and their community. Team Taylor is destined for great things as they continue helping others with heart and hustle.



Photo submitted by Drew Taylor

“
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”



Photo by Brendon Pinola Photography

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