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Photo by Stevie LeJeune

SEPTEMBER 2024



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Ryan Thomassie

Louisiana Born, LSU Proud: As a native of South Louisiana and former LSU Offensive Lineman, I bring passion to everything I do. A Business Administration graduate, my two decades in the mortgage industry have been marked by a commitment to client success. Married for over 20 years with a son, my free time revolves around sports and outdoor activities. Whether coaching youth sports or cheering on LSU and the Saints, I'm dedicated to staying active. Joining NOLA Lending over a decade ago, I believe in their process and products, ensuring the best service for my clients. Let's achieve your goals together!

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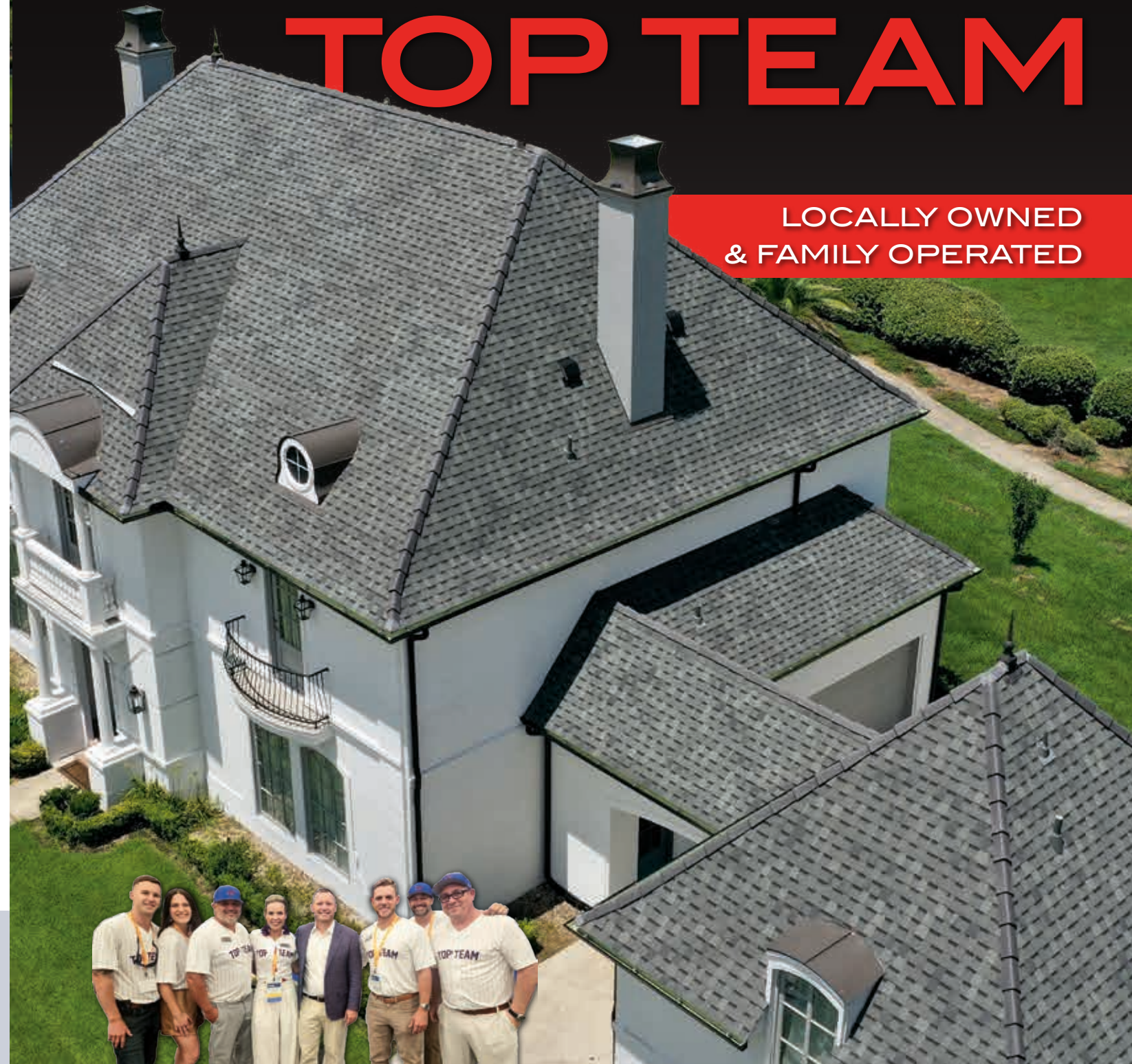
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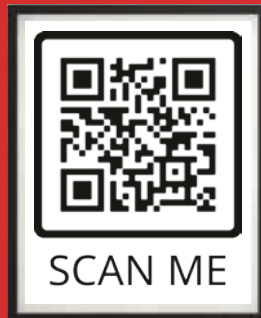
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THAT WAS A STRETCH

In the 4.5 years of running BRRP, I've gotten to know hundreds of business owners and thousands of real estate agents. *Nice to meet you.* In those 4.5 years of meeting you I've witnessed you go through a world-wide pandemic, the election of a new president, rock bottom interest rates, bid wars, rising interest rates, a slowed economy, inflation, Mother Nature out for blood, changes in state insurance requirements and most recently the elimination of rules on Realtor commissions. The business model we've all known and worked with is officially over.

The past few years have stretched us.

I'm an Observer. If you're familiar with the Enneagram...I'm a 5. According to another test taken (after my second cup of coffee and

avoiding necessary tasks) I'm an INTJ. According to Myers-Briggs, I'm Introverted, Intuitive, Thinking and Judging—Okay. That probably checks out. I am a self-proclaimed homebody, but I embody both introverted and extroverted qualities. They call us Ambiverts. Along with all these labels, I'm a huge fan of good character. I'm a Character Connoisseur. To me, good character outplays fancy, flashy, and famous all day long.

I watch closely and have developed tremendous respect for my BRRP Partners. I see how hard they work for our Realtors and hear how much they care. It's truly admirable. When the real estate industry shifts, they diligently educate themselves and prepare

for those changes. We attend a partner lunch every month and I listen. I hear them discuss...lender to lender... insurance agent to insurance agent... roofer to roofer...I hear them talk about the industry and grow together.

These industry changes can be challenging, but they also present opportunities for growth and improvement. By staying informed and adaptable, we can continue to provide service to our clients with excellence and integrity. By remaining flexible, we can endure the seasons that stretch us.

Be kind to one another.
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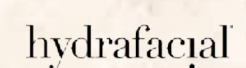
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By Breanna Pizzolato
Photos by Stevie LeJeune

Maria Thorn

LIVE LOVE
LOUISIANA

Maria Thorn finished college as a single mother. She later married and owned an aerial aviation business with her then husband, and after they decided to purchase rental properties she started in real estate school. Before earning her license, Maria's life took a turn—she divorced and left the place she called home to start a new chapter.

Shortly thereafter, one of her best friends from college, Gregory Thorn, reached out. He had also divorced and started over in his own way, and nearly twenty years later, the two reconnected. Now, they have been married for almost two decades. “My grass is greener,” Maria says, beaming. “It was meant to be. And we always say that had we gotten together earlier, it wouldn't have been the same.” When life throws Maria a challenge, she meets it with a smile. And when Maria makes a friend, it's for life.

Family Matters

Maria grew up in Raceland, a small town along Bayou Lafourche near Thibodaux and Houma, as the second-oldest of six siblings. Her father worked as a well-respected and beloved OB-GYN for many years, which made the small town feel even smaller. Though he has retired, his bedside manner left a lasting impression on his patients. His friendly, understanding and genuine care for others is something Maria carries with her as well. “A smile on your face will get you a long way,” she says. This simple yet profound philosophy has guided her through every storm and setback, reminding her and those around her of the power of positivity and resilience.

Having grown up surrounded by a large, loving family, Maria has always valued spending time with them and building meaningful relationships. So, in 2009, when her youngest sister, Aimee, mentioned

working with Maria to spend more time with her daughters, Maria was over the moon. Aimee left her long-held position as a top salesperson at a local furniture store, and the two have successfully operated a real estate team together ever since.

The sisters complement each other perfectly as buyer and seller agents, and their personality styles also balance each other out. “She is regimented, by the book and always keeps a planner on her. I fly by the seat of my pants,” Maria says with a smile. Their dynamic partnership blends structure and spontaneity, and they are both better for it. “As the ‘team leader’ I get a lot of the recognition, however to me TEAM means Together Everyone Achieves More, and without Aimee by my side, my time, resources and success would have been limited,” Maria explains.

Being a guiding light in the industry fuels Maria's passion. She majored in education, but aside from a few summers as a swim instructor, she didn't pursue a career in teaching. But she did find real estate, which has become her platform to educate and change lives.

Pay It Forward

Hurricane Katrina left hundreds of thousands of South Louisianans in disarray, with their homes destroyed and communities shattered. The overwhelming sense of uncertainty lingering in the air felt especially heavy as she also navigated a divorce, temporarily moved in with her college-age daughter and began a new career.

During her first week, Maria observed from behind her laptop and mostly empty desk as her fellow real estate agents scrambled to answer calls and close deals. “People were calling and trying to get into any available home,” she recalls. “I had no clue what I was supposed to be doing and nobody had time to do any



training because it was just an unexpectedly crazy busy time.” As much as she wanted to jump in and help, she mostly sat idle amidst the chaos. Then, an associate broker took her under their wing, inviting Maria to ride with her for a showing and a listing appointment. The broker set a purchase agreement in front of Maria and guided her through filling it out. “I filled in the blanks and did what she told me,” she recalls. She then completed the listing agreement as instructed. “Three weeks later, someone handed me a check for \$2600 because she put me as a co-agent. It brought me to tears. She didn’t have to do that. I thought it was just training. So I vowed that day that if I ever had the opportunity to help somebody else, I would.”

Since that day 19 years ago, Maria has consistently honored that promise, becoming a trusted mentor within eXp Realty and to other local agents. Her colleagues often say, “Stick with Maria,” a testament to her unwavering support and expertise in helping others elevate their business.

Years ago, a new agent coined the phrase after near-daily learning sessions with Maria. The phrase has become synonymous with her reputation for guiding new agents through the complexities of real estate, helping them build the confidence and skills they need to succeed. Maria’s dedication to her colleagues reflects her commitment to the profession and the community she serves.

More Than Just A Name

Team Live Love Louisiana is more than a catchy team name; it truly embodies Maria’s way of life. Alongside Gregory, she has explored numerous destinations,



including a beautiful Alaskan cruise and another from New England to Quebec. Next, they’re headed to Lake Banff for another exciting adventure. Whether traveling with family to support their grandkids at baseball tournaments and dance recitals or their close-knit group of friends, they cherish every moment. Despite experiencing various cities and cultures, Maria emphasizes that “there’s nothing like the people in Louisiana.” She reflects on how many clients leave the state only to return, saying, “I can’t imagine living anywhere else. It’s where we grew up. The people

Iowa Hawkeyes to win their first national championship. The following month, she was in Omaha watching the Tigers take home the championship at the College World Series. “We’re pretty hot and heavy LSU sports fans,” she laughs. “We love it.”

In everything she does, from her travels to her unwavering support for others, Maria exemplifies the spirit of Louisiana. She prioritizes helping others and spending time with family and friends to enjoy life while recognizing the value of hard work. Her dedication to her clients and colleagues goes beyond transactions, reflecting a deep-seated belief in the power of community



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ELSE, I WOULD.”

and the food are fantastic, and our culture can’t be beat.” For Maria and Gregory, home is where the heart is, and Louisiana will always hold a special place in theirs.

and mentorship. Family and friends are the cornerstones of her world, and she fosters these relationships with the same care and commitment she brings to her professional endeavors.

Maria is also an ardent supporter of LSU athletics, with season tickets for football and Women’s Basketball. Last year, she cheered from the stands as the LSU Women’s Basketball team defeated the

Whether she’s guiding a client through the complexities of the market, exploring a new city with friends or spending an afternoon with her family, Maria exudes warmth, generosity and a love for her roots. And she does it all with a smile.

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For Lisa Carline, continuously working toward the best outcome is as natural as navigating the murky waters of Bayou Sorrel. Just keep paddling.

It's a lesson she learned from a young age, watching her Grandma Gertie wade through a flooded yard in her rubber boots to open the Bayou Lounge each day. And when the water got too high, she paddled a small boat. The recurring floods brought with them a sense of uncertainty and disruption. But as a mother of 15, it would take more than some flood water for Grandma Gertie to close the business.

"When I lived next door, I had to do the same thing to get to the school bus," Lisa explains. "My mom would tie the boat up to the porch with a rope. Every morning, I would untie it and paddle me and my brother to the road to catch the bus. It's not every day you see an alligator when you open the front door, but many times we did!"

Roots of Resilience

Growing up in a large family in Bayou Sorrel, Lisa learned that life is defined not by the challenges we face but by how we use the lessons learned from them. "I had a simple yet fulfilling childhood," she says. "We didn't have much, but looking back we had everything!" She watched year after year, struggle after struggle, as her grandma handled

business with a welcoming and warm spirit. Her can-do attitude shaped Lisa's worldview and continues to inspire her. "I credit her for instilling the work ethic I have now," she says. "Her passion and drive resonate with me."

That day after Christmas in 2010, when Gertie passed away, marked a profound turning point in Lisa's life. Over the next six months, she endured tremendous loss, losing a longtime friend and coworker, followed by the heartbreaking death of her mother.

"One thing I won't ever forget is running into my brother's arms and he hugged me so tight," Lisa recalls. "As we walked closer to her car, he grabbed me again, holding me ever so tight and said he didn't want this to be the way we last saw her. As badly as I wanted to, I knew he was right. Life as we knew it had been turned upside down. The coming days were filled with heartbreak as we planned for her funeral and went through her things."

As they packed up her mom's belongings, Lisa noticed the brand new bottle of perfume she had gifted her for Christmas sitting on the counter. "It was nearly full," she says. "She had been asking for that perfume for so long. It was her favorite. She didn't wear it every day, she wanted to save it for a special occasion."



That bottle of perfume gave Lisa a new perspective. “Don’t save anything for a special occasion,” she says. “Every single day is a special occasion. I usually don’t leave my house without spraying perfume like a small child all over, and it reminds me how blessed I am to wake up and have another special occasion.”

Her heart had endured so much with death after death after death. Then, just six days after her mom passed away, Lisa’s only brother, Byron, tragically passed away while working on his truck. “I was once again rushing to be by his side, only this time it was me holding him so tight, just as he held me six days prior,” she recalls. So much loss could have easily led to

a deep depression and despair, but instead, her heartache became the catalyst for a profound transformation and a deeper appreciation of life.

Pain Becomes Purpose

“Turning pain into purpose is a powerful reminder that even in the face of adversity, kindness and compassion can shine through,” she says. “I want to be a guiding light for those navigating difficult times, showing them that hope and optimism can prevail even in the darkest moments.”

Taking that mission into her own hands, real estate became her way of shining a light for people navigating another one of life’s most difficult struggles—facing foreclosure.

Her journey in real estate began as an extension of her role as a Paralegal at SNSC, a company specializing in re-performing seriously delinquent loans, a position she has held for 18 years and continues to work while balancing her duties as a Realtor. “I witnessed firsthand the struggles of borrowers on the brink of losing their homes,” she says. “It was a turning point when I realized I wanted to do more. Becoming a Realtor was a conscious decision to channel my empathy, knowledge and passion into a role where I could truly make a difference.”



“““

BECOMING A REALTOR WAS A CONSCIOUS DECISION TO CHANNEL MY EMPATHY, KNOWLEDGE AND PASSION INTO A ROLE WHERE I COULD TRULY MAKE A DIFFERENCE.



Her career in real estate is more than just another job; it’s a mission to create a lasting impact while building meaningful relationships. “I am not just closing deals; I am creating opportunities for new beginnings, hope and stability,” she explains. “My goal is to be the guiding light for those seeking a fresh start.”

Her commitment to giving back extends beyond real estate. She is a proud supporter of the Iris Domestic Violence Center in Baton Rouge, a beacon of hope for those seeking to rebuild their lives in a safe and supportive environment. One event close to her heart is “MAKE YOUR MOTHER

PROUD,” which collects essential items for mothers and children leaving violent homes.

The losses she has endured have fundamentally changed how Lisa views life. Inspired by her mother, who never took a flight out of fear and only took one vacation that she can remember, Lisa has vowed to embrace the adventures and opportunities of life.

She’s overcome her fear of heights, ziplining down mountains with her sons, Slayde, 17 and Maddox, 13, and cherishing every moment.

In 2023, she achieved her long-held goal of becoming an investor after acquiring rental properties. The venture quickly became a family affair, with her dad and two boys actively involved in the process. “Their willingness to help bring my vision to life was a shared accomplishment,” she says.

A spontaneous soul, she embraces life’s unpredictability with open arms, ready to seize the moment and embark on new adventures. Traveling with her children and creating unforgettable memories is her favorite pastime. “I’m one of those moms who takes a million pictures, and I feel no shame for it,” she laughs. “Every picture is a cherished memory, a testament to living life fully.”

In the face of profound loss, Lisa chooses to live her best life day after day by transforming her pain into a purpose that touches countless lives. Through her work as a Paralegal, Realtor and advocate for women, she continues to be a guiding light, showing that hope and optimism can prevail even in the darkest moments. “I’m not afraid of dying,” she explains. “I’m afraid of not living my life to the fullest. Take the trip, take that chance, speak from your heart and love those who love you deeply.”

As Lisa’s story continues, her grandpa passed away in July. His funeral was held the Friday morning before her scheduled photo session for this edition. “It stormed all morning and I had no back up plan, as we had everything scheduled for outside by a pond,” she explains. “I just had a calmness that came over me and knew it would work out!” By the time Ace arrived, the sky was clear.

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CHANDLER ACCARDO

▶ rising star
By Breanna Pizzolato
Photos by Ace Sylvester

GO YOUR OWN WAY

In the shadow of awe-inspiring mountains or seated in a canoe navigating the rushing waters of a remote river, Chandler Accardo finds respite from the clamor of everyday life. These outdoor adventures reveal Chandler's adventurous and tenacious spirit, whether a week-long canoe trip in Missouri or a grueling 65-mile hike through the Bob Marshall Wilderness. In both the wilderness and business, he has learned the value of forging his own path, understanding that it's not so much about the destination. It's the journey.

New Beginnings

Chandler started his 20s shy and anxious, working a blue-collar job he merely tolerated. After five years as an HVAC and electrical technician, the role became increasingly unfulfilling. "I was looking for a way out, and real estate was something I wanted to try," he says in his usual calm and casual manner.

Chandler was among the record number of agents who became licensed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. According to the National Association of Realtors, more than 156,000 people joined their ranks in those two years — a nearly 60 percent increase from the previous two years. The self-proclaimed "Covid Realtor" didn't take anything for granted. As more and more people flocked to the industry, competition picked up, and so did Chandler's pace.

The Baton Rouge native found exactly what he was seeking—freedom, growth opportunities, valued professional relationships and newfound confidence. He wasn't about to give it up easily.



"When I started, I looked up to the people being named as the top three agents in the brokerage and being that kind of Realtor felt so unattainable...until I did it," he says. "That's when I really started seeing that I could do this." In 2023, Chandler was recognized in *Baton Rouge Real Producers'* Future of Real Estate special edition featuring 12 agents under the age of 30.

Every real estate transaction is a new beginning, and that's a fact Chandler does not take lightly. He takes pride in being the go-to Realtor for his friends as they navigate life changes like getting married, having children and moving to bigger homes or different parts of the city.





One Step at a Time

From a young age, Chandler has understood the unpredictable nature of life and the profound importance of family. At just ten years old, he witnessed a traumatic incident when a freak explosion in a backyard burn pile severely burned his younger brother. His father quickly extinguished the

flames engulfing his 8-year-old brother, and paramedics rushed him to the hospital via Helivac. This harrowing experience taught Chandler about resilience and the swift changes life can bring. “It makes you stop and think much more about gratitude,” he says. His brother fully recovered, and to this day, Chandler holds tightly to gratitude and prioritizing time with family.

Despite chatter from naysayers and doubters, he and his girlfriend Gabrielle Nunez decided to blaze their own trail as leaders of their own real estate team. Their first order of business was to find a name and lay the foundation for a brand that captured their mission; eventually deciding upon Monarc Group Team brokered by Réve Realtors

In what can only be described as a full-circle moment, Gabrielle saw the name “Monarch” on an electrical truck while driving through the city. She and Chandler had been brainstorming names for their budding real estate team. While in the discovery phase of branding, they considered “going the butterfly route,” Chandler explains. The monarch butterfly represents transformation and rebirth, aligning with their life cycle and the 3,000-mile journey during their migration season. However, they wanted to go even deeper, so they dropped the “h” and added more meaning. “Think of a monarchy, royalty,” Chandler explains—the ultimate symbol of power and dignity.

There’s no one secret to success, but Chandler has found a formula that works for him. Equal parts hard work, willingness to embrace change and a loving support system of close friends and family. Chandler looks to the future filled with excitement because his next big adventure is right around the bend.



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C H E R I S M I T H - H A R R I S O N

REGENCY REAL ESTATE

Good as Gold

Cheri Smith-Harrison sat in bed surrounded by her laptop, fax machine and printer. Her Blackberry stayed tucked to her ear with the help of her shoulder. The doctor put her on bed rest for her third trimester, but he never said she had to stop working.

It wasn't until a client who worked as a pharmacist came in to sign a purchase agreement that she realized something may be wrong. He noticed her labored breathing immediately and urged her to go to the hospital. A few hours later, doctors performed emergency surgery to deliver her twin girls, Abigail and Audri Ana, weighing two pounds each. Cheri spent 12 days in the ICU with toxemia/pre-eclampsia, pneumonia and two broken ribs. Meanwhile, her daughters were being treated in the NICU. The two were so tiny that Cheri's husband, Jeff, could slide his wedding band to Abigail's bicep – a picture that has remained quickly accessible on her phone ever since.

God's Plan

Cheri had only recently started her career in real estate, marking a new chapter after years of working as an attorney, predominantly helping clients with wills and successions. However, she also had stints in both family and criminal defense law. The emotional toll of many cases weighed heavily on her empathetic nature. Initially, she obtained her real estate license to save money on a new house for her and Jeff, but it quickly became apparent that this industry was where she truly belonged.

“While talking to one of the agents I sent many clients to, I realized I could ride around town talking on the phone and look at houses with people,” she laughs. “My friend told me I shouldn't over-glorify it like that, but that is what it has always felt like to me. It came naturally.”

Throughout her life, Cheri has often marveled at how things serendipitously work out for the best result. Despite the twists and turns along the way, she has one explanation for why and how everything seems to work out for the best.

“You know when you're following God's will because everything all falls into place,” she says. People need an attorney or a Realtor in all kinds of circumstances, and Cheri is always ready and willing to help. “He directs me, and from there, deals come to fruition,” she explains. Real estate is not who she is but an extension of what she does.

“In law school, one of my professors said something that stuck with me. He told the class, ‘You need a team to get things done, and you're only as good as the team you run with.’”

cover story

By Breanna Pizzolato
Photos by Stevie LeJeune

Problem-solving and connecting people is as natural as breathing for Cheri. Struggling with a sleepless child? She'll point you to her neighbor Melissa. Got a ghost in your house? She'll advise leaving out a bowl of alcohol to keep mischievous spirits at bay. Need an inspection sticker for your car? She knows the best spot in the city and will tell you to ask for Lou. Her knack for helping others by connecting them with the right people and experts is well-known among friends, family and even strangers like the cashier at the store.

This year, Cheri turned her skills inward and became her own best advocate. By speaking up and relentlessly pushing for answers, she prompted doctors to make a life-saving diagnosis. Had it not been discovered in time, doctors told her she would have had "a week to two weeks" to live.

Life Line

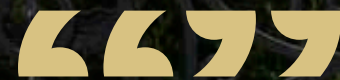
When Cheri struggled to stand up from chairs and get into her car due to weakness in her legs, she knew something was very wrong. Week after week, she visited doctors in search of answers. After scheduling a spinal tap at the neurologist and consultations with spine specialists and rheumatologists, her symptoms piqued the interest of a friend and client who is a doctor. He suggested she visit Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center. There, a bone marrow biopsy revealed MGUS, a non-cancerous condition where the body produces an abnormal protein. Though not cancerous,

people with MGUS have a higher risk of developing blood cancer.

"They told me I could be treated there or go to Mayo Clinic, where doctors were more familiar with my diagnosis," she explains. When she arrived at Mayo Clinic, her doctor ordered a PET scan and was about to leave for vacation but called her back at 5:30 p.m. that day. "He told me he couldn't leave in good conscience after seeing

my results that I was a triple alarm fire," she says. He diagnosed her with aortitis and giant cell arteritis, which can cause sudden blindness and deadly aneurysms. The condition is known as a "cadaver disease" because it is typically only discovered and diagnosed during an autopsy. After being transferred to Baton Rouge, doctors admitted they had never seen a case in a living patient. "They told me I was walking the line of death," she recalls.

Even during her stay at Mayo Clinic, as she waited for test results and between meetings with her



You know when you're following God's will because everything all falls into place.



medical care team, Cheri continued fielding calls, answering questions and completing paperwork to close deals. Her daughters, now in their final semester at LSU, earned their real estate licenses to help with the business when she was still seeking a diagnosis. "They did that all on their own," she says, smiling.

Now on life-saving medication, Cheri will continue to be monitored by doctors both for her care and research. Her daughters remain involved in the business when they're not volunteering at Hospice, fostering shelter pups or working at a local orthopedic clinic. They've even created a system for burying and retrieving Cheri's collection of St. Joseph statues, keeping their mother's listing tradition alive.

No matter what challenges life throws her way, Cheri faces them with resilience and grace, absorbing each experience as a learning opportunity and taking every chance to help someone else.

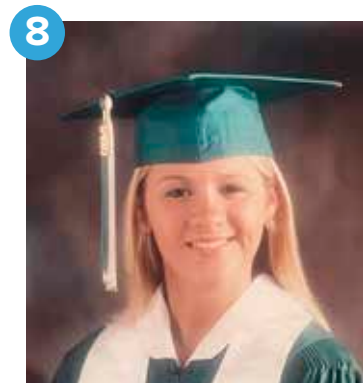
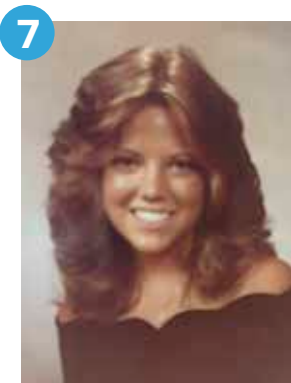
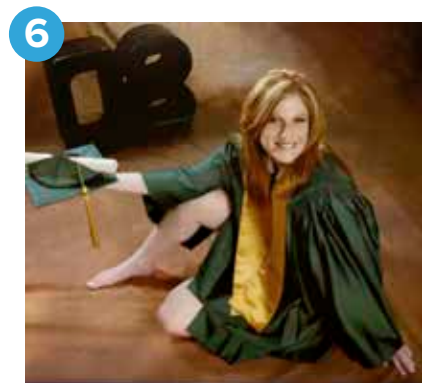
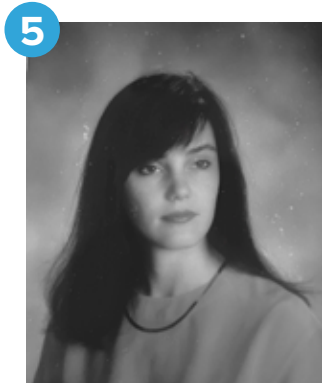
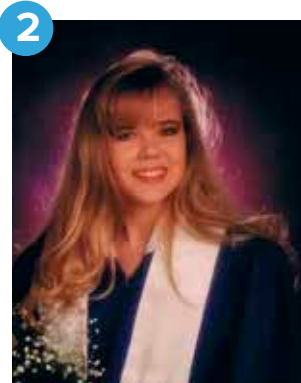
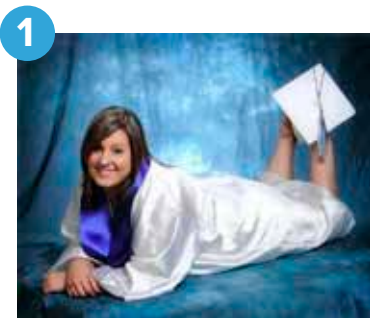
Cheri's unique ability to connect people and solve problems, whether for friends, clients or total strangers, is a hallmark of her character. As the Broker-Owner of Regency Real Estate, she takes seriously the role of a regent - someone in charge of caring for and leading others.

She proves that even the most daunting challenges can be overcome with faith, resilience, family, and the occasional White Swan from Gino's. And when she's not riding around town, talking on the phone and looking at houses with people, she's... Well, she sums it up best. "There is no outside of real estate," she laughs. "Real estate is my fun."

▶▶ special feature

Guess Who?

Throwback Time



7. Tammy Balentine
Broadmoor High School, Class of 1981
8. Lisa Carlisle
Plaquemine High School, Class of 2002
9. Danni Downing
Baton Rouge High School Class of 1974

4. Sheridan Fay
St. Mary's Dominican, Class of 2002
5. Stacy Belanger
Bunkie HS, Class of 1989
6. Caitlyn Guice
Gables Academy, Class of 2008

1. Cherie Mack
Holy Family Home School, Class of 2008
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Parkview Baptist High School, Class of 1995

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