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# WELCOME FALL!

## ▶▶ publisher's note

Greetings!

Welcome to the first month of fall! For most, the kids are back in school, and life is on a steady, structured pace once again. We hope everyone enjoyed their summer break; we sure did! We had some great events with top agent Robert Colello speaking on how to be successful within the NAR settlement, and our own social media manager Amanda Renzi and former Rising Star agent, Lina Saba putting on a fantastic social media/tech tips event as well. Our partner, Women's Council of Realtors, hosted "A Day at The Races", and "Meet Your Local Politicians" in August, both which were fun and informative. This month, we are celebrating leaders! A select group of people that give their time and value to their particular organization for the betterment of our industry. We are also featuring Rising Star Grayson Stewart, a Northern California transplant that is seeing success here in San Diego. Don't miss the fantastic article on Kona Kai San Diego Resort. What a glorious place for a weekend staycation, or to have a lovely lunch or dinner, enjoying all that the resort has to offer. They actually have a wonderful Club that you can join and make Kona Kai a part of your lifestyle with family and friends.

Cheers!

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▶▶ rising star

# GRAYSON STEWART

## REAL ESTATE IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

Photos by Calder Pearce, Golden Lens Media

### When did you start your career in real estate?

While in college, I began to take online real estate classes. I Took my exam towards the end of college, then interviewed and shadowed/attended real estate meetings and day to day activities such as open houses until my license came in.

### What did you do before you became a realtor?

I was a manager at a local winery tasting room while in college. I also bartended during the slow wine season and again as I was waiting to get my real estate business up and running.

### What are you passionate about right now in your business?

Helping first time home buyers discover their perfect home, learning and getting more listings, and helping people build or remodel property to improve their homes and lives.

### What has been the most rewarding part of your business?

Watching people achieving their real estate ownership goals. Purchasing real estate will set them up for a better financial future than renting. It's always hard to take that first step out of the renter pool, but it's incredibly beneficial.

### What was your biggest challenge as a realtor?

My biggest challenge as a realtor was transitioning careers as I didn't have a large nest egg to depend on if I didn't succeed in real estate.

### What's your favorite part of being a realtor?

My favorite part of being a realtor is the sociability and being able to network and improve your connections with other agents and business individuals.

### How does Real Estate fit into your dreams and goals?

Real estate has fit into my dreams and goals by the fact that it's helping me to buy my first property in the next few months. This will help me begin to achieve my financial goals down the line as well.

### Tell us about your family?

My family is in San Luis Obispo, where my mom serves as the current town mayor. My parents also are part owners in a local flower shop. My dad also has his real estate license, and my younger brother lives in downtown San Luis Obispo and works as a property manager of an apartment building owned by our dad's real estate team.

### Any favorite books?

Some of my recent favorites have been "Outwitting the Devil", "Sell it like Serhant" and "Think and Grow Rich".

### What are your hobbies and interests outside of Real Estate?

I like to play soccer for fun once a week. I also enjoy golfing a lot, I go at

least once or twice a week. I also enjoy hanging out with my dog P.

### Are there any charities or organizations you support?

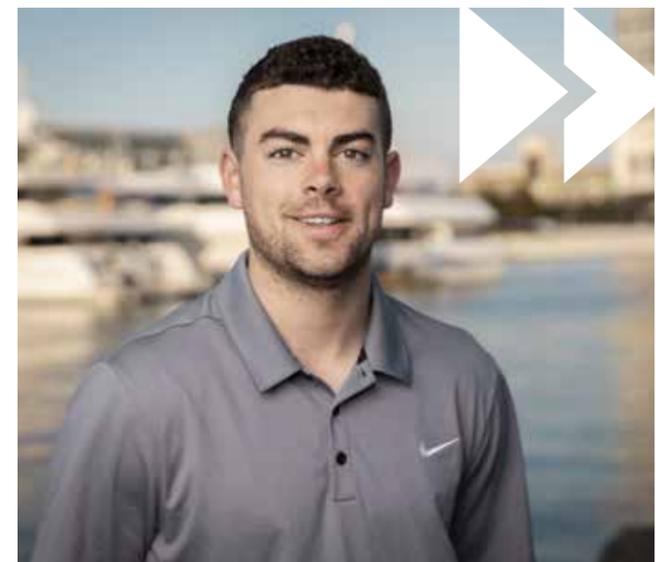
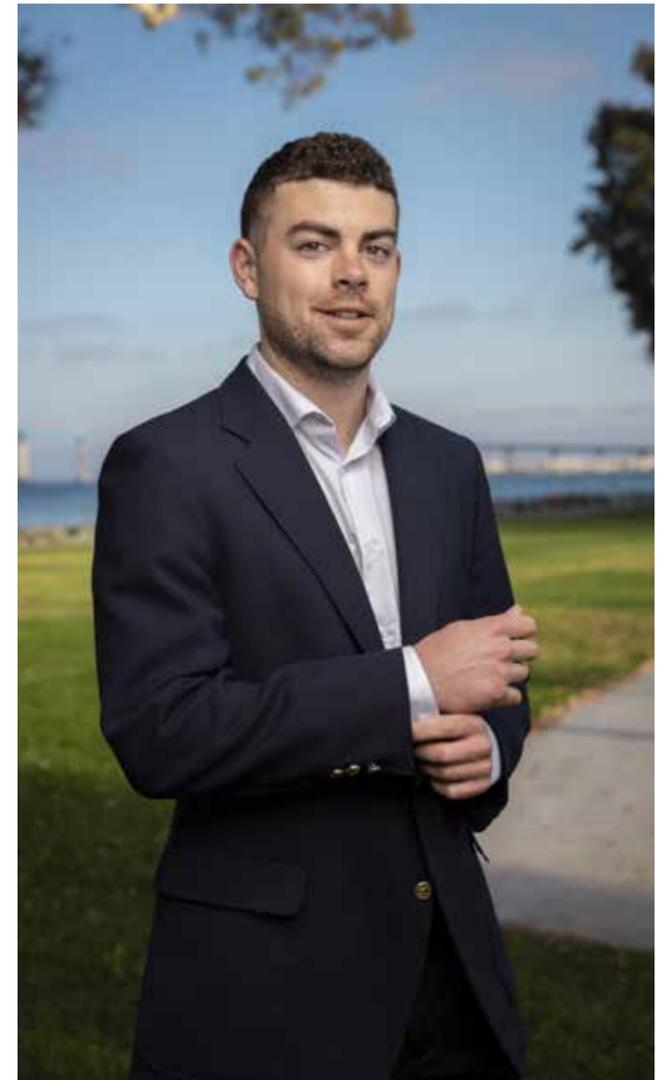
I support YBNB, as I am a member and will speak at our events and will be starting to host events to inform members about purchasing and selling real estate here in San Diego.

### Define success

Success to me is achieving the goals you set for yourself; being content with how you have lived your life and what you have accomplished as well as the relationships you've cultivated through the years

### Given your status and expertise, what is some advice you would give the up-and-coming Rising Stars?

I would say communicating is crucial, being quick, responsive and genuine will take you a long way. People can read fake, if you don't know an answer to something admit it and find it out for them right away, don't ever lie.



## A NEW TOOL TO FIND & SELL PROPERTIES

By David Cornwell  
Photos by Brandon Pease-Linked Preview, LLC

The Wispr Network is something to shout about, say its founders, Tom and Lara Gabriele.

Launched earlier this year, Wispr is an exclusive invitation-only community for real estate agents.

“Wispr combines 21st-century technology with traditional networking to reimagine real estate home sales,” Tom says. It does that by uncovering pre-market properties for buyers and increasing deal flow for agents.”

“Our platform connects agents and exposes their pre-market inventory while simultaneously protecting the integrity of their client relationships,” Tom says.

He says this approach allows agents to connect potential buyers with suitable properties before they even hit the market, reducing transactional costs and giving sellers more control over deal terms.

“Ultimately the focus is on generating deal opportunities rather than just generating leads.”

Community access includes state-of-the-art software, a marketplace of thousands of Wispr properties, robust AI for deal matching and a series of live, in-person and virtual events where agents connect with each other across the country to share pre-market opportunities.

“We aim to foster a network of like-minded agents who aspire to better serve their clients and reshape how the industry works,” Tom says.

Lara says the idea was born from Tom’s tech background and her own 22 years of experience in real estate.

“When I shared my frustrations about the industry with Tom, we put our heads together to envision the ultimate platform for agents to do deals without hindrance, free from giants like Zillow,” she says.

“My biggest gripe with the industry has always been its focus on leads and outdated agent marketing automation,” she says. Wispr believes in supporting the agent-client relationship and full-service approach. We want to create a network of Goldman Sachs-level agents for Main Street homeowners and homebuyers.”

Since launching earlier this year, Wispr has quickly grown to include agents in 12 states. There’s also a companion mobile app for both Google Play and Apple’s App Store.

With their backgrounds, it’s no surprise the couple met on MySpace, the first social networking platform to find a global audience.

Years later “with three amazing children,” Lara says, it’s evident everything worked out.

“We are one big happy mess,” she says of the couple working from home while their children—two girls and a boy, ages 14, nine, and five—are home for the summer or school breaks.

“Sometimes the chaos seems never-ending.”

Working to ensure their children are good kids who grow up to be good adults, they also work to set them up for success, their oldest daughter very much involved in Wispr.

“We definitely believe there are different paths to success other than getting a degree like it was in our parents’ generation,” Tom says. “We think it’s a perfect opportunity for her and it’s great to be able to be teaching her now.”

Both Lara and Tom were raised in Catholic households and their faith is the family’s anchor.

“We try to live in Christ as much as we can,” Tom says. “And that’s something that we don’t shy away from.”

Born to an Egyptian Lebanese mother, Lara’s Irish Canadian father passed away when she was young.

“So, I had both the advantages and disadvantages of being raised by a single mother,” she says. “She was an incredible woman, kept our house together, put us through private school and showed me a very strong work ethic that I keep to this day.”

Tom, meanwhile, is Italian through and through, his great grandparents immigrating to the U.S. four generations back.

His parents grew up in a New York Italian suburb, his father serving in the military during the 60s. After multiple



moves, they landed in Sacramento where Tom was born and raised.

Both now entering the Wispr phase of their lives, they’re more excited than ever about what lies ahead.

“We are committed to helping agents source deals through the community,” Tom says. “We help them develop the deep and robust professional relationships needed to be truly successful.”

He says the key to success as an agent is to focus on providing value to clients rather than just trying to get listings.

“Instead of cold calling, we should aim to connect with clients in a more meaningful way, such as informing them about potential opportunities that match their needs,” he says. “By building strong relationships and understanding the needs of our clients, we can create more opportunities and provide better value as agents.”

“Tom and I talk about this all the time,” Lara says. “It’s our mission to serve agents. We believe in the power of an agent. We believe in the relationship that agents bring to the marketplace. And we don’t believe that that should be displaced in any way, shape or form.”



# MONICA MARTINEZ CHIN

2024 PRESIDENT

Photography By Jun Lee - Sureshot Productions

**Tell us a bit about yourself. What were the life events that led you to become a real estate agent?**

I moved to this country just before turning 30, and I didn't speak any English. I was a kindergarten teacher in Mexico. I got married and that's the reason I moved to this country. My husband encouraged me to become a real estate agent, so I learned English while taking classes to get my Real Estate license. My journey to become a real estate agent was fueled by a genuine desire to help others and meet new people in this new country.

**What life experiences have shaped you both personally and professionally?**

I started to live on my own at 16 years old. It was hard and scary at that time, but it helped me to adapt easily to the changes and challenges I went through as a young woman. Moving to a new country with no friends and family and starting over at almost 30 years old was another experience that made me stronger. I worked hard by finding clients while door knocking the streets in San Diego and that's how I met my first clients.

As English is a second language, I need to work 10 times harder than native English speakers. I found myself many times translating conversations before I can reply to my clients or other real estate professionals when I started. Even now, sometimes I need to look on google what LFG means and any other texting abbreviations. My mind is usually fast, always finding answers and translating what people want to express or communicate. I do believe the more challenges you have the stronger you become!

**Do you have a favorite quote or mantra that motivates you?**

Yes, when I started in Real Estate my mentor would call me in the morning, and we shouted out 10 affirmations every day at 7am. We did that for a year. One of them that is always in my mind is: "I find solutions to every situation that I have."

**Besides your volunteerism, what are your interests and hobbies?**

I love reading, contact with mother earth like exploring national parks, a nice scenic hike and counseling people into self-development.

**Tell us about your organization. What is its core mission, values and goals.**

The National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals®. We are The Voice for Hispanic Real Estate® and proud champions of homeownership for the Hispanic community.

Homeownership is the symbol of the American Dream, the cornerstone of wealth creation and a stabilizing force for working families. Our role as trusted advisors and passionate advocates is to help more Hispanic families achieve the American Dream in a sustainable way that empowers them for generations to come.

**Mission Statement**

NAHREP is a purpose-driven organization that is propelled by a passionate combination of entrepreneurial spirit, cultural heritage and the advocacy of its members. Our mission is to advance sustainable Hispanic homeownership. NAHREP accomplishes its mission by:

- Educating and empowering the real estate professionals who serve Hispanic homebuyers and sellers
- Advocating for public policy that supports the trade association's mission
- Facilitating relationships among industry stakeholders, real estate practitioners and other housing industry professionals

**What drew you to become a leader within your organization?**

I'm passionate about helping my community, especially immigrants because I understand the struggle, and the challenges they go through when moving to a new country. Most of them came to this country with dreams and the desire to offer a better life to the ones they loved.



Also, I believe our realtors need to give more guidance and educate this community because there are many programs available for them. If more realtors know how to help the Hispanic community, we will be able to help more families to achieve the American Dream of homeownership and start the path of wealth creation for our future generations.

My goal was to serve 2 years as a director after attending one of the big National events called L'ATTITUDE when I saw the big picture and all the work the organization does for our Hispanic community. 2023 was my first year as the treasurer and the board nominated me to be the president for 2024. At first, I hesitated because I still make mistakes when speaking English and I was a little afraid to make mistakes in English in front of 300 people in our events, but then I realized that it was an opportunity to do something that I'm passionate about and be the VOICE for the ones we help.

**What are the pros and cons of being President for an industry association?**

The pros are all the rewarding experiences, the satisfaction that you are helping your community, the support and love you get from people, the satisfaction of being part of the big national organization and its amazing mission. Also, the board and the people involved become your family, so the unity of the board and the teamwork is very rewarding. Also, the opportunity to make connections nationally and locally, build trust in your community with your colleagues, clients and main players in your city.

The cons are that you could get a little distracted in your business trying to make sure everything in the organization is working the way it should be, sacrifice a little time away from your family, and if you are not super social still try to make an effort to show up at different events because most of other organizations want you to support theirs and they will also support yours.

**Has it been difficult to balance your servant leadership with your real estate business? How do you make time for both?**

This year was a little challenging for me to balance both. I'm a very responsible person and I make it a priority to serve the organization 100%. Before I started, I decided this position was going to be for one year only and I wanted to do it right. I believe it depends on the personality of the leader and the priorities they have. Everyone can balance both by blocking time on the daily schedule.

**Do you feel it has benefitted your business to be involved with your organization?**

I feel I have developed my leadership skills; I have learned a lot since I started, and it has helped me to meet many people and to be knowledgeable of all the different programs and solutions available for my community and clients. This year was the first time I visited Capitol Hill, and being there with my board fighting for solutions for our Hispanic community was very powerful. I feel that since I joined the organization I have been growing and developing my skills and ability to find solutions.

**How do you encourage others to join your organization, and to step up to leadership positions?**

I believe in the power of energy. If I and my board believe in our mission, people will feel it and we will attract others. Our goal is to provide value in our events and bring topics and speakers that our local industry needs based on the challenges we are experiencing. Providing tools to help with business and with their clients. We also believe in collaboration and love to share information that will help others in their business. We want leaders who are 100% in! Most of the future directors will join a committee as the first step.

**In closing, is there anything you would like to include about your organization?**

I want to thank and express my gratitude to my board of directors for their time, their dedication, their hard work and their giving hearts. All of them are volunteers. Our chapter was able to grow this year because we work together as a team, and everyone works hard behind the scenes. All the wins in our organization are because we all do our BEST. I love and appreciate everyone involved and together as a big organization with National, I know we are making a difference. Mi gente, Mil gracias!



## ERIC TAI

Photography By Jun Lee - Sureshot Productions

**Tell us a bit about yourself. What were the life events that led you to become a real estate agent?**

I grew up in Sacramento and the Bay Area up until 2008, when my girlfriend at the time convinced me to move to San Diego. I did and when I got here, I had no idea what I wanted to do career wise. I ended up joining a debt settlement company working customer service. 3 weeks into getting hired, the CEO came in and let everyone go because he had sold the company to a larger entity. He pulled me aside and asked me about my experience and to see if I would be interested in becoming a loan officer. I would be the first loan officer for a start up direct lender in Carlsbad, CA. That was my foot in the door to the real estate/ mortgage industry.

**What life experiences have shaped you both personally and professionally?**

I was always the type of guy that lived in the moment. I rarely planned for anything a month out, let alone have a 1 year, 5 year or 10-year plan. What really changed me personally and professionally would be the arrival of my daughter in 2009 and son in 2015. It really grounded me and made me grow up a lot faster than the pace that I was going at that time. Now, my big why are my kids and my whole world revolves around them. I work hard to not only provide for them, but also to give them things that I never had when I was a kid.

**Do you have a favorite quote or mantra that motivates you?**

“You miss 100% of the shots that you don’t take.”

**Besides your volunteerism, what are your interests and hobbies?**

I love to vacation! Exploring new places, eating new food, meeting new people, etc. have always been very important to me. Besides vacations, the gym is a good outlet for me. There’s nothing like having a stressful day and going to the gym to let all that stress out.

**Tell us about your organization.****What is its core mission, values and goals.**

The Asian Real Estate Association of America (or AREAA). Our Mission Statement – AREAA is dedicated to promoting sustainable homeownership opportunities in Asian American communities by creating a powerful national voice for housing and real estate professionals that serve this dynamic market.

**What drew you to become a leader within your organization?**

I have been a member of AREAA for quite a few years. I was introduced to the AREAA San Diego board of directors in 2018 and instantly fell in love with how the board operated. I immediately felt like family and wanted to jump in and help however I could. I became a board member in 2018 and joined the executive board in 2021. Now, I consider our AREAA San Diego board as my 2nd family.

## 2024 PRESIDENT

**What are the pros and cons of being President for an Industry association?**

There’s a lot more pros than there is cons. Some of the pros would be the immense network that AREAA has all over the country. I have been able to meet so many amazing individuals that I now talk to on a regular basis. I’ve learned so much about policy, leadership and the importance of representation, because not everyone is represented the right way or at all. We also provide a lot of educational events and seeing everyone attend and take away information that they can implement in their businesses is really rewarding. The community outreach events that we organize and getting everyone to participate to improve our community is also extremely rewarding.

Some cons can be that being the president for such a huge chapter of a national organization can get very stressful in terms of budgeting, organizing events, making sure events are well attended and ultimately keeping everyone focused on the goal. Being the president, you also must excel at communication because you work with so many different personalities.

**Has it been difficult to balance your servant leadership with your real estate business? How do you make time for both?**

It can sometimes be very difficult to balance the 2 but that’s why it’s so important for the president to be able to delegate tasks to the rest of the board and trust that they will make it happen. As the president, I participate in the committee calls for all events that we put on, just to make sure that we are on track.

**Do you feel it has benefitted your business to be involved with your organization?**

Absolutely. I have made so many connections through AREAA that I will cherish for the rest of my career/life. I now have so many friends across the country! I also have learned so much about Asian American cultures and how there is still so much work to be done to ensure that they receive the help needed to create generational wealth through real estate.

**How do you encourage others to join your organization, and to step up to leadership positions?**

For folks that are considering joining our organization, I let them know that the membership is very affordable, and it goes to a good cause. You will participate in events where we bring in industry experts to talk about current and pertinent real estate and mortgage information as well as the successes, they are experiencing so that you can potentially duplicate and improve your business as well.

For leadership, I always start off with our Mission Statement. At the end of the day, we are all volunteers, and we dedicate our time and effort to improve as an organization so if you don’t truly believe in our mission, it might not be a good fit. However, if you do support and believe in our mission, just give me a call and we will have a discussion on what leadership position might work for you!

**In closing, is there anything you would like to include about your organization?**

Make sure you follow @areaasandiego for up-to-date information on upcoming events. Come out and check us out and I promise we will not disappoint!

# LAURIE MACDONALD

## 2024 PRESIDENT

Photography By Jun Lee - Sureshot Productions

**Tell us a bit about yourself. What were the life events that led you to become a real estate agent?**

I am a 4th generation San Diegan, who grew up in the house next door to Grandparents who were both Real Estate brokers and owned Kelly & Associates in La Mesa. I spent a lot of time with them and in the office, listening to the life changing transactions being made. They were helping people sell their biggest assets so they could retire and down-size or the newly married VA couple who just moved to San Diego and just found out their family was expanding. Besides my grandmothers amazing suits with matching high heels, it was stories like these that made me want to help people with their real estate dreams too.



**Do you have a favorite quote or mantra that motivates you?**

“The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion”- Paul Coelho I to show by example to my children, colleagues, neighbors.

“ The time is always right to do what is right” -MLK Integrity is one of the most important things to me.

**Besides your volunteerism, what are your interests and hobbies?**

I have never been one for going to the gym, but I love chasing a ball! Lol! Pickleball is my new love, and I try to play 5 days a week. I love competition and games, whether its cornhole, cards, or Rummikub. I also love Camping, and traveling to our family houses in San Felipe, Mexico

**Tell us about your organization. What is its core mission, values and goals.**

Pacific Southwest Association of Realtors Mission is to empower REALTORS. WE help REALTORS help each other by working together. We believe REALTORS are a valuable resource and, Private property rights must be secure, and homeownership is widely available.

**What life experiences have shaped you both personally and professionally?**

Travel, seeing the different states and real estate in different countries really makes you realize how special San Diego is. We really have it all, the weather, Mountains, deserts, the beach, an easy-going culture, food and great diversity.

**What drew you to become a leader within your organization?**

I like having a seat at the table, working together with other leaders to move our profession forward.

**What are the pros and cons of being President for an Industry association?**

Change and keeping the balance between volunteering and your own business and clients. Since being involved with YPN, my business has only grown, I’m so grateful for all the education and amazing relationships i have fostered through getting involved.

**How do you encourage others to join your organization, and to step up to leadership positions?**

One of the most important things I believe a leader can do, I lift others. Always be looking for others to bring up and get them involved. I believe strongly in passing the torch, new fresh ideas are so important to continue to grow any organization.

**In closing, is there anything you would like to include about your organization?**

Big change for our profession is here, and those who are able to change and pivot quickly will continue to thrive. Pacific Southwest Association of Realtors wants to be available for our members and their needs to help them grow. We are a very transparent organization and welcome involvement in any of our committees. Our board of directors and PSAR staff welcomes any ideas or input from our members.



# DARRILL COOK

## 2024 PRESIDENT

Photography By Jun Lee - Sureshot Productions

### Tell us a bit about yourself. What were the life events that led you to become a real estate agent?

Growing up with very humble means and witnessing my parents and community members struggle to create opportunities for their families profoundly shaped my path. These experiences instilled in me a deep commitment to improving the lives of others, leading me to pursue a career in real estate.

### What life experiences have shaped you both personally and professionally?

The rigorous demands of military life instilled in me a sense of discipline and commitment. These qualities have permeated every aspect of my personal life, ensuring that I approach challenges with determination and a structured mindset. Facing diverse and often difficult situations have taught me resilience. The strong bonds formed with fellow service members have highlighted the importance of teamwork and camaraderie. These relationships have not only provided a support system but also emphasized the value of working together towards common goals. Clear and effective communication was vital in the military, whether for issuing orders or coordinating with team members. This skill has been instrumental in my professional life, enabling me to convey ideas clearly and foster effective collaboration. The military's emphasis on honor and integrity has deeply influenced my professional ethics. Upholding these standards has earned me respect and trust in my professional interactions and leadership roles. Training and mentoring others in the military have honed my skills in development and guidance. This experience has been valuable in professional settings, where I have taken on roles

that involve training new employees and mentoring colleagues.

### Do you have a favorite quote or mantra that motivates you?

Out of the many quotes that inspired me this response came to mind: "There's no breakthrough without follow-through!"

### Besides your volunteerism, what are your interests and hobbies?

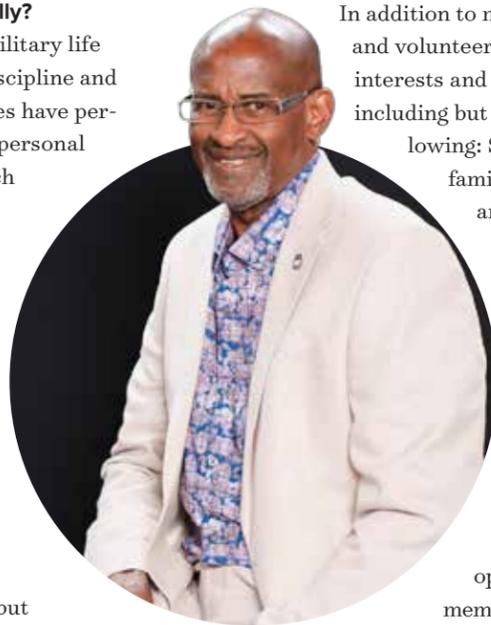
In addition to my professional endeavors and volunteerism, I have a variety of interests and hobbies that enrich my life, including but are not limited to the following: Spending quality time with family, enjoying Jazz, Gospel, and R&B music, playing golf, dining out with friends and family, going to movies, concerts and shows, as well as traveling.

### Tell us about your organization. What is its core mission, values and goals.

NAREB's mission is to enhance the economic development and improvement of its members and the communities we serve. We advocate for democracy in housing and strive for equal housing opportunities for all, particularly for African Americans and other underserved minority groups. NAREB's core values are Integrity, Advocacy, Empowerment, Community Focus and Professionalism. NAREB's goals aim to promote homeownership among African Americans and other minority groups by offering education and professional development opportunities for the community we serve and its members.

### What drew you to become a leader within your organization?

I was drawn to a leadership role within NAREB because I believe my life experiences and skills



align perfectly with the organization's mission, values and goals. Serving as President has allowed me to influence the direction and policies of the association, fostering positive change while remaining committed to our mission.

### What are the pros and cons of being President for an Industry association?

The pros of Leadership are shaping the association's direction and policies, building valuable connections, gaining respect within the industry, enhancing leadership and management skills and making impactful decisions that affect the community.

The cons of Leadership are balancing the demands of the role with other responsibilities, managing crises and delivering results, navigating differing opinions and conflicts, the role's demands can lead to potential burnout, and bearing the weight of the association's successes and failures

### Has it been difficult to balance your servant leadership with your real estate business? How do you make time for both?

Balancing my servant leadership with my real estate business has been challenging but rewarding. I have established personal and professional relationships that have significantly benefited my business. By setting a good example and promoting the goals and values of NAREB, I hope to encourage others to take leadership roles within our organization.

### Do you feel it has benefitted your business to be involved with your organization?

Absolutely, being involved with my organization has significantly benefited my business. The network and resources available through the organization have provided invaluable support and opportunities for growth. Overall, my involvement with the organization has been a cornerstone in advancing my business, providing a robust platform for networking, growth, and professional development.

### How do you encourage others to join your organization, and to step up to leadership positions?

Encouraging others to join our organization and step up to leadership positions involves highlighting the many benefits and opportunities we offer. I emphasize

the numerous advantages of being a part of our organization, such as access to a vast professional network, industry resources, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. Sharing success stories and testimonials from current members also helps illustrate these benefits.

I actively promote our mentorship programs, and I make it a point to communicate the various leadership opportunities available within the organization. I assure potential leaders that they will receive the support and training needed to succeed in their roles. Recognition programs and awards highlight the value we place on leadership and active participation. I hope to create a compelling case for joining our organization and stepping into leadership positions, ensuring that our community continues to thrive and grow.

### In closing, is there anything you would like to include about your organization?

In closing, I would like to emphasize the outstanding qualities and opportunities that our organization offers. We are committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where every member can thrive. Our dedication to professional development, continuous learning, and networking ensures that our members are always equipped with the latest industry knowledge and skills. We pride ourselves on our strong sense of community, where collaboration and mutual support are at the forefront of everything we do. The leadership opportunities within our organization are abundant, providing a platform for members to grow, lead, and make a significant impact. We invite you to join us, experience the benefits, and contribute to our ongoing journey of growth and excellence.



# MARIA ZVETINA

2024 PRESIDENT

Photography By Jun Lee - Sureshot Productions

**Tell us a bit about yourself. What were the life events that led you to become a real estate agent?**

I had just gotten married, moved to a new area, and was looking for my next employment without a big commute. My husband was a Realtor, and he bought me the books to get my license. I thought about it. I had just come off working for myself as a café owner/entrepreneur and have a ton of client and marketing experience, also I had gone to art school and studied interior design and architecture...in general I have a love of homes. I knew that it would be a good fit for me. I've never looked back.

**What life experiences have shaped you both personally and professionally?**

Well as a Realtor, definitely purchasing my own home. I felt so naïve. I wanted to help others through the process in the best way possible, so they really felt safe, that I gave time to all their questions and was able to help quell fears with information and solid advice. That mindset is a mantra for my service as President of Women's Council as well. I love the solid collaboration of a team, I enjoy hearing other perspectives and working together to make magic happen. It makes for a fuller experience for all and a successful one.



**Do you have a favorite quote or mantra that motivates you?**

From one of my coaches: "Go fearlessly forward, focused and assertive with no apologies!" I have that above my desk. Another is, "Wouldn't that be great?" Whenever I have an opportunity come to me, I look at how I can materialize success starting with that opening thought.

**Besides your volunteerism, what are your interests and hobbies?**

Reading. I'm in 3 book clubs at the moment. I study flamenco dance. I live near the beach and often make time for walks. Hiking, biking, pickleball. Listening to live music with friends.

**Tell us about your organization. What is its core mission, values and goals.**

Women's Council is the voice for women in Real Estate and is the premiere source for the development of leaders in our industry. We lay the foundation at the local level. San Diego is a hotbed for California leadership in and out of Women's Council, in our local and state associations as well as on the national level. In 2023, the top three executive leaders of CAR were women, and all Women's Council of REALTORS® members, which speaks volumes.

**What drew you to become a leader within your organization?**

It challenged me, and I thought I could make a difference. I am looking forward to working at the state level next year as District Vice President, and to being trained well in service as a result when volunteering at my local association.

**What are the pros and cons of being President for an Industry association?**

Volunteerism has always been an important part of my personal growth and journey in Real Estate. I have met many good people on similar paths and journeys in an out of Women's Council. It has helped me build relationships in the industry and greatly furthered my knowledge. No cons.

**Has it been difficult to balance your servant leadership with your real estate business? How do you make time for both?**

No. I completely enjoy serving. I also am still building my business here in San Diego. I am enjoying the journey in both.

**Do you feel it has benefitted your business to be involved with your organization?**

Absolutely. Not only have I gotten business from referrals, but Women's Council has also grown me through essential training with my business knowledge. It has brought me close to people I admire and desire to emulate in the industry. I keep my finger on the pulse of Real Estate and don't ever feel left behind.

**How do you encourage others to join your organization, and to step up to leadership positions?**

Firstly, we often work from within to build our leaders, we encourage camaraderie and tapping people on the shoulder. We put on great programs. We do outreach at broker tours, caravans. We encourage our team to step up. We nurture old and new members alike, so they spread the love and attract good people.

**In closing, is there anything you would like to include about your organization?**

It gets better and better the more I get into Women's Council. As I reach to give more, I get more. This has been one of the most supportive years I've felt at Women's Council both in my own network, state and nationwide. I encourage anyone who's interested in networking and leadership to check us out locally at WCRsandiego.com, and always at WCR.org.



# DEREK BARKSDALE

## 2024 PRESIDENT

Photography By Jun Lee - Sureshot Productions

### Tell us a bit about yourself. What were the life events that led you to become a real estate agent?

Originally from Oakland, California, I joined the military in 1989 and have been in San Diego since 1990 when I pre-commissioned the USS Rushmore. San Diego has been home to me ever since, as I served all 21 years here—11 as an enlisted member and 10 as an officer—in America's finest city. I've always had a passion for real estate, which I attribute to my mother, who studied for her real estate exam while pregnant with me and got licensed one month before I was born. My wife and I gradually became real estate investors and decided she should get her license to help us offset some of the fees. Unfortunately, she got her license in 2006, just before the market downturn in 2007. Despite this, I encouraged her to help one of my shipmates buy his first home. We guided him through the steps of getting preapproved, doing some credit repair, and then went house hunting. The day we closed escrow, I met him at his new doorstep, and he broke down in tears, thanking me for helping him become the first homeowner in his family. That was the day I knew I was going to retire and start a company, Military Mutual, to help our military veterans and their families achieve homeownership.

### What life experiences have shaped you both personally and professionally?

I was born into a celebrity household. My father was an NBA basketball player who broke many of the color barriers in the sport. By the time I was growing up, he had transitioned from his basketball career into a philanthropic career with a nonprofit organization called Save High School Sports. I witnessed him raise funds and help communities with groups of people who had common goals. I always knew that I wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself, and the military was the first step. While in the military, I was



guided by leaders who saw potential in me and held me accountable to being my highest and best self through integrity, hard work, and always doing what was best for the bigger picture. I planned to become a realtor and then ultimately a broker with a brokerage (Military Mutual). Today, I am a real estate broker and licensed mortgage loan originator serving as the founder of Military Mutual and co-founder of Ensure Lending. Both companies focus on education first and foremost while giving back to our military veterans and their family members.

### Do you have a favorite quote or mantra that motivates you?

Actually, I have quite a few, but the ones that stand out the most are as follows:

- It's not about you (me) – Force Master Chief Keith Goosby
- What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us – Oliver Wendell Holmes
- You can have everything in life that you want. If you can just help enough other people get what they want – Zig Ziglar.

### Besides your volunteerism, what are your interests and hobbies?

I absolutely love golf, and everything about it. It's a sport that it's very humbling, and at the same time it requires a level of meditation, as you stand over the ball, which helps me focus on one task at a time on and off the golf course.

### Tell us about your organization. What is its core mission, values and goals.

VAREP was established in 2011, the same year that I retired from the military and started Military Mutual. Our founders, Justin and Son, carry the same passion that I have. VAREP is not only my military and real

estate background but also my "why," which is to change the way veterans are served through real estate.

At VAREP, we not only provide education to veterans and their families, but we also educate our own industry to better serve veterans. Setting aside competitive thoughts, we genuinely give back to veterans by training our competition to be better at serving them.

We are on Capitol Hill each year lobbying for homeownership for veterans. There are 92 congressionally chartered veteran service organizations (VSOs) in the world, like Amvets, DAV, etc., but not one advocates for the VA home loan guarantee. VAREP is already a veteran service organization, but once we become a congressionally chartered VSO, we will be able to advocate for veteran homeownership and the VA home loan guarantee at the highest level.

### What drew you to become a leader within your organization?

It goes back to "my why," changing the way that veterans are served through Real Estate. A lot of people complain about the things that are going on wrong around veteran homeownership, and the VA home loan benefit; whereas VAREP facilitates making a difference at the highest possible level, and I wanted to be a part of it!

### What are the pros and cons of being President for an industry association?

The biggest pro is being able to make an impact and being at the leading edge of change. If I have an idea on how to do something, as the president, it's easier to get the ball rolling.

As for the cons, it is a nonprofit and we are told that there is work that is involved. I would say easily put 20 hours per month towards ensuring, the San Diego chapter is meeting its goals. I have to say, I have an amazing board of directors who helps me along the way though!

### Has it been difficult to balance your servant leadership with your real estate business? How do you make time for both?

Not necessarily, as I've been in the nonprofit space for many years with the Navy league, the Eagles organization, and many other nonprofits, where I've

served in a Board of Director positions for most. I do my best to live and breathe by a calendar, ensuring that the big rocks come first. The big rocks are my family, and those who depend on me at Military Mutual and Ensure Lending first and foremost. Keeping things in perspective is always best, otherwise, we will find ourselves burnt out and ultimately failing at all levels.

### Do you feel it has benefitted your business to be involved with your organization?

Absolutely! The best way it has benefited my business is by fueling my passion and being able to see the amazing things that our organization does for veterans and their families. Additionally, I've met such great people along the way, whether they are members of VAREP or other associations of realtors who share a similar passion for real estate. This involvement truly fuels me to be my highest and best self!

### How do you encourage others to join your organization, and to step up to leadership positions?

The great thing about our organization is that it's only \$100 per year to become a member. The value you receive through our lunch and learns, networking mixers, and the ability to connect with others to make a change in the way veterans are served through real estate is compelling. I understand that many people may not have time to take on leadership positions, but for some reason, we never fall short of those who would like to step up into these roles. We are absolutely blessed with an amazing Board of Directors!

### In closing, is there anything you would like to include about your organization?

VAREP has evolved significantly over the years, but our vision has always remained clear from the very start. Having chapters spread across America, especially near our military bases, is our aspiration. Whenever I visit Washington DC on Capitol Hill, I am always amazed at the misunderstanding's members of Congress and the Senate may have about veterans and the VA home loan benefit. We are truly making a change at the highest level possible. I urge anyone in our real estate industry—whether you are a realtor, lender, title representative, escrow representative, or anyone serving veterans through the real estate transaction—to become a part of this amazing organization!





# Join the CLUB!

By David Cornwell  
 Photography By Brandon Pease-Linked Preview, LLC  
 Select Photos provided by Kona Kai Resort



## KONA KAI SAN DIEGO RESORT

Echoes of the past live on at The Club at Kona Kai. Adding value to club membership and how to better pamper members drives it into the future.

Opening in 1953, the Kona Kai Club once welcomed presidents, movie stars and celebrities of every kind.

“It was called ‘The Club of Clubs’ in the 50s and 60s,” says general manager Scott Ostrander. “Back then, its exclusivity and glamor made it more than just a place to socialize but really made it a lifestyle.”

Created by C. Arnault Smith on a sandbar known as Shelter Island, Scott says the club and accompanying marina were designed to be a luxurious and exclusive haven for Smith’s many friends.

And though the Kona Kai Resort has long since evolved into a world-class resort, membership in the Club at Kona Kai is still very much a lifestyle to be lived, he says.

“The Club at Kona Kai is no longer the domain of just the rich and famous but of families as well,” Scott says.

“You can’t help but have a great time at Kona Kai Resort. But membership in the Club at Kona Kai just makes it so much better.”

Located on the tip of Shelter Island, the resort is just three miles from the San Diego International Airport and a short ride away from San Diego’s historic Gaslamp District, with many of the city’s other attractions nearby.



Scott Ostrander Kona Kai General Manager



With 170 spacious guest rooms, 41 of them being suites, the resort offers 13,000 square feet of indoor meeting space, with 43,000 square feet of outdoor space in three unique venues, all framed by the San Diego Bay.

The resort features multiple pools, a diverse choice of daily activities, broad and robust fitness and wellness programs, a rejuvenating full-service spa and a multitude of action water sports.

And just as it was when established, the marina remains San Diego’s premiere marina—closest to the open ocean with more than 500 slips.

But, as Scott says, membership in the Club at Kona Kai makes the Kona Kai experience even better.

Club members get special pricing at the resort’s SpaTerre on all spa treatments, packages, à la carte services and retail items to help pamper body and mind.

Preferred pricing is also offered to club members at Vessel Restaurant and its bar as well as the poolside Tiki Bar.

With an extensive hospitality background, Scott takes particular pride in the resort’s culinary program, which he helps make sure is always trendy and delicious.

Other perks club members receive include members-only cabanas at the resort’s private beach with full food and beverage service in season.

There are also discounts on cabana rentals, catering, events, and corporate meetings and a healthy discount from Action Sports on kayaks, stand-up paddleboards, pedal boats, catamarans, wave runners and other equipment.

Helping members ensure their Kona Kai lifestyle is a healthy lifestyle, club members can also take unlimited complimentary fitness classes with certified trainers and instructors at the Health and Fitness Club. Weight training, yoga variations, deep stretching, cardio and Zumba are some of the classes offered.



The Club at Kona Kai members can also take full advantage of the resort's sister San Diego property, Mission Bay Resort, with a waterfront pool, five restaurants, a luxurious spa, nightly live music and more.

While the Club at Kona Kai has changed over the years, the memories of the past remain.



A member of the Kona Kai Yacht Club from 1966 until his death, Jerry Lewis' yacht remains moored at the Kona Kai Marina. Charlton Heston used to play in tennis tournaments there when he was a member.

Liberace used to play at the Club's restaurant three days a week, sometimes accompanied by Peggy Lee.

Members and guests at the club have included JFK, Richard Nixon, John Wayne, Clark Gable, Dick Van Dyke and many others.

To perhaps give an idea of the club's prominence in the day, consider that one-time owner Jack Wrather also owned the Disneyland Hotel, the Queen Mary, Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose, Muzak Corporation and other unique properties and businesses.



*the club at*  
**KONA KAI**



Wrather also financed and helped produce movies and TV shows, including The Lone Ranger and Lassie. A number of TV shows and movies were filmed at Kona Kai or nearby.

Always looking to the future and how to improve value and experience for members, Scott says he'll continue to make sure the facilities and services are beyond first-class.



He also hopes to create new and compelling activities for club members to enjoy.

"We want to make sure being a member of the Club at Kona Kai just keeps getting better every year."

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# Robert Colello's NAR Seminar at New Venture Escrow



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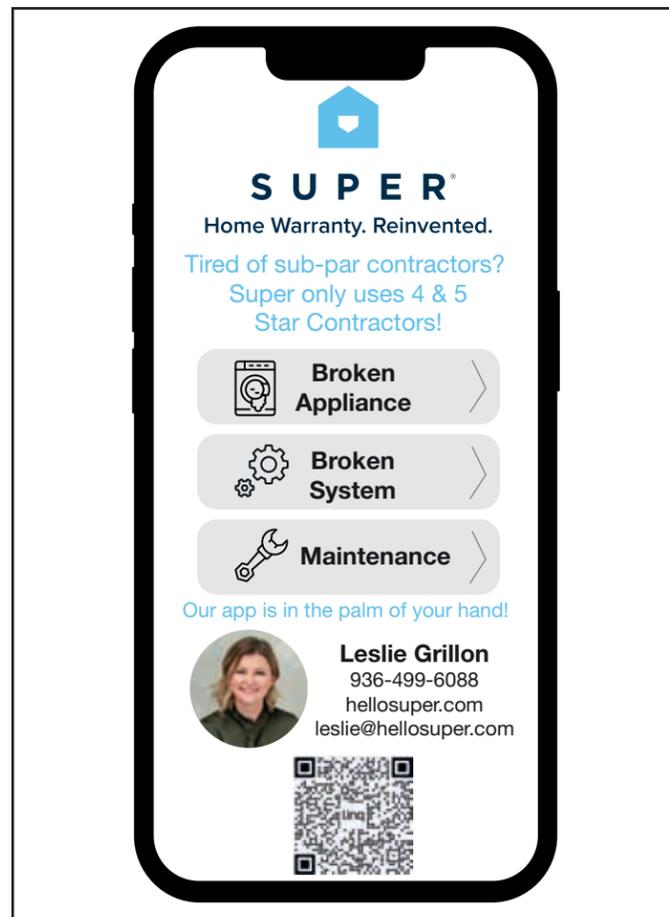
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