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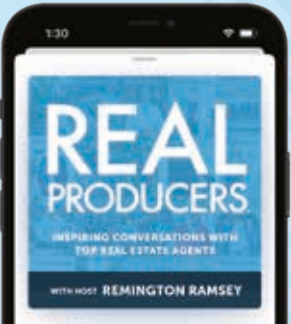
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– RORY VADEN

We had the chance to hear Rory Vaden speak about building your personal brand and impact at our national RP Elevate event. I’ve been reading his latest book, *Wealthy and Well-Known*, and the quote above immediately stood out to me. It captures exactly what Real Producers is all about.

Our platform exists to strengthen relationships among the Region’s top agents and trusted partners. Through our stories, events, and collaborations, we aim to keep those connections real and valuable. We’ve seen how a single relationship can open doors, spark opportunity, and lift our entire community.

This issue, we’re thrilled to welcome four new Preferred Partners to our Real Producers family: Wells Funding Group, People’s Choice Home Inspection Services, Regional Federal Credit Union, and Chicago Title. Each one shares our commitment to excellence and connection, and we’re proud to have them join our network.

Thank you to Public Bar & Rec, Phoenix Renovation & Design, and everyone who joined us for our Fall Event on November 6. You’ll find some great moments from that day captured by T-23 Productions in this issue.

As we wrap up 2025, take a moment to celebrate the connections that carried you forward this year. Trust and genuine connection are what truly move us forward. Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a successful new year ahead!



Val Contreras
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TO THE TOP 300

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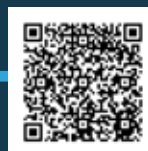
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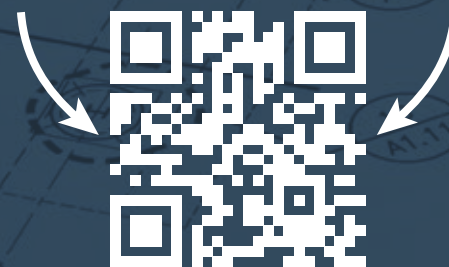
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AJ Alghazali & Rafael Araiza

of Rytech Restoration of Lake County



FROM **SERVERS** TO **STORMS:** *How AJ and Rafael Swapped IT for Restoration*

BY ALI
KUCCHARZAK
PHOTOGRAPHY
BY MELINDA
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For more than a decade, AJ Alghazali and Rafeal Araiza were the kind of men who made technology hum quietly in the background of corporate America. Their careers in IT kept networks secure, servers running, clients connected, and facilities protected with the latest and greatest technologies. They had the steady paychecks and predictable routines but they also had an eye for bigger challenges and a drive to solve real-world problems beyond the data center.

But beneath the calm exterior, something was missing.

Cybersecurity will always be part of who we are," AJ said. "But we had always talked about owning our own business and creating something that truly makes a difference. When we connected with the Rytech Restoration team at a franchise show, we immediately recognized the opportunity to help people during some of their most difficult moments. That's what inspired us to bring a Rytech location to Lake County, Indiana."

That spark of ambition turned into countless late-night conversations between the two friends—discussions that eventually gave them the courage to

take the leap. Today, instead of managing systems and software, they're managing disasters. AJ and Rafael stepped away from the corporate world to launch Rytech Restoration, where they now help families and businesses recover from water, mold, and fire damage with compassion and professionalism.

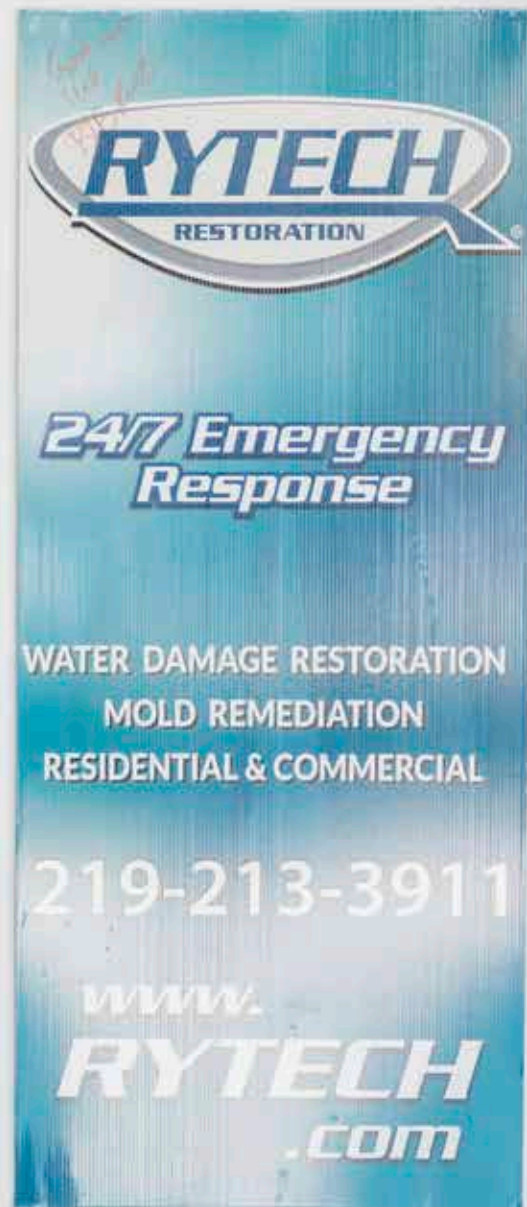
The Rytech Legacy

When AJ and Rafael chose to partner with Rytech, they joined a company with deep roots in the restoration industry. Rytech Restoration was founded in 1995 by William "Bubba" Ryan, who spent more than three decades in the restoration industry before launching his own company. After seeing gaps in how water damage was handled, he built Rytech to raise the standard. What began as one location has grown into a national network serving over 70 markets across the U.S., providing expert water, fire, and mold restoration. That commitment to quality and customer care is what inspired AJ and Rafael to bring the brand to Northwest Indiana.

The Leap of Faith

Neither AJ nor Rafael took the decision lightly. Leaving behind health benefits, stable salaries,

“WE’RE IN THE BUSINESS OF RESTORING PEOPLE’S LIVES.”



and the comfort of corporate life wasn’t what most would call a “safe” move. But for them, the risk was worth the reward.

“My kids constantly ask if I was scared to take that leap of faith and focus on the restoration business,” AJ said. “Of course, I was! But I think it shows them courage to go after what they want. I’ve always dreamed of owning my own business, and I have no regrets.”

The pair threw themselves into learning everything about restoration, earning IICRC certifications, investing in professional-grade equipment, and mastering the science behind water mitigation, fire

recovery, and mold remediation. What they lacked in experience, they made up for in drive, discipline, and belief in their vision.

“You have to believe in yourself,” AJ added. “You need the right mindset and the right mentors—and I hope to be that example for my boys one day. I want them to see that with hard work and faith, anything is possible.”

A Business Built on People

From the start, AJ and Rafael understood that restoration isn’t just about rebuilding drywall or removing water. It’s about helping people through one of the most stressful moments of their lives.

“We’re in the business of restoring people’s lives,” said AJ.

That human-first approach became their signature. Clients weren’t just “jobs”—they were families trying to get back into their homes, or small business owners desperate to reopen their doors.

“We are in the restoration business. But it’s such a broad topic. There’s so much to it. What are we restoring? We are restoring people’s lives who have just been through a fire, a flood, or a hurricane. We are there to try to restore their property and put the pieces back together,” said AJ.

Word of mouth spread quickly. AJ and Rafael became known for their transparency, communication, and for rolling up their sleeves right alongside their crews.

Expanding the Vision

With steady growth under their belts, AJ and Rafael are already thinking bigger than day-to-day operations. Their next dream? An education and training center dedicated to restoration.

“There’s a huge need for skilled technicians in this field,” AJ explains. “We want to build a program where people can learn the right way to do this work, earn their certifications, and start careers of their own.”

The proposed center would serve as both a classroom and hands-on training facility, combining real-world restoration scenarios with the technical knowledge required to succeed. They envision it as a pipeline—not only for their own crews but for the industry as a whole.

“We want to educate and train future technicians and the public on what needs to be done when water damage happens,” said AJ.



A Different Kind of Success

Today, their company has expanded from a two-man dream to a growing team with trucks, technicians, and a steady stream of clients. They’ve tackled everything from basement floods to smoke-damaged offices, always with the same philosophy: people first, property second.

And while the corporate world gave them valuable skills, they don’t miss it.

Their story is proof that success doesn’t always come from climbing a ladder—it can also come from building a bridge. For AJ and Rafael, that bridge doesn’t just carry clients from disaster back to normal life—it may soon carry future technicians into a career field with endless opportunities.

And while restoration may not be glamorous, it’s deeply meaningful. For these two former IT professionals, it’s a calling they’re proud to have answered—and one they’re determined to pass on.

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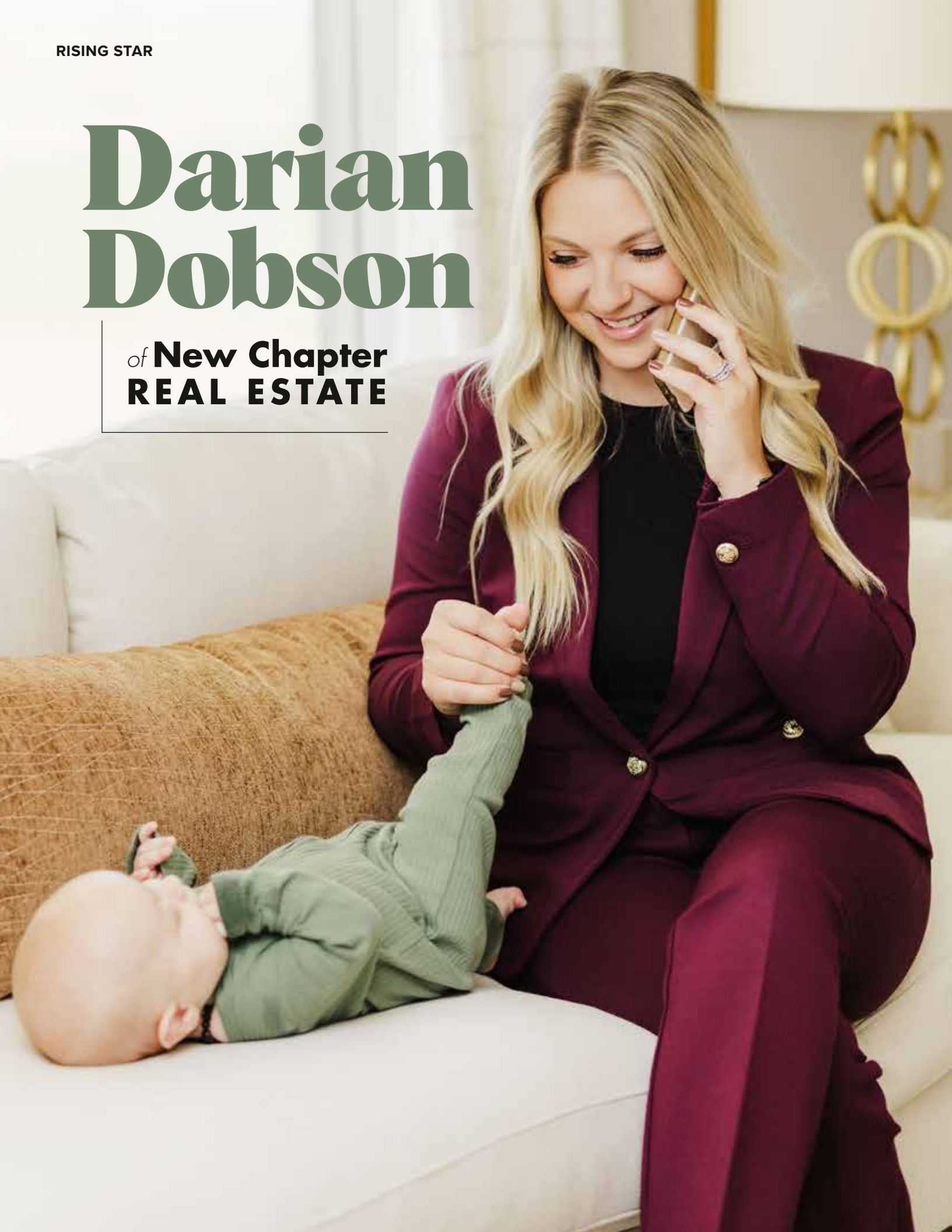


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Homeschool *and* Home Sales:

Darian Dobson's Blueprint for Success

BY GIAVONNI
DOWNING
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For many, real estate is a world of transactions and commissions. For Darian Dobson, it's about time. "You can always make more money," she says, "but you can't get more time back."

That belief drives everything she does—from selling homes to homeschooling her oldest. As a mom of three children under 5, Haislee, Haddie, and Summit she lives a very busy life with an even busier schedule. In just two years, she's turned her passion for both family and business into a thriving career while teaching her children from home.

Redefining Success on Her Own Terms

Darian's drive is rooted in hard work and hustle. In high school, she juggled three different part jobs. In college, she worked more than 50 hours a week while studying full-time for a Business Administration Degree. That tireless work ethic eventually led her to a management position at a CVS store, where she logged 80-hour weeks sometimes. The paycheck was steady—but the time wasn't hers.

She traded the corporate pace for a role in the banking industry. It paid

less, but it offered the one thing she valued most—time. "That ended up being the perfect bridge into real estate," she says. "I learned so much about lending and the process behind the scenes."

"When my second daughter was born, I told my husband, 'I'm not going back to that eight-to-five,'" she recalls. "It just didn't fit the kind of life I wanted for our family."

When the moment came to leap into real estate, she didn't hesitate. "I just told myself, 'I'm going to do it.' I wanted the flexibility to homeschool my kids



“
*I want my kids
to know their
mom
worked
hard
and
kept
her
word.*
”

and be present for them. Those years go by too fast, and I don't want to miss them.”

A Formula Built on Hard Work and Heart

In her first two years, Darian sold more than \$8 million and is on track to hit \$10 million by year's end. She's setting her sights even higher, aiming to reach \$15 million within three years—a remarkable feat in her rural market, where average home prices range from \$150,000 to \$275,000.

“In a smaller market, you've got to work harder. It's more transactions, more miles, more clients, more follow-up,” she says. But Darian has never been afraid of hard work.



Her success comes down to two principles: invest in the business and serve people well, while creating strong relationships. She leverages social media, online tools and paid leads, but what truly sets her apart is her commitment to service. “I treat every single client like they're a million-dollar client,” she explains. “No matter their budget, they're the most important person to me at that moment. That's how you build a friendship and trust—and that's how you earn referrals.”

She's quick to point out that real success doesn't come from comparison. “I try not to look at what other agents are doing,” she says. “That just sets you back. I focus on my goals and my personal growth. What's working and what isn't. For me, real success means being able to work hard, raise my kids at home, and be there for my family.”

Balancing Faith, Family, and Future Goals

Darian's husband is part of a third-generation family that owns two car dealerships, and his dedication inspires her own. He has always said, “When you run your own business, no one wants it to succeed more than you do,” she says. “There is a lot of truth behind that statement and that's how I approach my real estate business. I treat my clients like family so they want to come back to me.”

Her long-term vision is equally ambitious. “Within five years, I'd love to open my own brokerage,” she says. “I want to build something lasting—a bond with the community. I want a successful business that I can eventually pass on to one of my children one day.”

That legacy mindset extends on. “I want my kids to know their mom worked hard and kept her word,” she adds. “When I say I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it.”

To prepare for the next phase, Darian is going to pursue additional certifications, including luxury real-estate and commercial real estate training. She's also part of an agent collaboration network—a peer group where agents meet and share strategies, challenges, and successes. “It's great to learn what's working for others - or what's not in our area. It's great that we can have these conversations and can continue growing together,” she says.

Making Time for What Matters Most

When she's not negotiating deals or guiding clients, you'll find Darian at home reading a book or homeschooling her oldest. She loves camping with her family, or traveling to new destinations. She loves that homeschooling will give them an opportunity to travel more and can turn real world experiences into lessons. “When we travel, there will always be places we can visit to use as a part of their education,” she says. “Whether it's a museum or a historical site, zoo's, workshops or even state parks. There's always something to learn.”

Real estate has given her the life she prayed for—one where family and faith come first. “It's truly been a blessing for our family,” she says. “I get to do meaningful work, create lifelong friendships with clients while helping them find homes they love, and still have the time to be a wife and mom. That's true success to me.”

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BY GIAVONNI DOWNING
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From **TRENCHES** to **TRIUMPH**: *Melissa Capellari's Journey Through Fear, Failure, and Freedom*



Some storms come to destroy. Others come to rebuild. For Melissa Capellari, the events that could have broken her instead fueled her success.

"It was a tough, intimidating crowd," she says about her competition in the early years. "In a small community, everyone has an opinion of you. Some feel threatened and try to de-rail you. Thankfully, others are more kind, and with training, I built a good business, even in my early 20's."

Rebuilding in the Rubble

Ten years into her career, however, Melissa found herself in the middle of a difficult, fairly public divorce. It forced her to face herself. "I had to take accountability for the areas I needed to grow," she says. "I could either let the pain define me or let it refine me."

She began reading self-help books by the stack, using every insight to rebuild her confidence. "I was the woman hiding in the back of the library with *Divorce for Dummies* tucked inside a real-estate book," she laughs. "But I realized, you can learn anything."

Real estate became her anchor. The work offered flexibility, independence, and a way to keep moving forward. "It gave me a purpose and a paycheck while I healed," she says. "It taught me how to keep showing up."

She refused to let "divorce" become her family's identity. "Our story was never going to be defined by drama," she says. "We ignored the chaos and focused forward."

Roots of Resilience

Long before she built a thriving real-estate career, Melissa learned what hard work meant. She grew up on a horse farm, waking before sunrise to feed and train her horses before school. "That's where discipline started," she says. "If you want something, you take care of it. You show up."

That early discipline led her to college and eventually to building houses with her then-boyfriend—a side project that sparked her passion for real estate. "We didn't know what we were doing, but we did it anyway," she recalls. "That's how I've lived most of my life, staring fear in the face and pushing forward."

From Pain to Purpose

These days, Melissa continues to build her life with purpose. Real estate became more than a career; it is her classroom for courage. "This industry is not for the weak, but I believe that knowledge is power. The more you learn, the less control fear has over you," she says.

As a single mother raising two daughters, she found strength in helping others find stability. "My greatest joy is connecting people and setting them up for financial success," she says. "Equity and access are empowering. They give people choices."

“
Success is
improving
someone
else’s life.”

Her own choices recently led her to a new calling: helping seniors navigate major life transitions. Inspired by her grandfather’s journey with Alzheimer’s, and a calling to assist clients with aging in place, Melissa launched Downsize NWI, a business dedicated to helping seniors “right-size” their lives.

“It’s not just about selling a house,” she says. “It’s about helping people age with dignity and peace of mind. I want to make sure they feel seen, safe, and supported.”

Over the years, Melissa has become a respected leader in her industry. She currently serves as State President for RRC (formerly CRS) and holds leadership roles with NIRA and several local initiatives. She was also selected to serve on the National Association of Realtors Federal Financing & Housing Policy Committee, Member: At-Large.



Choosing the Light

Through heartbreak, reinvention, and leadership, Melissa has built more than a career — she’s built a way of life. “Success,” she says, “is improving someone else’s life.”

That belief has become her compass. Her story is proof that darkness can be the birthplace of brilliance. She proves that the hardest seasons can refine, not ruin, the ones willing to grow through them. “You can’t control what happens,” she says. “But you can choose what you do with it. You can decide to grow.”

Melissa has passed those same lessons on to her daughters, Anna and Mia, now both seniors, one in college and one in high school. “I tell them: figure out who you are before you let anyone else define you,” she says. “Empower yourself with knowledge, stay true to your heart, and never stop growing.”

Her words mirror the way she lives, with courage, compassion, and consistency. “The definition of a real producer isn’t in the numbers or rankings,” Melissa says, “it’s in producing consistently year after year. Whether you’re up or down, you keep showing up and doing it with heart.”

Melissa is a real producer who shows up, gets things done, and grows through every challenge.





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Carol Dobrzynski

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BY GIAVONNI DOWNING
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA
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Some stories remind us that success isn't inherited, it's created through grit, grace, and the courage to bet on yourself. For Carol Dobrzynski, real estate became more than a profession; it was the vehicle that carried her from modest beginnings in East Chicago IN, to building a thriving business serving clients across the country.

Her family-centered legacy is rooted in hard work and heart.

The Courage to Leap

Carol's real estate journey began not with a plan, but with a possibility. While working as a server, a customer noticed her spark, warmth, humor, and natural connection with people, and offered her a job in the service department at his car dealership. She accepted, even though she "didn't know a thing about cars." That leap led to another.

One day, the top Realtor in the nation pulled into the dealership. Impressed by Carol's customer service,

he asked, "Have you ever thought about selling real estate?"

She hadn't. But that conversation planted a seed that changed everything.

"After work I went home and reviewed my finances. With lots of prayer I realized I could make it financially for a few months until I got settled in real estate," she recalls. "Part of me thought,



Carol and her son Matthew

The Audacity of Ambition:

Carol Dobrzynski's
Unscripted Rise in
Real Estate





What if I'm not smart enough? What if I can't do it? But then I thought — what do I have to lose?"

Within forty-eight hours, Carol resigned from her job and enrolled in real estate school. She passed both her classes and licensing exam on the first try. It was the start of a career defined by bold moves and quiet faith in her own resilience.

"I'd rather try and fail," she says, "than live wondering what might have happened if I hadn't."

Carol's success was never handed to her. She grew up in East Chicago, a tough neighborhood where gunshots and sirens were background noise. She remembers the sting of food stamps and the humility of garage-sale clothes.

"There were times when people would fight over that block of cheese in the government box," she says. "I learned early that if I wanted something better, I'd have to create it myself."

As the oldest child, she shouldered heavy responsibility while her mother worked multiple jobs to support her and her younger sister. Yet those early struggles built the backbone of her drive. She vowed to take control of her future and rewrite her family's story.

Ten years into her career, with business booming and burnout creeping in, Carol faced another crossroads. "I was overwhelmed but



From left to right: Lynn Fernandez, Tony Datullo, Jordan DeYoung, Carol Dobrzynski, Matthew Salgado, Rosalia Vasquez-Hernandez, Pooja Goyal, Alex Garcia

didn't want to compromise service," she says. Her solution was to build a team and not just any team, but one that reflected the loyalty and unity that defined her family.

Team Dobrzynski became a true family enterprise:

By Carol's side are her Mother Carol (Senior Transaction Mgr.), Son Matthew (Broker), Aunt Lynn (Broker & Vice President), Niece Jessica (Broker) & Cousin Valerie (Broker)

That philosophy extended beyond her relatives. "Even if someone isn't a blood relative, once they're on my team, they're family," she says. "It's about trust, accountability, and helping each other win."

Together, they created a culture of collaboration, transparency, and heart. "We talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly," she laughs. "No one's left on an island because we figure things out together."

The Strategy Behind the Success

Discipline is Carol's north star. "Success," she explains, "is being consistent. It's doing the work every day — even when you don't feel like it." She's built her reputation on structure: sticking to a routine, staying educated, and adapting to an ever-changing industry.

Her strategic edge comes from an unexpected source: two decades of playing poker. "Poker teaches

patience and observation," she says. "Don't expose your hand on day one. Listen first." That lesson translates directly into real-estate negotiations: stay calm, stay focused, and always think two moves ahead.

Over the years, Carol has turned dreams into tangible milestones: a convertible she once only imagined, a second home in Florida, and a flourishing business she built on her own. "Every dream I've written down," she says, "I've checked off."

But for Carol, ambition has never been about accumulation. It's about impact — for her clients, her family, and the agents she mentors. "I want to teach other agents to be accountable," she says. "To

know that when you say you'll do something, you do it."

Legacy in Motion

Carol's next chapter is already unfolding. Licensed currently in both Indiana and Illinois, she's In Real Estate School to be licensed to serve even more clients in Florida. Her motivation? Her grandson. "I want him to grow up near the water," she says. "Florida felt like the right place to build the next foundation."

She's also deeply engaged in her community. She supports local Trunk or Treat, Toys for Tots, and the Humane Society. Outside of real estate, she loves line dancing, traveling, hiking, kayaking, and spending time by the ocean.

And when she's not closing deals, you might find her

skydiving or bungee jumping — living proof that the girl who once doubted if she was “smart enough” has replaced fear with fearlessness.

“I think some people see me as tough,” she admits. “But I just expect a lot from myself — and I care deeply. I’ll always help someone who’s trying to learn or grow.”

Her advice reflects the philosophy that’s carried her through every obstacle:

“When someone seems unapproachable, try anyway. Don’t let fear stop you. You’ve got nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

From Humble Beginnings to Empowered Legacy

Carol Dobrzynski’s story is about so much more than real estate; it’s about rewriting the narrative you inherit. It’s about turning survival into strategy, and scarcity into strength.

From the young girl determined to rise above economic struggle to a resilient leader guiding others toward greatness, Carol reminds us that success isn’t reserved for the privileged — it’s built by those bold enough to begin.

“You can’t control where you start,” she says, “but you can control where you go from here.” And that, perhaps, is the heart of Carol’s story — proof that with faith, persistence, and a little audacity, anyone can build a life that outgrows its circumstances.



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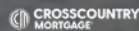


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