

EAST TEXAS

FEBRUARY 2025

# REAL PRODUCERS<sup>®</sup>



## Dona Willett

SUMMER'S COOK  
& COMPANY REAL  
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Rising Star:  
Kilton O. McCracken, Sr.

Dee Martin Realty Group  
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Partner Spotlight:  
Tom Holyfield

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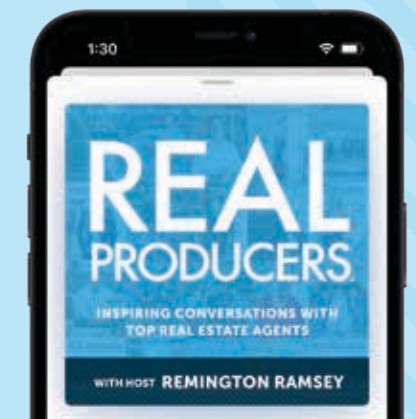
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# WHAT IS REAL PRODUCERS?

## Welcome to *East Texas Real Producers!*

*Providing a platform to celebrate and unite the top real estate professionals across East Texas*

BY CHERIKA JOHNSON

It's my honor to bring this community to our East Texas area and to celebrate everything that makes you all an outstanding part of the East Texas Real Estate Community. I look forward to highlighting your accomplishments, encouraging your dreams, and recognizing you for your continued excellence in serving your clients.

Real Producers started as a simple idea in 2015 in Indianapolis and has spread across the nation like wildfire. The Real Producers community is now available in 130 locations and is changing the way the real estate community interacts across America. As we embark on this journey, I promise to create platforms to connect this community and forums to recognize and celebrate what makes each one of you iconic. In years to come, I hope to interview every one of you so that I can share your success stories in future issues. I also look forward to celebrating you at our events, providing tools and connections to help you grow your business and representing your passion for this industry that we all share.

Here are some quick facts about Real Producers:

**DISTRIBUTION:** This magazine will arrive in the mailboxes of the TOP 300 agents in East Texas each month. These 300 agents are determined through compiled MLS data from 2024. If you are receiving a hard copy of the publication, it is because you belong to the elite group of the top 10%.

**CONTENT:** This publication is all about YOU, the East Texas real estate community. We will be writing personal and unique stories on members of this community, giving you a platform to inspire greatness in others. As we grow, we will continue to add fresh content focused entirely on the top 10% and our Preferred Partners. We have NOTHING to sell to real estate agents as it is absolutely FREE to be featured in this publication. To be featured, the agents must be nominated by a peer, leader or influencer in the East Texas real estate market. We always encourage nominations and love to hear about agents that are making a huge impact in our market.

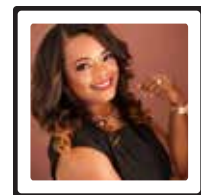
**PREFERRED PARTNERS:** Anyone listed as a "Preferred Partner" in the index of this publication will also be a part of this exclusive community. You will see them advertised in every issue, attending our private events and being a part of our online community. We do not cold call businesses off the street to join us, nor do we allow any business that approaches us to be a part. One or many of you have recommended every single one of these Preferred Partners that you see in this publication. Our goal is to give you as many resources as possible to add to your arsenal so that you always remain that trusted referral source to your clients and customers.

**EVENTS:** Along with our monthly publication, we will be hosting various social and educational events throughout the year. Our goal is to bring the best of the best together while

supporting our local communities. And we fully intend to have a good time doing it! We will be communicating information on upcoming events through the publication, monthly emailed newsletter and social media.

**CONTRIBUTION:** If you are interested in contributing, nominating REALTORS for certain features, know of additional top-notch affiliate partners who would be a great fit for our community, or would simply like to learn more, please reach out to me anytime. I look forward to meeting with every one of you in the future. I would also like to give a HUGE THANK YOU to the Preferred Partners who jumped on board with us so that we could bring *East Texas Real Producers* to life. Also, a huge shout-out to my team that pulled this together without much guidance. You all are incredible, and this first issue is dedicated to you!

I appreciate you all and look forward to seeing all of you at our networking events soon.



*Cherika Johnson*

**CHERIKA JOHNSON**  
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# Tom HOLYFIELD

A JOURNEY OF DEDICATION AND PERSEVERANCE IN REAL ESTATE

With Guild Mortgage

WRITTEN BY DAWN SIMS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DERRICK TAYLOR



In the dynamic world of real estate and mortgage financing, it takes more than expertise to stand out; it requires passion, purpose, and a genuine desire to make a difference. Thomas “Tom” Holyfield, a seasoned loan officer and manager with Guild Mortgage, embodies this philosophy. With 24 years of experience and a steadfast commitment to helping families achieve homeownership, Tom’s career is a testament to hard work, resilience, and heart.

Tom opens the door at his office with jeans, boots, a starched button-up shirt and a vest. He shyly smiles and welcomes us in to visit. He immediately exudes a combination of confidence and humbleness. An oxymoron? Yes. But this East Texas leader accomplishes just that.

“My journey into the mortgage industry was inspired by my mother,” Tom shared during our conversation. “She worked as an underwriter at Chase Bank, and growing up in a single-parent household, I saw firsthand the challenges of homeownership. After my parents’ divorce, it took over 15 years for my mom to buy a house for us. That

milestone left a lasting impression on me.”

When Texas passed its Home Equity law in 1998, allowing homeowners to borrow against their home equity, Tom saw an opportunity. “That’s when I decided to dive into mortgage financing,” he explained. By 2001, he had launched his own brokerage, dedicating over a decade to helping individuals and families navigate the complexities of buying a home. “It’s been my mission to make homeownership attainable for everyone,” he added.

Tom’s dedication and expertise have earned him recognition as one of the top 1% loan officers nationwide. A proud member of Guild Mortgage’s prestigious President’s Club, his accolades reflect both his technical proficiency and his ability to connect with clients on a personal level.

**“I’m proud of what I’ve accomplished, but it’s really about the people I get to help,” he remarked humbly.**

His academic foundation—a bachelor’s degree in Finance from the University of Texas at Tyler—has also played a key role in his success, equipping him with the knowledge to navigate the ever-evolving mortgage landscape.

“For me, being a loan officer is more than a job; it’s a calling,” Tom explained. He sees his work as a noble profession that helps people achieve a dream that often feels out of reach. “I’m especially passionate about working with clients who face barriers like low credit scores. I’ll do whatever it takes to help someone get there—even if it means working 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. most days,” he shared with a laugh.

**“I truly believe in the wealth-building power of real estate,” he continued. “Helping people understand this and guiding them through the process is incredibly fulfilling.”**

The mortgage industry has its challenges, and Tom acknowledged that the past 24 months have been among the





most difficult of his career. “Honestly, it’s been even tougher than the financial crisis of 2009-2010,” he admitted. Yet, he approaches these challenges with gratitude, focusing on the people he helps and the team he leads.

“One of the most rewarding moments for me is working with clients who think homeownership is unattainable,” Tom shared.

**“When they finally close on a home, seeing the joy and relief on their faces is priceless. That’s what keeps me motivated.”**

When Tom isn’t guiding clients through the home buying process, he finds peace on his 55-acre ranch. “We raise cows and horses, including thoroughbred racehorses that we race at tracks across the country,” he said with a smile. The ranch serves as his sanctuary, a place where he can recharge and spend quality time with loved ones. We accompanied Tom to his home and it was obvious that this is where he can find peace in the midst of all of the chaos the mortgage world brings. Walking side by side with his horses, riding them right in the middle of God’s country, we were able to witness another side of Tom. But make no mistake, whether you are his client, co-worker or friend, that soft, country part of him always makes an appearance.



“I also love traveling to hear live music, visiting our beach house in Gulf Shores, Alabama, and cherishing moments with my twin granddaughters,” he said. “I live by the motto: ‘Work hard to play hard.’” While achieving work-life balance is still a work in progress, Tom strives to make the most of his time both professionally and personally.

**“My mom’s resilience and my dad’s entrepreneurial spirit shaped my values,” Tom reflected.**

These influences instilled in him a belief that anything is possible with determination and hard work. For Tom, success isn’t defined by material wealth but by stability and peace of mind. “Success, to me, is being able to walk into a store like Walmart and buy whatever I need without worry,” he explained, a poignant nod to his modest upbringing.

Looking to the future, Tom hopes to leave a legacy of inclusivity and opportunity in the real estate industry. “I want to be remembered as someone who helped everyone, regardless of their financial situation, achieve the dream of homeownership,” he said. Inspired by Zig Ziglar’s famous words—

**“You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they want.”**

—Tom’s career is a living testament to this philosophy.

For those considering a career in real estate or mortgage financing, Tom emphasized the importance of networking and continuous learning. “Spend the first two years getting outside your comfort zone, meeting people in the industry, and attending community real estate events,” he

advised. He also underscored the value of learning from experienced peers.

**“Wisdom is earned over time, not overnight,” he said.**

Tom Holyfield’s journey in the mortgage industry is a shining example of how passion, perseverance, and purpose can lead to a fulfilling career. From his early days inspired by his mother’s resilience to his current role as a top loan officer, Tom has consistently demonstrated a commitment to helping others achieve their dreams.

Through unwavering dedication, he has not only built a successful career but also positively impacted the lives of countless individuals and families. As Tom continues to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the industry, his legacy of compassion and hard work will undoubtedly leave a lasting mark.

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# KILTON O. McCracken, Sr.

A Path Defined by Grit, Faith, and a Heart for Service

WRITTEN BY CHERIKA JOHNSON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DERRICK TAYLOR

Some paths to success are defined by persistence, purpose, and an unwavering commitment to helping others—qualities that epitomize Kilton O. McCracken, Sr. In just two years as a real estate professional with RE/MAX Alight in Tyler, Kilton has made a remarkable impact, closing 25 transactions in 2023 and exceeding

those numbers with a total volume of \$6.97 million in 2024.

Kilton's journey, however, is more than numbers—it's a testament to the power of resilience and faith. Born and raised in Palestine, Texas, he grew up surrounded by strong values and a sense of service. Today, he is a devoted

husband to Kenda, his wife of 13 years, and a proud father to their two children, Karissa and KJ. His commitment to faith, family, and community is the foundation of his life and career.

#### A Foundation Built on Faith and Grit

For Kilton, success in real estate goes beyond buying and selling properties—



it's about empowering people to make smart decisions that transform their lives. He credits much of his success to his unwavering faith and the mentorship of key figures like Dwayne Gardner, Lillian and Marvin Hollie, and Ralph Caraway Sr. Guided by 1 Corinthians 10:31, Kilton approaches every task with purpose, ensuring his work reflects his deep commitment to God and others.

“What separates me from others is GRIT and godly passion,” Kilton says. This resilience has fueled his ability to navigate challenges and stay focused on his mission of service.

Kilton's dedication to his craft earned him a significant honor in December 2024 when he was named the 2024 Greater Tyler Area Association of Realtors Rookie of the Year. This recognition reflects not only his professional achievements but also his ability to connect with clients and colleagues alike, building trust and delivering results.

#### A Passion for Real Estate and People

Kilton's passion for real estate stems from a desire to educate and guide clients through one of the most important investments of their lives. His ability to blend theological insight with practical advice sets him apart in an ever-changing industry.

“Faith plus works is the reason for my success,” Kilton explains. “Being on the

right team and having the right mindset are the keys to thriving no matter what the market looks like.”

Kilton credits his team leader, Dee Martin, with providing him the tools and support needed to succeed in real estate.

Working alongside a team that shares his dedication has reinforced his belief in the power of collaboration.

#### Gratitude, Growth, and Giving Back

When asked what he is most grateful for, Kilton's answer is simple and





heartfelt: “My wife.” Kenda’s steadfast support has been instrumental in his journey, allowing him to confidently pursue his goals. Kilton cherishes time with his family outside of work, finding joy in everyday moments and creating lasting memories.

Kilton’s faith and dedication to lifelong learning continue to inspire him. “I’m always seeking wisdom from those who have walked the path before me,” he says. Guided by his mentors and his deep spiritual connection to the Bible, Kilton strives for personal and professional growth. He lives by the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Beyond his work in real estate, Kilton has a passion for giving back. As a former mentor with the Mentoring Alliance of Tyler, he helped guide young individuals toward success. He also channels his love for education through his YouTube channel, Smart Moves,

where he provides valuable insights into the real estate market and empowers his followers to make informed decisions.

**A Legacy of Service and Perseverance**

Looking to the future, Kilton’s goal is to leave a legacy of inclusivity and service in the real estate industry. “I want to be remembered for helping anyone who wanted to buy a home, no matter the price,” he shares. Kilton’s journey is a powerful reminder that success is not just about personal milestones but about creating meaningful connections and improving the lives of others.

**Words of Wisdom for Aspiring Professionals**

For those considering a career in real estate, Kilton emphasizes the importance of building relationships and seeking knowledge. “Spend your first two years getting outside of your comfort zone, meeting people in the industry, and attending real estate functions in your community,” he

**“BEING ON THE RIGHT TEAM AND HAVING THE RIGHT MINDSET ARE THE KEYS TO THRIVING NO MATTER WHAT THE MARKET LOOKS LIKE.”**

advises. “Always be a lifelong learner and seek advice from those who have paved the way.”

Kilton McCracken is more than a successful Realtor—he is a man of faith, resilience, and purpose. His story inspires others to pursue their dreams with dedication and integrity, proving that with grit and the right mindset, anything is possible.

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# DONA WILLETT

*Houses, Hope & Heart*

The Petite Realtor with a Passion for People & Properties Written by: Dawn Sims



Though she may stand at only 4 foot 11 inches, Dona Willett is a big name in the East Texas real estate community. On a rainy afternoon, I took some time to sit and chat with Dona. Greeted with a warm hug, dressed to perfection, and of course, with her loyal assistant and fellow realtor, April Allen by her side, we talked about her life before real estate, her balance of life in real estate and what matters most in life itself.

Naturally, I was eager to dive into what makes Dona stand out in such a competitive field. Her response was refreshingly practical and heartfelt: “I get up and get dressed every day!” she said with a laugh. “I’m an office girl—I’m ready to work, connect, listen, and help people. Every day, I anticipate it’s going to be a great day.”

As a top-performing agent with a deep connection to her community, Dona has built a career that is as much about relationships and service as it is about success. Her journey into the real estate industry is one of faith, resilience, and a genuine desire to help others.

Dona’s story began as a stay-at-home mom raising three children. Her first and most important calling remains with her family, but she felt a burning passion for connecting with and helping people. She started a career in the insurance arena and excelled but her love for homes paired with the ongoing desire to serve others eventually drew her into real estate. When prompted, she began to reflect on the people who have shaped her journey, particularly her husband, Jimmy, and her close friends, whose encouragement and support have been pivotal in her life. I watched her bring her hand up to her face with a grin as she recalled Jimmy being her biggest cheerleader as she made the decision to jump into real estate. Initially full of fear and doubt starting another career later in life, soon dissipated with him telling her she could do it. His consistent encouragement and her faith gave her the strength and excitement she needed to step into a role she was meant to walk in...in heels.

Her approach to success is rooted in her faith. Dona defines success as “loving

the Lord and knowing my audience is for One,” a principle that guides her every day. Her favorite Bible verse, James 1:17—“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights”—is a reflection of her gratitude for the blessings in her life. This verse, she says, inspires her to live with purpose and to glorify God in all she does.

As an exceptional realtor in the East Texas real estate industry, Dona stands out for her meticulousness and dedication to excellence. She believes that “details matter” and emphasizes the importance of doing a good job, having fun, and building strong relationships with clients. Her success is evident not only in her achievements but also in her involvement with the industry. Dona is actively engaged with TREPAC (Texas Real Estate Political Action Committee) and serves on numerous Realtor committees at both the state and national levels.

Beyond real estate, Dona’s contributions extend to her church and her



Dona's very first clients Ken and Shannon Martin

community. She is involved with Mobberly Baptist Church, where she finds inspiration and fellowship. Occasionally, she even shares her beautiful singing voice during church services. Dona also carries a strong responsibility in politics. She believes that is the best way to make a difference. "Getting involved in politics is all about people coming together to help put good laws into place so we can make the place we live better." The Longview Arboretum is another place close to her heart, offering her peace and a sense of connection to the natural beauty of East Texas. Originally from Carthage, Dona calls Longview home. Despite her many professional connections, she remains deeply rooted in her East Texas heritage.

Although she has soared in her career and has accomplished much, Dona acknowledges that real estate is not without its challenges. One of the most significant hurdles she has faced is countering the misinformation often present in the market. She has learned that knowledge of the local market and effective communication are essential for navigating these challenges.

One story that illustrates her passion and dedication is her experience with her very first clients, Shannon and Ken Martin, and their son, Jude. A chance meeting at an open house led to a connection that not only set the standard for how Dona builds

relationships but also touched her heart in a lasting way.

Gratitude is a central theme in Dona's life. She often expresses thankfulness for the ability to do what she loves and to do it well. Her family is her greatest joy, and she lights up when talking about her husband, children, and grandchildren. Naming each of them with such pride, "Jimmy is my husband, then Kaitlyn with a 'k', my daughter and she's married to Bryan with a 'y'...and they have 3 of my grandchildren. Then there is Kerris, my daughter, and my son, Matt and Kourtney with a 'k', they have one of my grandchildren."

I was surprised to learn that Dona grew up on a cattle ranch, where she learned the value of hard work early on. Whether baling hay or driving tractors, her upbringing instilled in her a strong work ethic that continues to define her today. Her parents, now in their late 80s and still working, have been enduring role models for resilience and determination. So yes, behind her impeccable fashion and cute shoes, Dona is a country girl at heart!

When asked about the legacy she hopes to leave in the real estate industry, Dona speaks with warmth and humility. "I want to be a good friend to everyone in this business. We're like family. I want to

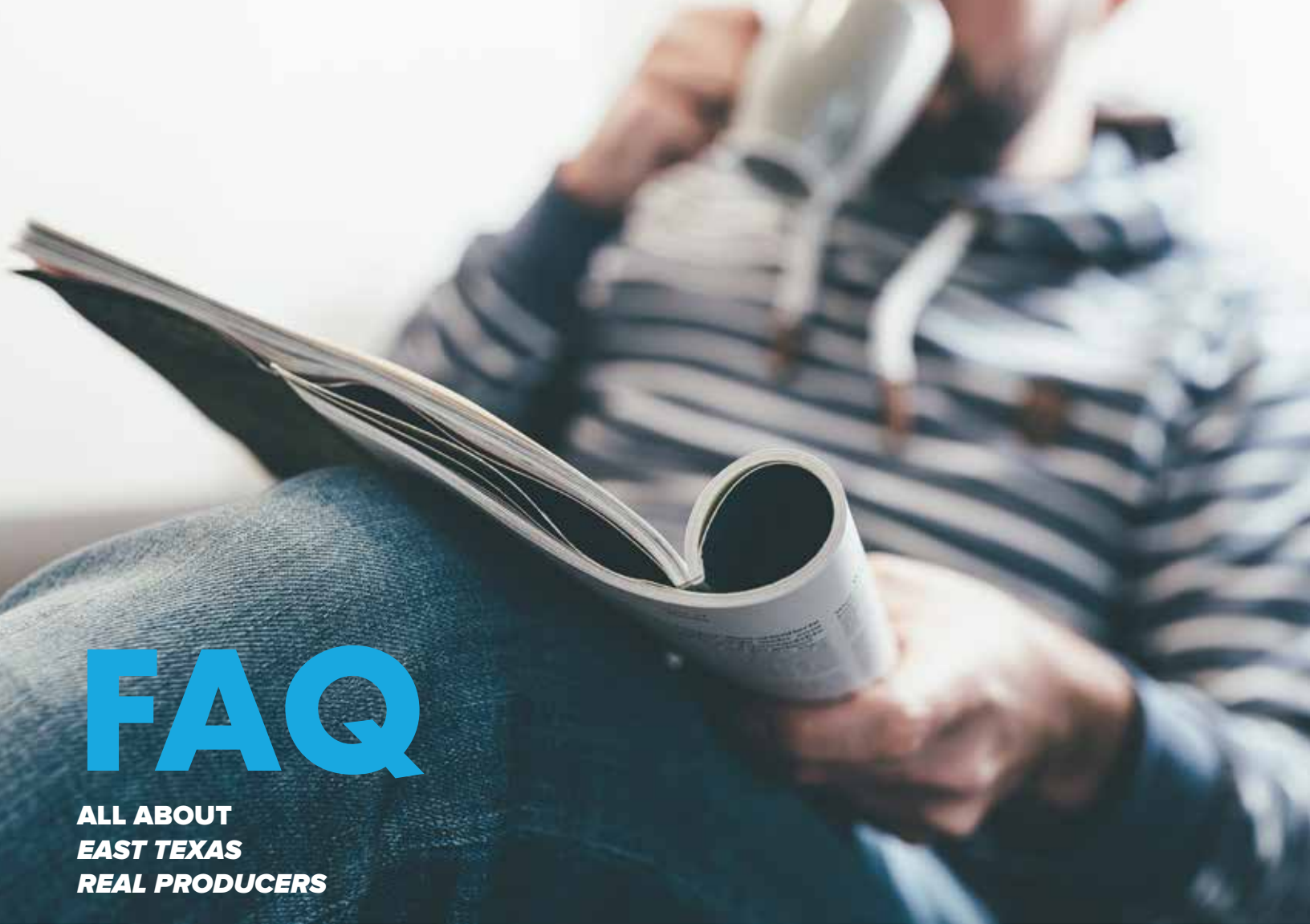
be remembered as kind, as a mentor, and as someone who's always willing to help." Her advice to new agents is to "be confident and be helpful," while also emphasizing the importance of enjoying the work and the people."And choose a good brokerage! It's so important to work with a broker who will be present and supportive."

Dona's life is filled with wisdom and faith, and she is often quoted for her optimistic outlook. Among the sayings she is known for, one stands out: "Do a good job. Be genuine. Enjoy people." I happened to lean in to include her assistant April, asking, "When you hear Dona's voice, what do you hear her saying?" Without missing a beat, April smiles and says, "God's going to take care of us." These simple yet profound words offer a glimpse into the heart of a woman who has dedicated her life to helping others while staying true to her values.

Dona Willett's career and life are a testament to the power of faith, hard work, and compassion. Whether through her work in real estate, her involvement in the community, or her dedication to her family and faith, she continues to inspire those around her with her kindness and genuine love for people.



“  
EVERY GOOD  
AND PERFECT  
GIFT IS FROM  
ABOVE,  
COMING DOWN FROM THE  
FATHER OF LIGHTS.”



# FAQ

## ALL ABOUT EAST TEXAS REAL PRODUCERS

**Q: WHO RECEIVES THIS MAGAZINE?**

**A:** The top 300 agents in East Texas based on volume for the previous year and our Preferred Partners. There are thousands of agents in the region and you, in this elite group, are the cream of the crop. Just to be included in this group is an accomplishment that testifies to your hard work, dedication, and proficiency.

**Q: DO REAL ESTATE AGENTS HAVE TO PAY FOR MAGAZINES OR EVENTS?**

**A:** NO! The magazine and events are FREE to agents and funded by the partners who advertise.

**Q: WHAT KIND OF CONTENT WILL BE FEATURED?**

**A:** This is all about you. We'll do personal and unique stories on members in the community, providing you with a platform to inspire others. As we grow, we'll add fresh content focused entirely on you. It costs absolutely

nothing for a REALTOR® to be featured. We are not a pay to play model; we write real stories, about Real Producers, and we're always accepting nominations. We will consider anyone brought to our attention— we don't know everyone's story so we need your help to learn about them!

**Q: WHO ARE OUR PARTNERS?**

**A:** Anyone listed as a "Preferred Partner" in the front of the magazine is funding and fueling this community and is an essential part of it. They are the top professionals in their industry. They will have an ad in every issue of the magazine and attend our events. One or many of you have recommended every single Preferred Partner you see in this publication. Our goal is to create a powerhouse network, not only for the best REALTORS® in the area, but the best affiliates as well, so we can grow stronger together.

**Q: DOES Real Producers HAVE EVENTS?**

**A:** Yes! Along with the magazine, we will host quarterly events exclusive to this community, where you—the best of the best—get together at local venues to socialize, mastermind, deepen our connections, and better our businesses. We will communicate about events through the magazine and on social media. Stay tuned for info on our launch party this Fall!

**Q: HOW CAN I RECOMMEND A BUSINESS OR FEATURE STORY?**

**A:** If you are interested in contributing, nominating REALTORS® to be featured, know of top-notch affiliate partners who you believe should be a part of our community, or would simply like to network; email or call us. I look forward to hearing from you!

**Email:** Cherika.Johnson@n2co.com

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