

BIRMINGHAM

JANUARY 2025

REAL PRODUCERS[®]

REALTOR[®] ON THE RISE:
ASHLEY DEFOREST

AGENT FEATURE:
BRENT GULLEDGE

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:
DAVID GRAVES
PHOTOGRAPHY

Kevin Sargent &
Christy McDonald

EXCELLING IN SALES AND SERVICE

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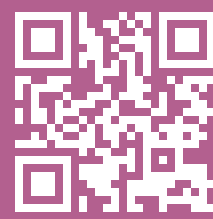


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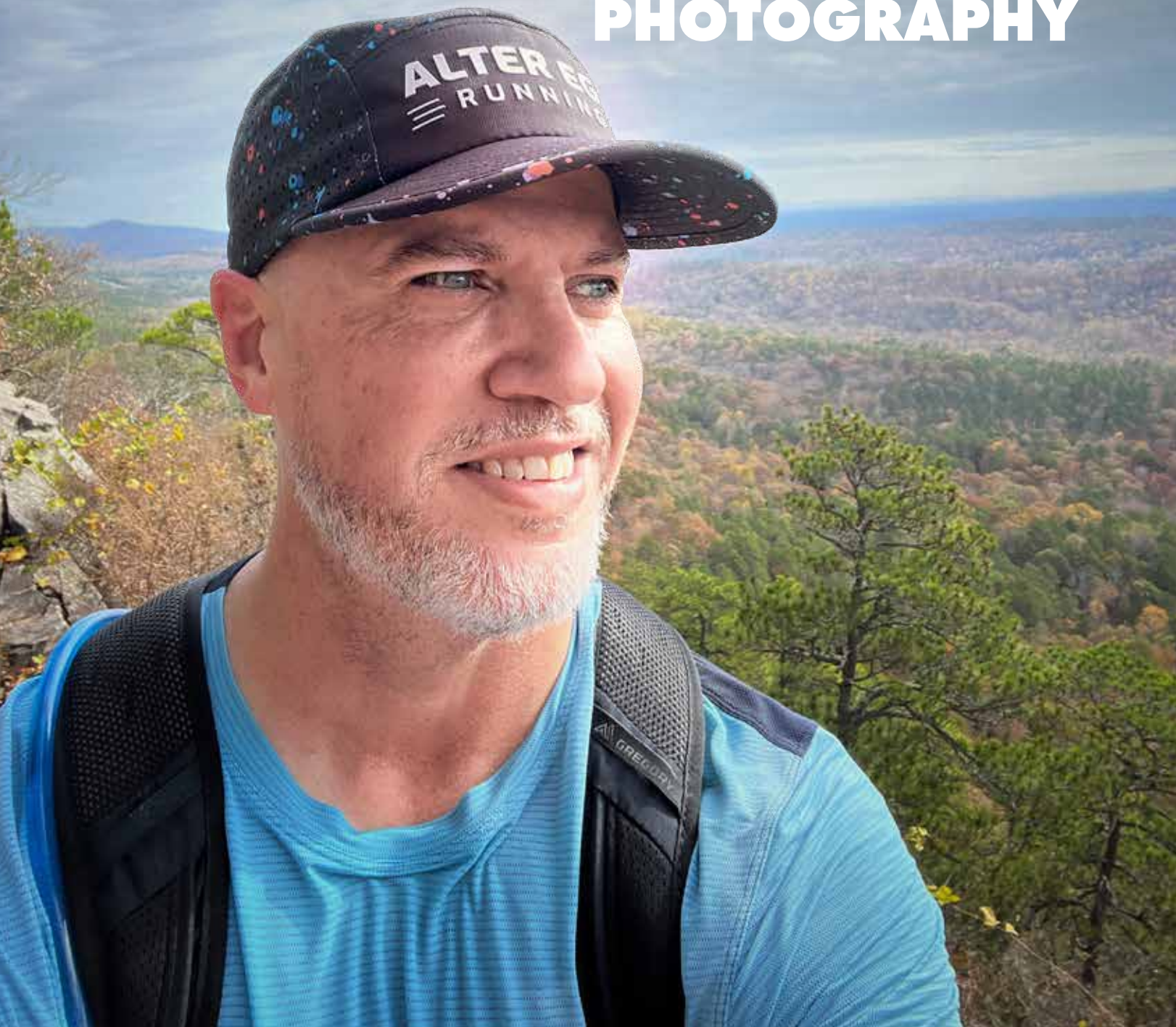


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David Graves

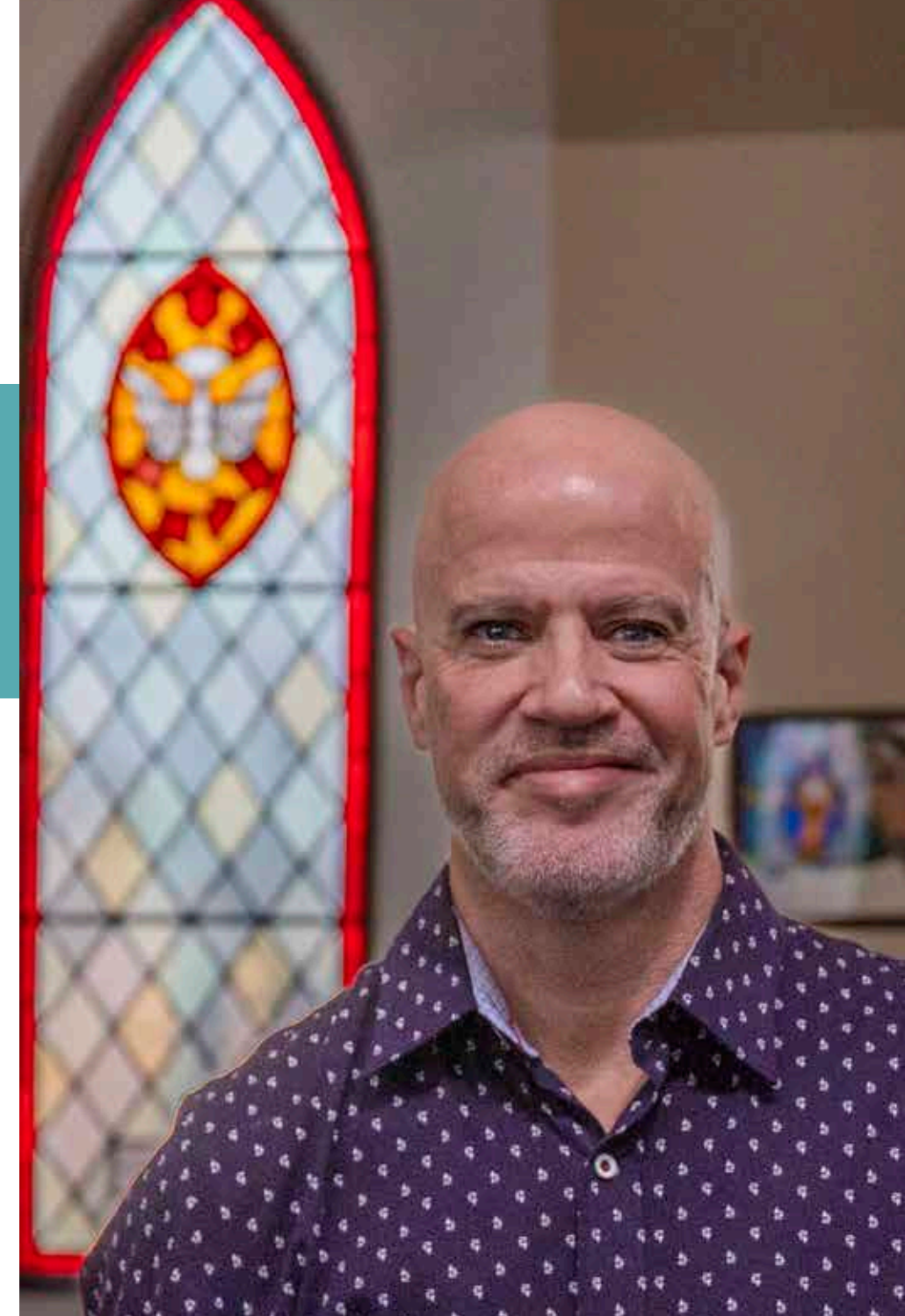
PHOTOGRAPHY



STORYTELLING THROUGH THE LENS OF FAITH

WRITTEN BY NICK INGRISANI
PHOTOS BY DAVID GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHY

“When we pause to think about the story of hope these windows tell, we’re encouraged in two ways: a lot of lives have been changed as a result of faith, and a lot of lives will be changed as a result of faith. Our job is to slow down and remember that story in our own lives.”



David grew up in the small southern country town of Thomasville, Alabama. He comes from a close-knit family and community. One of four siblings, including his fraternal twin, he experienced a childhood rooted in faith. After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in General Studies at the University of Mobile, David moved to Birmingham in 1997, where he began a career in sales.

David began his journey as a photographer seven years ago, sparked by a desire to document the places he visited overseas. “I wanted to document what my eyes could see and capture a good reflection of it,” he says. So he dove into learning the craft of photography and hasn’t looked back since. “I found my passion in photography was being a storyteller, trying to evoke an emotion from the viewer.”

A pivotal moment came around two years ago when Meredith, a longtime friend, noticed one of David’s social media posts and invited him to be a photographer for *Real Producers*. He jumped at the chance to use his photography as another gateway for his storytelling vision.

“Most people have had their picture taken but don’t realize they’re telling a story with their photo. I spend a lot of time asking questions and evoking emotion from the person I’m photographing because I want them to be as engaged in the process as possible. When they’re engaged, their presence comes through the photos.”

For David, these moments of connection are the foundation of his work—moments where emotion and storytelling come alive through the lens.

A Message of Hope with *Alabama Faith: Churches and Stained Glass*

A core childhood memory planted the seed for the passion project that would define his photography career. Around the age of 10, David's church—Pineview Baptist in Thomasville—announced that they would not have a Sunday evening service since it landed on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. The pastor encouraged members to “just stay home and be with family.” Since they lived close to the church and his father had a set of keys, they went in one Sunday night and sat on the front pew. There in the quiet, empty church, David sang “Silent Night” and vividly recalls the light streaming in through the stained glass windows and casting vibrant colors on the pews.

David told that story to a friend, and the friend suggested that he should take pictures of stained glass. While driving to his full-time job, he saw a church on the side of the road and went in to take pictures of their windows.

“From that moment, I knew I wanted to take on this project to show people the beauty around Alabama and remind them of faith and hope in these turbulent times.”

Over eight months, David traveled across the state of Alabama and photographed stained glass windows at 100 churches. The result is a gorgeous collection of 150 photos in his book, *Alabama Faith: Churches and Stained Glass*, which was released in October 2024. The book is a true labor of love and a celebration of faith.



“Each window is a testament to the community, faith, and family that have shaped Alabama’s history.”

For David, the project is about more than just photography. It's a beautiful reminder of the power of hope and faith.

“Each window is a testament to the community, faith, and family that have shaped Alabama’s history. This book is more than just a collection of photographs—it’s a celebration of the bigger picture that connects us all.”

Following the success of *Alabama Faith: Churches and Stained Glass*, David envisions creating a second volume to feature other churches across the state. Hearing directly from readers how the photos sparked their own memories and desire to share them with others motivates him to continue using his photography to tell impactful, meaningful stories.

“When we forget our own story of hope and faith, we lack a sense of empathy for other people. That’s why these stories matter so much. We desperately need connection with humans around us to remember that we all play a part in this grand scheme of life. Having empathy toward one another goes a long way.”

DAVID GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHY

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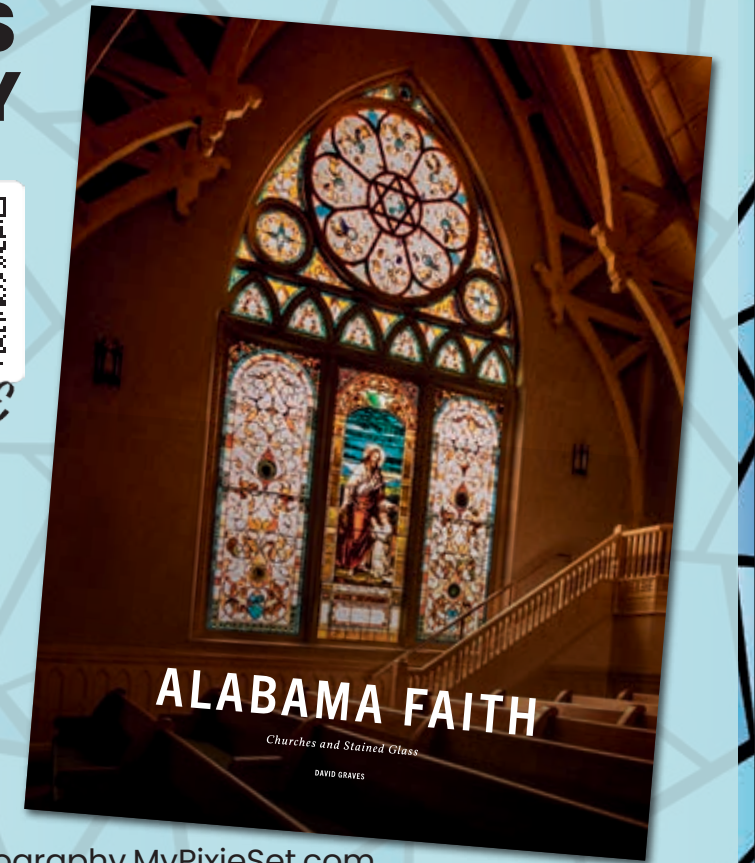
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Ashley DeForest

Passionate About Real Estate

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH MCCABE · PHOTOS BY BRENDON PINOLA PHOTOGRAPHY

“I didn’t really pursue real estate,” says Ashley DeForest, who is originally from Minnesota. “It fell in my lap, in a sense,” she smiles. Yet, in just two and a half years, Ashley has made a significant impact in the real estate market, landing in the top 10% of her office for the past two years and earning the Rookie of the Year award for 2023 from the Birmingham Association of REALTORS®.

Ashley was led to real estate through CrossFit, where she happened to coach an adult athlete named James, a REALTOR®. “I was James’ CrossFit coach, and you get to know your athletes as a coach. You see them after their workday ends and before they go home.” Through that time, she learned about real estate. “I expressed interest in working with him as a possibility after working in the nonprofit world for 10 years,” she reminisces. “I went from coaching James to him becoming my coach.”

Ashley worked for James at the James Rodgers Realty Group for a year before she became a licensed agent. “That made me more successful a lot quicker,” she says. “I had good expectations of what to expect as a licensed agent.” Ashley was set up for success. “I wouldn’t be successful without him,” she shares, “as well as my motivation and my drive.” Ashley also gained invaluable skills working in the nonprofit world for 10 years before real

estate, connecting with a lot of different people in all types of situations in life and different demographics.

As the director of operations for a sports training facility, she used athletics to engage youth in the west area of Birmingham. It was there that she discovered her talent for organizing and her knack for problem-solving. These skills were essential in real estate.

“When I first started working for James, I spent the first 3-4 months building out his business,” she says. In the process, she learned leaps and bounds about real estate. This year, she is looking forward to being a single agent.

Helping Others

Ashley loves helping others, a quality instilled in her early on in life. Raised by a single mother in a unique childhood experience, she had the open-mindedness, empathy, and compassion to understand many different types of people.

“I used it for good, making a difference for others,” she smiles. In the nonprofit world, one of her first jobs was to work at a youth home for teenage girls. Ashley also became a certified birth doula for several years for single mothers. As a result, she was able to help people with the transitions in life. Little did she know that this would be essential in her future career in real estate.

“Being in real estate is similar,” she says. “I provide support to people living and investing in communities.” Similarly, in the nonprofit world, she provided informational support, coached and guided others. Now, she does that with her clients, moving transactions to the closing table with grit and grace.

Ashley also holds a degree in psychology from the University of North Georgia, which has been helpful in her real estate career as well.

Building a Legacy in Homewood

Now a proud resident of Homewood, Alabama, Ashley is deeply invested in her community. She is an ambassador for the Homewood Chamber of Commerce and participates in local events, like a recent 5K supporting the Homewood Firefighters and Police Association. “I love this city,” she says. “I want to be involved in its businesses, people, and success for the long haul.”

Her Homewood office is a reflection of her commitment to the community. Alongside two fellow agents and an administrative team, Ashley continues to grow her career while staying true to her values.

Living Her Best Life

Outside of work, Ashley embraces a healthy and active lifestyle. A fitness



“Invest in yourself and show up every day as the best version of yourself.”

enthusiast, she’s passionate about powerlifting, pickleball, hiking, and paddleboarding. “I love nature,” she adds. Her two black goldendoodles, Murphy and Rosie, often join her on outdoor adventures.

Her advice for aspiring REALTORS®? “Invest in yourself and show up every day as the best version of yourself,” she says. “For me, that means staying healthy, maintaining strength through powerlifting, and surrounding myself with supportive people. When you’re passionate about what you do, others are naturally drawn to you.”

Ashley’s approach to real estate centers on coaching and educating her clients, especially through what she calls her “buyer’s strategy session.” By empowering clients with knowledge, she ensures smooth and successful transactions, leading to her success in sales.

A Rising Star

Ashley DeForest’s road to real estate is inspirational. From her Minnesota roots to her current home in Alabama, she has proven that a combination of hard work and heart can lead to extraordinary success.

Whether she’s guiding clients through the real estate process, supporting her community, or tackling her next fitness challenge, Ashley’s dedication shines brightly—making her a REALTOR® on the Rise.



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Brent GULLEDGE

A Community Staple

WRITTEN BY ZACHARY COHEN
PHOTOS BY BRENDON PINOLA PHOTOGRAPHY

Real estate has always been a central theme in Brent Gulledge's life. When he was a child, conversations about home building and real estate transactions dominated the dinner table. His father, a custom home builder, and his mother, a 25-year title industry veteran, set the tone for Brent's eventual career.

"In real estate, I saw an opportunity," Brent shares. "Helping people purchase a home, it's been something I've had an interest in from the beginning."

In 2014, Brent began his professional life in home building, supporting his father's residential homebuilding company as a construction supervisor. He became a real estate agent in 2017 and a home inspector in 2019. Through 2021, Brent balanced all three roles before dedicating himself entirely to real estate sales.

"Being a REALTOR® was a good fit because I love guiding people and helping them," Brent continues. "Showing houses, learning about the maintenance of houses... I've seen the fulfillment and gratitude. I saw my mom and dad helping folks, and I wanted that

opportunity. My first sale was a \$65,000 trailer on the lake. The gratitude for being able to help them get into that home is something I will never forget. That client still sends me pictures of their families. The satisfaction is huge."

For Brent, real estate is more than a career; it's a calling deeply rooted in family and community. He's lived in the Birmingham area his entire life, and much of what he does today is centered on giving back. That journey culminated with opening EXIT Realty Crossroads alongside his wife, Morgan, in April 2024.

Today, EXIT Realty Crossroads is a thriving team of ten REALTORS®. With a mission to give back to the community, they have quickly become a community staple. "Our formula is family and community. The reason I wanted to open a brokerage is because I really enjoy helping people out, and it also gives an opportunity to give back to the community," Brent explains.

Brent's wife, Morgan, supports the brokerage as co-owner and operations/backend support alongside her full-time job at UAB St. Vincent's. Brent is the managing broker and an active real estate agent. Both are deeply committed to supporting their agents, clients, and the broader community. "We're an open



"BEING A REALTOR® WAS A GOOD FIT BECAUSE I LOVE GUIDING PEOPLE AND HELPING THEM."



“HELPING PEOPLE PURCHASE A HOME — IT’S BEEN SOMETHING I’VE HAD AN INTEREST IN FROM THE BEGINNING.”

door and always want to be there for our agents. It’s a tight-knit group, and we feel like family,” Brent says proudly. “EXIT’s formula for fostering a family-like culture resonated with me.”

For Brent and Morgan, the brokerage is more than just a business—it’s a way

to give back. EXIT Realty Crossroads proudly supports Ann’s New Life Center (<https://annsnewlifecenter.com>), a local nonprofit dedicated to helping pregnant women. Ann’s New Life provides essential services such as ultrasounds, education, and resources like diapers

and formula. They even help with job training and financial literacy. In spring 2025, the brokerage is planning a home and garden show to benefit the organization, further cementing its commitment to service.

Outside of work, Brent and Morgan’s lives revolve around family. Brent is the proud father and Morgan is the proud bonus mom to their 9-year-old daughter, Lila Kate. They enjoy spending quality time together—whether hosting friends for football games, cooking out, or relaxing at their family beach home in Panama City Beach. “We’re big on family and feeding people,” Brent says. “There’s nothing better than bringing people together over good food and great company.”

As Brent and Morgan look ahead, they are excited about the impact they can create with EXIT Realty Crossroads. Their goal is to become the top brokerage in Moody—in both sales and community involvement.

“The vision is to own our own piece of land and have our own building and supply a great brokerage to new and seasoned agents. We want to be a staple in the community. We’ve been really honing in on that... being part of the community, giving back, supporting foundations, and running events. We’re building our name by giving back.”



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EVENT RECAP

Sips, Sweets, & Santa's Treats Holiday Brunch

PHOTOS BY DAVID GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHY



On Thursday, November 21, we hosted our “Sips, Sweets, and Santa’s Treats Holiday Brunch” at our wonderful partner’s storefront, Rolls Bakery. From the heavenly cinnamon rolls to the delightful strawberry scones, Rolls treated us to a festive feast. To top it off, holiday sangria was a hit, sponsored by our generous partner, Lambert Agency Insurance.

This celebration wasn’t just about treats; it was about giving back. Together, we filled three boxes of toys for the Ronald McDonald House of Birmingham through our toy drive. Seeing the community come together for such a meaningful cause warmed our hearts and was the perfect way to close out 2024.

The event also gave us the opportunity to honor our October and November featured REALTORS®, whose hard work and dedication make our community thrive. Attendees had the chance to win fantastic door prizes, thanks to the support of our incredible sponsors:

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To all our partner sponsors and devoted REALTORS®—thank you for making this event and this past year such a success. Your support fuels everything we do, and we are so proud of what we accomplished together in 2024.

Here’s to an exciting 2025 full of new opportunities, community connections, and even more reasons to celebrate!



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Kevin Sargent + Christy McDonald AT REALTYSOUTH

Excelling in Sales and Service

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH MCCABE
PHOTOS BY DAVID GRAVES PHOTOGRAPHY



When it comes to real estate, two are always better than one. Just ask Kevin Sargent and Christy McDonald, who have turned their friendship and shared passion into a powerhouse partnership at RealtySouth. For nearly a decade, this dynamic duo has combined their expertise to deliver exceptional service, building a reputation for integrity, dedication, and results.

A Serendipitous Partnership

Christy McDonald, now in her 22nd year in real estate, began her career after transitioning from a successful stint in Yellow Book advertising. Kevin Sargent, who will celebrate his 12th year in real estate this February, also came from a background in advertising and marketing, working at Bell Media.

The two first crossed paths at a business planning meeting in December 2015. Though they had grown up in the same community and lived in the same neighborhood, they had never spoken until that day. Kevin recalls, “I thought it would be good to approach her about working together instead of competing against each other.” Christy laughs, “He

was scared of me; that’s what it boils down to.”

The partnership proved to be a winning formula, blending their complementary skills and commitment to client satisfaction.

Road to Real Estate Dating Back Decades

Christy’s passion for real estate began in childhood,

inspired by her father, who worked in construction lending for a builder. “I grew up visiting job sites with him as a child. I was intrigued by the industry as a whole. When I grew up, I wanted to sell houses,” she smiles. Although she jokes she took the “long way” of getting to real estate, she arrived at her long-awaited destination. “I felt a calling on my life early on to do what I do,” she smiles.

Kevin’s journey was shaped by personal experience. After graduating college, he went to look for a foreclosure law firm that specialized in REOs and foreclosures, which was his first exposure to real estate. After buying his first home in 2010 and encountering less-than-stellar service, he thought, “I can do better for clients than this.” This realization spurred him to pursue a career in real estate, where he’s been excelling ever since. His previous career in advertising prepared him to be the successful real estate professional he is today.

That doesn’t mean the road was always easy.

For Kevin, forging a path outside his family’s trade of electricians required courage and conviction. “I didn’t want to disappoint my family, but I knew real estate was the right path for me,” he says. “You have to do what’s right for you and your family.”

Passion + Purpose

For Christy, delivering stellar client experiences is her driving force. “I aim to be the 5-star Google review,” she says with a smile. Kevin shares a similar mindset, emphasizing the importance



of providing a quality service. “We want our clients to feel secure and happy with how they’ve been represented.” Together, they work to exceed their clients’ expectations, which is why 90 percent of their business is referral-based.

To those entering the industry, Kevin and Christy emphasize authenticity and building relationships. “Be as honest and genuine as possible,” Kevin advises. Christy adds, “Take care of your clients, and they’ll refer you to their family and friends.”

Fueled by Family

Both Kevin and Christy credit their families as their greatest influences and sources of motivation. For Christy, her husband, Scott—who serves as a captain in the Hoover Police Department—and their two children, Mallory (20) and Hughes (12), are her anchors. Mallory, a college student who also works at a preschool, dreams of becoming a schoolteacher, while Hughes is a basketball enthusiast who is passionate about the game. Christy cherishes the time her family spends traveling and enjoying their lake house, a beloved retreat that brings them closer together.

Balancing a demanding career with family life has been one of Christy’s biggest challenges, especially as a working mother in an industry that often demands round-the-clock availability. “There were voices that said you can’t be a good mother and succeed in real estate,” she recalls. But through



“
We want our clients to feel secure and happy with how they’ve been represented.”

prayer, careful scheduling, and unwavering dedication to her priorities, Christy has proven otherwise. “Having my first child changed how I approach everything, including real estate. I look at everything through a mother’s eyes,” she says.

Kevin, a proud father of three daughters—Olivia (13), Molly (11), and Reagan (7)—finds his drive in the

responsibility of providing for his family. His wife, Kristen, works in the exceptional education department at Trussville City Schools, and together, they prioritize creating meaningful experiences for their children. Olivia thrives in middle school band and enjoys archery, while Molly and Reagan are deeply involved in competitive

cheer. “Having kids young made me grow up faster. They motivate me every day,” Kevin shares.

When they’re not closing deals, Kevin and Christy prioritize quality time with their families. For Christy, it’s all about creating memories through travel and experiences rather than material gifts, a philosophy she embraces during the holiday season when her children receive “experiences” instead of traditional presents. Kevin finds relaxation in activities like hunting, fishing, and working out, and his family treasures opportunities to explore new destinations together, including a memorable trip to Europe.

Collaboration Over Competition

Putting people first is the cornerstone of their success. Kevin Sargent and Christy McDonald have built their careers on a foundation of trust. The power of their partnership, coupled with a relentless work ethic and a passion for delivering exceptional results, has set them apart. By fostering meaningful relationships and going above and beyond to exceed expectations, Kevin and Christy have earned a reputation as not only best friends but also two of the most respected and admired professionals in the industry.

Best of all, it all started by collaborating with one another rather than competing, which speaks volumes of how win-win solutions can be created in the competitive world of real estate.

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