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Happy New Year, *Northwest Indiana Real Producers* family!

With 2025 upon us, we're embracing the opportunity for fresh starts, bold goals, and new connections. Here's to a year filled with positivity and plenty of reasons to celebrate!

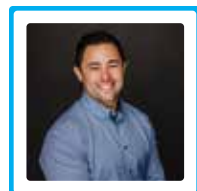
Speaking of fresh starts, we're thrilled to welcome three outstanding partners to our ever-growing community: Fidelity National Title, Franklin Pest Solutions, and Near North Title. Thank you for joining our thriving community—your partnership strengthens our mission of connecting and inspiring the top professionals in the region. Their expertise and commitment to excellence make them invaluable additions to our network, and we can't wait for you to get to know them better in the months ahead.

This month's features offer an inspiring start to the year. Our Partner

Spotlight highlights Ken Erow, the visionary behind Everlast Flooring. With nearly 30 years in the business, Ken's story is one of dedication and craftsmanship. From high-profile custom flooring projects to building a trusted local business, Ken and his team transform homes with integrity and care. Rising Star Fernando Alanis has built a thriving career by fostering meaningful relationships and serving his community. From steel mills to real estate success, discover how this rising star is navigating the ever-changing market. Our Cover Story features Lisa Thompson. Lisa's path to real estate began with a leap of faith, and she's never looked back. With her detail-oriented approach and a heart for service, Lisa has built a powerhouse team that thrives on trust and results. Her story showcases her journey, her passion for helping others, and her unwavering commitment to both clients and animals alike.

As we head into 2025, you'll notice a refreshed look for *Northwest Indiana Real Producers*. After nearly a decade of the national Real Producers brand, it's time for an upgrade as part of our ongoing efforts to maintain and elevate the product. This new look represents our commitment to leveling up while staying true to the mission of celebrating the top professionals in real estate. We're excited to continue growing alongside our community, and we hope you enjoy the updated design!

Here's to another incredible year of connecting, inspiring, and celebrating the best in Northwest Indiana real estate. Cheers to 2025 and all the possibilities ahead!



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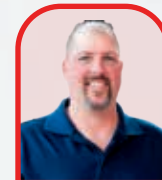


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Fall Event Connections at Coppolillo's

PHOTOGRAPHY BY T-23 PRODUCTIONS



On November 21st, Northwest Indiana Real Producers hosted our Fall Event, Connections at Coppolillo's, at Coppolillo's Italian Steakhouse in Crown Point. Despite the season's first snowfall, over 100 top real estate professionals and Preferred Partners filled the room, bringing unparalleled energy and enthusiasm to this networking celebration. The event was a testament to the power of collaboration, camaraderie, and shared passion within our real estate community.

The warm ambiance of Coppolillo's provided the perfect backdrop for an afternoon of connection and inspiration. Executive Chef Steve

Coppolillo outdid himself with a delectable spread of appetizers, setting the tone for a truly indulgent experience. Attendees enjoyed live music by Nick Kazonis and Alex Akers, adding a festive vibe to the room, while Eagle Eye Media captured the vibrant energy with their exceptional videography and T-23 Productions documented the day through stunning photography. We also celebrated the incredible individuals featured in our September, October, and November issues.



A heartfelt thank you goes out to Coppolillo's and The Amanda McKenzie Team of First Community Mortgage for co-hosting this event and to every attendee who brought their enthusiasm and support. Your presence made this gathering unforgettable, and we are so grateful for your continued engagement in building a strong and supportive community. Here's to more moments of connection, collaboration, and celebration as we move forward together!





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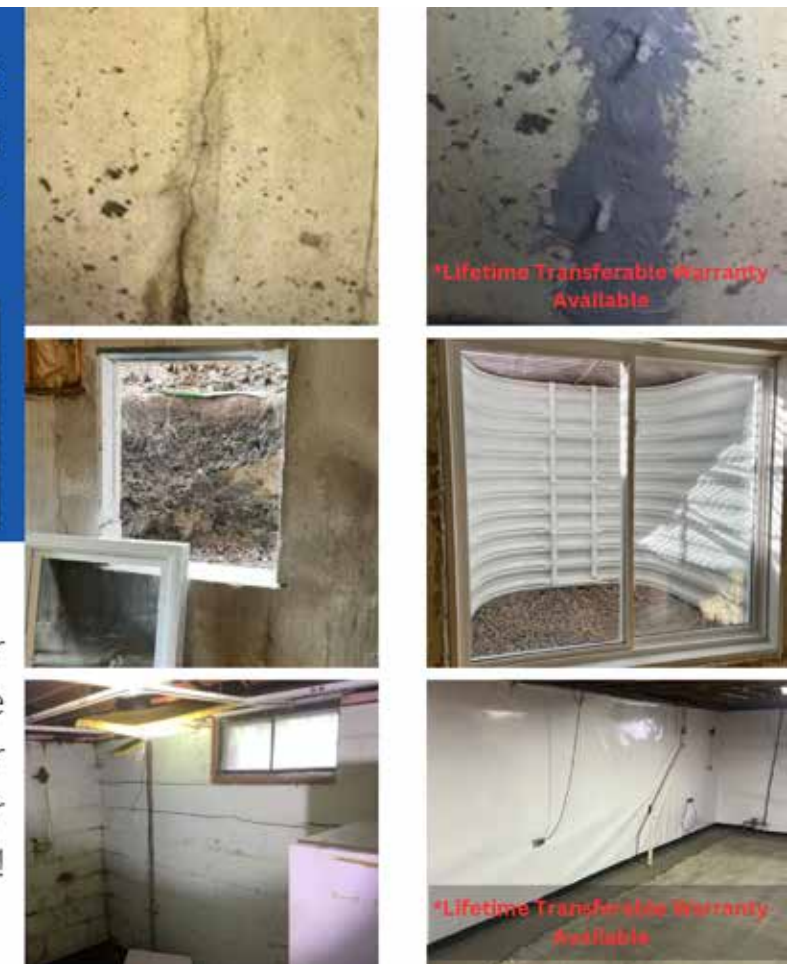
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BY GIAVONNI DOWNING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Ken Erow, the owner of Everlast Flooring, has spent nearly three decades perfecting his craft and leading his business with integrity and dedication. With over twenty years of experience running his company, Ken's journey is a testament to his hard work and commitment to delivering quality customer service.

He entered the flooring industry after a brief stint in college framing houses. "Before getting into the flooring, I attended 2 years of college. I soon realized college wasn't for me. I hired on with a local homebuilder and started framing houses. While doing that, I met a guy who was doing flooring. I started working with him and enjoyed it."

Ken's career took an exciting turn when he joined a company based out of the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. The company specialized in installing custom wood floors for high-profile clients, including celebrities, professional athletes, and large corporations.

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The transition to running his own business was a life-changing decision, allowing Ken to remain closer to home while continuing to do what he loved. As a small business owner, Ken is deeply proud of the team he's built. "I enjoy the crew working for me right now. It's hard work, but we enjoy the before and after. We can make a huge difference in someone's house in a short period, whether it's a complete refinish, installing new wood flooring, or some nice vinyl plank."

For Ken, the most rewarding aspect of his business is delivering the highest-quality service to his customers. "Every job is different, and we try to do everything as if it were our own house," he says.

Ken notes that scheduling can sometimes be unpredictable. "It's never just right in the flooring industry. It's either too much work or not enough. We try to get to everyone promptly, but it isn't always possible," he admits. Despite these challenges, he remains committed to ensuring his team is well taken care of. "I always try to ensure my guys have full work weeks plus overtime if they choose. I've been able to stay pretty consistent with that over the years. My guys are key to the company's success."

He still enjoys working closely with his team while gradually shifting toward overseeing the business and handling estimates. "I can't do as much as I used to physically, but I still like to work with the guys on site as much as possible. I'm blessed to have a few great guys that do great work."

Everlast Flooring's success is evident in its longevity and the number of repeat customers and referrals the company receives. "We are usually booked out for weeks or months. A couple of my employees have been with me for 10-15 years," he reflects.

“

It's hard work, but we enjoy the before and after. We can make a huge difference in someone's house in a short period, whether it's a complete refinish, installing new wood flooring, or some nice vinyl plank.”





Beyond his work, Ken Erow is a dedicated family man who profoundly appreciates his wife and children. He and his wife have been married for 24 years and have two sons.

Beyond his work, Ken Erow is a dedicated family man who profoundly appreciates his wife and children. He and his wife have been married for 24 years and have two sons, one recently married, adding a daughter-in-law to the family. Their oldest son and his wife graduated from Indiana Wesleyan University, where they ran cross country. Afterward, they moved to Utah for a few years to embark on an adventure. Their youngest son is a Blackhawk mechanic in the Army and is currently stationed in Alaska. Although Ken and his wife miss their children, they have embraced the empty nest lifestyle, finding joy in spending quality time together at home and staying involved in their church and community.

Ken also remains committed to giving back, supporting

veteran organizations, and helping an adopted daughter in Mexico. Ken and his wife have also taken up beekeeping over the past few years, adding a unique and rewarding hobby to their lives. Ken continues to find fulfillment in his professional and personal life, always eager to try new things.

Ken offers sage advice to aspiring entrepreneurs: "Make sure you enjoy what you're doing. Be honest with your employees and treat them well. Be honest and courteous to your customers and take pride in your work."

Ken Erow's story is one of dedication, hard work, and a passion for both his craft and his community. With a team he trusts, a loyal customer base, and a heart for service, Ken has proven that Everlast Flooring is built to last.

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Building Lasting Relationships and Real Estate Success

BY GIAVONNI DOWNING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

From the steel mills to the fast-paced world of real estate, Fernando Alanis has transformed his raw determination and magnetic personality into a thriving career. His story is compelling because of the blend of faith, relationships, and hard work that has propelled him to steady growth in a challenging market. Through it all, he has remained grounded, keeping his family at the center of his journey.

Fernando started his career in the Laborer's Union Local 41 working at the steel mill. He spent 15 years in the industry, with his final two years as a general foreman overseeing up to 20 people across multiple sites. But when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it forced him to rethink his future.

He decided to plunge into real estate—a field he had always been intrigued by.

“I always wanted to do real estate, even when I was 18 in high school. I said, ‘Hey, now is the time to do it.’” So, with his wife’s support, Fernando enrolled in real estate school. “I cried when I passed,” he said, recalling the joy and relief of becoming licensed.

Fernando’s first break came almost immediately after he received his license. “The day my license went active, I got a phone call from David Boyce at Preferred Homes LLC. He wanted to put a cash offer on a house.”

Working with David and his team, Fernando began gaining traction in real estate. He sold properties and built his reputation as a reliable, trustworthy agent. Soon, his client base expanded, and he was able to diversify his portfolio. Within months, Fernando had built a solid foundation in real estate despite the challenges of the pandemic and market shifts.

When asked about his success, Fernando attributes much of it to the relationships he’s built over the years. “I’ve been grinding since I was a kid,” he said. “I’ve been building my network. When I picked up the phone and said, ‘Hey, I’m in real estate now,’ people already knew what it was like to work with me.”

This network of established relationships has been a critical factor in Fernando’s ability to navigate the fluctuating market. “When others saw their sales drop due to the high



“

With his team, family, and community behind him, Fernando Alanis is well on his way to achieving even greater success, one relationship at a time. As Fernando would say, “Who’s next?”



interest rates, I didn't miss a beat," he said proudly. "I gained 100,000 from the previous year, even with the 8% interest rates." His focus on building and maintaining trust with clients and colleagues has helped him steadily grow his business.

Fernando's drive is centered on his family. "The most rewarding part of my journey has been being there for my daughters," he shared. Being present for them is priceless.

Fernando and his wife have been married for 13 years and have three daughters: Kaylee (10), Jaylee (3), and Zaylee (1). Fernando's wife's support and insights have been instrumental in his success. "She's my rock," he said, noting that her support allows him to focus on growing his career while she handles the home front.

Fernando's business continues to grow, and with that growth comes the responsibility of leadership. He has a small team focused on developing their skills to achieve their collective goals. "My goal for 2025 is \$20 million in sales," Fernando said confidently.

Fernando approaches every challenge with a positive attitude and is quick to lead by example, empowering his team to achieve their full potential.

He also strongly emphasizes self-improvement, citing books like *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins and *Atomic Habits* as personal favorites. The lessons from these books fuel his desire to lead with energy and adaptability, qualities that inspire those around him.

Fernando is passionate about helping his community. He's actively involved with the Urban Enterprise Association and has hosted homebuyer seminars to educate others about real estate.

"There are so many people out here with money saved up but lack knowledge about how to buy a home," he said. "I want to be the one to help change that."

Fernando focuses on both his personal and professional goals. "Success for me isn't about the money," he said. It's about peace and happiness. I measure success by how happy I am and how much I impact others."

With his team, family, and community behind him, Fernando Alanis is well on his way to achieving even greater success, one relationship at a time. As Fernando would say, "Who's next?"



“
There are so many people out here with money saved up but lack knowledge about how to buy a home. I want to be the one to help change that.”



Michele Godinez, Adeline Vaught, Jennifer Vaught, Lisa Thompson, Steve Cleveland, Michelle McManus, and Natalie Cooper

Lisa Thompson

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Mastering the Details to Build Real Estate Dreams

BY GIAVONNI DOWNING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Lisa Thompson never intended to be a Realtor. With a degree in accounting and finance from Indiana University, she was poised for a promising career at a Big Five accounting firm. But a chance suggestion changed everything. “The guy I was interning with said, ‘Take this real estate class with me,’” Lisa recalls.

“WE’VE BUILT OUR BUSINESS ON REFERRALS AND WORD OF MOUTH. MANY OF OUR CLIENTS BECOME LIKE FAMILY. IT’S ABOUT HOW YOU TREAT PEOPLE AND WHEN YOU HAVE THEIR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART, IT SHOWS.”



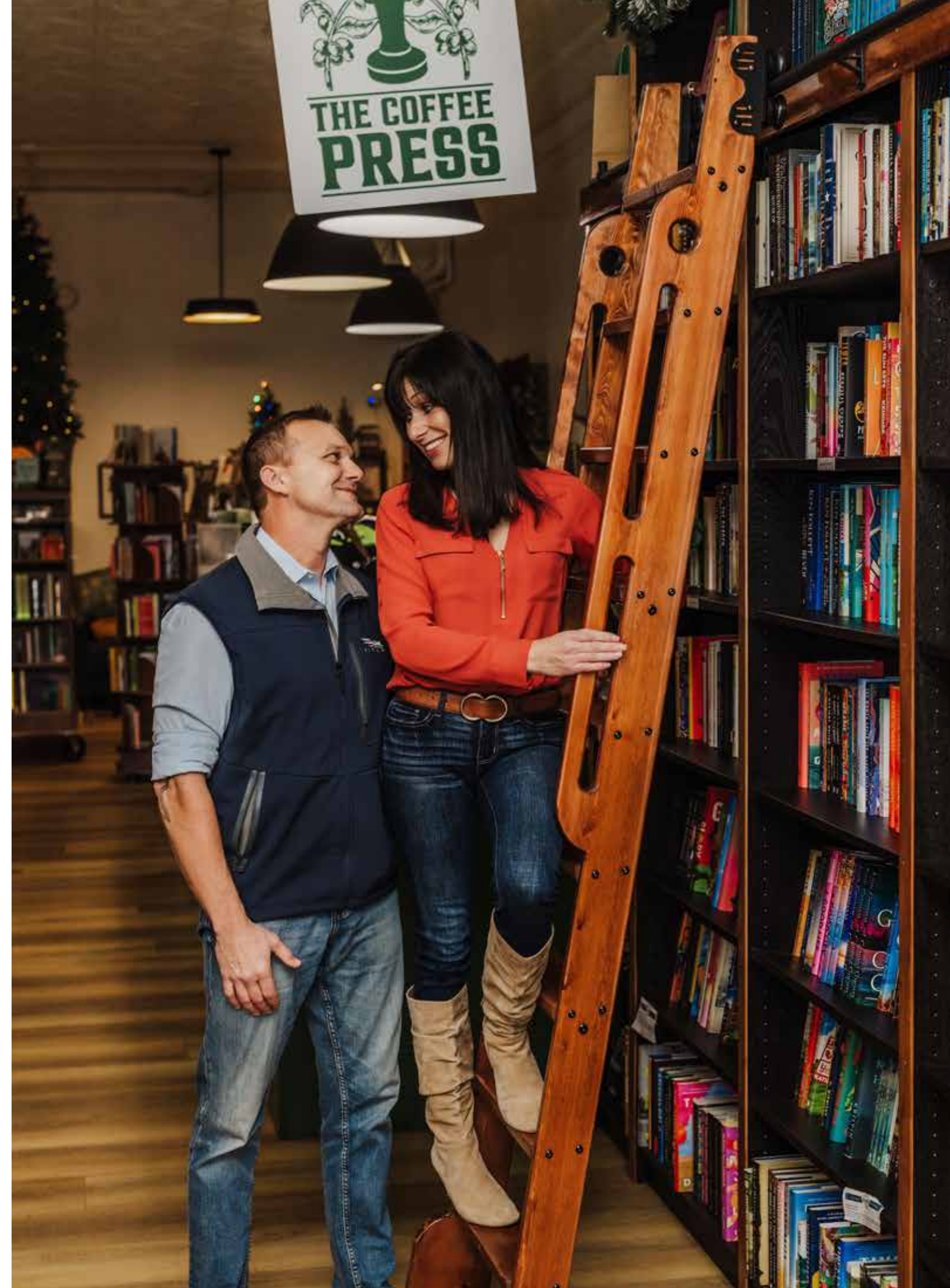


“MY TEAM TRUSTS ME, WHICH GIVES ME A REAL SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT. I FEEL LIKE I’VE EARNED THAT TRUST BY ALWAYS STRIVING TO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE AND PUTTING THEM A STEP AHEAD IN EVERYTHING WE DO.”

Against the advice of peers urging her to pursue the security of a corporate job, Lisa followed her instincts. “I’m a self-motivator. I thought, let’s give this a shot.”

From humble beginnings, Lisa entered the real estate world at 22, joining Coldwell Banker and cutting her teeth in the Northwest Indiana region. “I started at Coldwell Banker and stayed there for 17 years. My managing broker, Donna Zisoff, became like a second mom to me,” she shares. Despite her youth, Lisa quickly learned the value of hard work, building her business transaction by transaction. “I closed 70 to 80 transactions a year with just a part-time assistant. It was crazy.”

Her meticulous nature and background in finance helped her stand out. “I’m very detail-oriented,” Lisa says. “My assistant sometimes tells me I go overboard, but I believe in having systems in place.” That dedication eventually led her to expand her team and partner with her husband, Steve Cleveland, in 2013.





“IT’S ABOUT DOING WHAT YOU CAN TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE. WE’RE TRULY BLESSED TO HAVE THE ABILITY TO CREATE LASTING, MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN BOTH PEOPLE’S LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OUR FURRY COMPANIONS.”

Steve, a skilled union mason with 20+ years of construction experience on high-profile projects like the Art Museum expansion in Chicago, initially resisted the idea of joining real estate. “I told him, ‘Just take the class,’” Lisa laughs. “He thought I was crazy, but once he got his license, he realized how much his skills translated to this field.”

Steve’s extensive construction knowledge added immeasurable value to the team.

Their first year working together proved their synergy. “In 2013, we closed 148 transactions with over \$27 million in production—just the two of us and a part-time assistant,” Lisa says. “People would say our cars were in the office parking lot until midnight. We lived and breathed real estate.”

Today, Lisa leads a close-knit team that feels more like family. Long-time team members like Natalie Cooper, who joined in 2015, and Jennifer Vaught, a fellow high school alum, are integral to the group. “Natalie is my sounding board,” Lisa says. “Jennifer is creative and always comes up with fresh ideas. Then there’s Michelle McManus, who brings unmatched positivity. She’s like our Energizer Bunny.” Adeline Vaught, the newest team member, adds a fresh perspective to keep the team relatable, especially with Gen Z clients and social media content. In the background, Michele Godinez is the team’s invaluable full-time processor. Lisa believes the team’s success stems from everyone embracing the core value of always putting clients first and building relationships.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes to Lisa’s business. “We went from working out of an office to doing almost everything remotely,” she explains. “At first, I thought I’d never adapt, but now I love working from home. We built our dream home in Valparaiso during the pandemic, which we call our ‘elegant rustic retreat.’ It’s our sanctuary.”

Lisa also took the opportunity to step back slightly from the grind. “After some time, I realized I needed to enjoy life more,” she admits. “I sacrificed so much for my career. Now, I focus on supporting my team and ensuring they reach their personal and professional goals.”

While her team consistently closes \$40–50 million in transactions annually, her true fulfillment comes from relationships. “We’ve built our business on referrals and word of mouth. Many of our clients become like family,” she says.

“It’s about how you treat people and when you have their best interests at heart, it shows.”

She’s also found joy in her partnership with Steve. “We spend almost every moment together, and it works. We complement each other perfectly,” she says. “At the end of a long day, we sit on our deck with our Yorkie, Diesel, and reflect on how lucky we are to share this journey.”

As Lisa continues to navigate the evolving real estate landscape, she plans to leverage the power of relationships consistently. “I’ve always believed that if you focus on doing a good job, the success will follow,” she says. “That’s the foundation of everything we do.”

Lisa has a nurturing spirit and a bleeding heart for animals. “I love animals,” Lisa shared with a smile. “We give to Humane Indiana and our local animal shelters. I can’t even go into shelters because I’ll want to bring them all home.” Her dedication to helping animals isn’t just financial—it’s personal. Over the years, Lisa has taken in several rescues, often stumbling across animals in need during her real estate work. Her nearly 21-year-old cat, Sadie, was a stowaway in her mom’s belly when Lisa saved Marcy, Sadie’s mom, over 20 years ago. Lisa found homes for the other kittens, including two that went to her parents. “Then, in 2015, we found Lizzie, our Maine Coon, at an abandoned house. She was part of a litter of four, and I kept one while my mom kept three,” Lisa recalled. Nowadays, Lisa’s dad always makes sure she isn’t smuggling any new kittens in before he opens the door.

This love for animals reflects Lisa’s nurturing spirit, which also shines through in her leadership. “My team trusts me, which gives me a real sense of accomplishment. I feel like I’ve earned that trust by always striving to see the bigger picture and putting them a step ahead in everything we do.” Lisa is a natural problem solver, always determined to figure things out to give her clients and team the help they need. As a leader, Lisa’s attention to detail and ability to anticipate challenges have propelled her team forward.

Regardless of the task at hand, Lisa’s commitment to making a positive impact is clear. As she puts it, “It’s about doing what you can to make the world a better place. We’re truly blessed to have the ability to create lasting, meaningful change in both people’s lives and the lives of our furry companions.”

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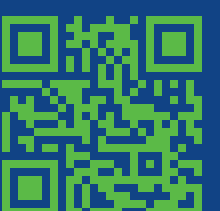
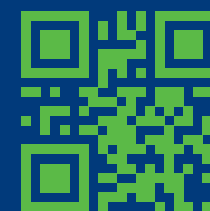


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