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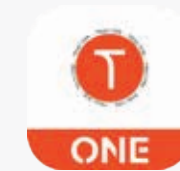
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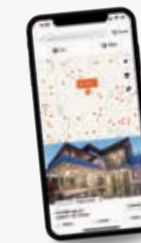
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VETERAN OWNED AXE MOVING



LIGHTENING THE LOAD

WRITTEN BY CHERIKA JOHNSON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TILMON MEDIA

For Marcus and Stephanie Howell, the heart of Axe Moving Co. was built on more than trucks, boxes, and schedules—it was built on service, integrity, and faith. Long before they became the trusted name that has helped more than 350 East Texas families move into new chapters of their lives, the couple walked a road marked by transition, grit, and purpose.

Marcus, a proud United States Marine Corps veteran who served from 2006 to 2010, learned early that discipline, accountability, and teamwork weren't just military values—they were life values. Those lessons carried him through years in the oil field as a shop foreman and eventually, into the calling that would redefine his family's future.

A Move of Faith

In 2015, Marcus and Stephanie found themselves in San Antonio, raising their one-year-old daughter, Presley, while facing uncertainty as the oil industry struggled. After years of moving from one home to another—five times in as many years—they knew firsthand the exhaustion that came with it. “We realized that moving was supposed to lighten your load,” Stephanie said, “but the experiences we had often did the opposite.”

With prayer and purpose guiding their next step, they made the decision to move back home to East Texas and start something new. “We were searching for what God would have us do,” Marcus recalls. “And we realized there was a need for a moving company that not



“
**EXCELLENCE IS
NOT AN ACT; IT
IS A HABIT.”**
– ARISTOTLE

only made the process easier, but one that truly served people—with kindness, excellence, and integrity.”

They purchased one box truck, applied for a USDOT number, and launched Axe Moving Co. out of Canton, Texas. It wasn't an easy road, but from day one, Marcus

and Stephanie committed to making their business more than just about moving furniture. “Our goal was to make moving feel like peace,” Marcus says. “We wanted every family to feel cared for and comfortable from the first phone call to the last handshake.”

The Marine Corps Standard

For Marcus, military service shaped everything about the way Axe Moving operates. The Marine Corps instilled in him a standard of excellence that continues to guide his leadership. “The military taught me to hold myself—and the people around me—to a higher level of accountability,” he explains. “That expectation for integrity, cleanliness, and respect shows up in how we run our company.”



“

THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH MY SONS AND BUILD SOMETHING TOGETHER HAS BEEN SUCH A BLESSING.”

Every crew member at Axe Moving is a full-time employee—never a day laborer picked up for convenience. Each one wears a uniform, speaks respectfully to customers, and operates with what Marcus calls “Southern hospitality wrapped in Marine discipline.” It’s a culture that blends professionalism with warmth, creating a team that customers can both trust and enjoy having in their homes.

“We never forget that we’re being invited into someone’s personal space during a major life transition,” Stephanie adds. “Whether it’s a growing family, a relocation, or a difficult downsizing, we treat every home and every person with care.”

Serving with Purpose

Behind every move, there’s a deeper mission. “For us, success isn’t just about paying bills,” Marcus says. “It’s that our customers see Jesus in us and in the way we serve.” That faith-centered philosophy is what keeps the Howells grounded and grateful. They’ve seen how a simple act of service—packing boxes, loading furniture, or listening to a customer’s story—can become ministry in motion.

That heart for service extends beyond business hours. Marcus and Stephanie serve actively in their church’s youth ministry, where they mentor and guide middle and high school

students—including their daughter, Presley, who recently joined the youth group herself. Marcus also leads an annual retreat for junior and senior boys in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, helping them discover their identity and purpose as young men of faith.

Outside of church and business, family remains their anchor. Saturdays are often spent at volleyball games, followed by lunch together—small moments that matter deeply to the Howells, who have learned the art of giving 100% wherever their feet are planted. “Balance is an illusion,” Marcus admits. “When I’m at work, I give everything to that moment. When I’m home, I give everything to my family.”

A New Mission: Reaching Veterans

Though the moving business keeps him busy, Marcus’s heart still beats for those in uniform. A lifelong student of Scripture, he has spent years studying and writing about faith through the lens of his military experience. His upcoming book, slated for release in 2026, aims to help service members navigate church life after combat—bridging the gap between the warrior culture and the faith community.

He dreams of starting a foundation dedicated to serving veterans, offering Bible studies and resources that

remind them they have a place in God’s kingdom as both warriors and brothers and sisters in Christ. “The military taught me how to lead,” Marcus says, “but faith taught me why to serve.”

Raising the Bar for the Industry

Over the past decade, Axe Moving Co. has earned a reputation for excellence—one that’s changing the way East Texans view professional movers. “There’s a stigma around moving companies,” Marcus explains. “People have been burned before—by poor communication, careless handling, or companies that won’t take responsibility when something goes wrong.”

Axe Moving was built to be the opposite. Their commitment to reliability, honesty, and service has not only earned them loyal clients but also reshaped expectations within the industry. “We wanted to raise the bar,” Marcus says, “and encourage other companies to do the same.”

Whether it’s the family moving into their forever home or the widow downsizing after loss, Marcus and Stephanie approach every job with the same heart—to make a difficult day a little easier, and to show compassion in motion.

Faith in Every Step

After ten years in business, three loyal dogs—Frank, Lucy, and Goose—and countless miles traveled across East Texas, the Howells remain as committed as ever to their purpose. “God has blessed us with incredible customers and an amazing team,” Stephanie says. “We don’t take that lightly.”

Driven. Chosen. Teammate. Those are the words Marcus uses to describe himself, but they could just as easily describe the spirit of Axe Moving Co.—a company built by a Marine, guided by faith, and dedicated to moving people not just from house to house, but from one chapter of life to the next—with care, character, and Christ at the center of it all.



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Ted Conover

Texas Born, Texas Built,
Truly Legendary

WRITTEN BY
DAWN SIMS



I first met Ted Conover in Tyler, of course at an event. Because if Ted is invited to an event or class that will grow or educate real estate agents, he is showing up. Even our interview didn't take place at a coffee shop... appropriately, it was in an office at the Greater Tyler Association of Realtors. Mr. Conover is a man of experience, involvement and advocacy. Sitting beside him, chatting, I could easily sense the pride he carries—not just in his accomplishments, but in the people he surrounds himself with, the communities he serves, and the family he adores.

Ted is a fifth-generation Texan, born in San Antonio, but his path has taken him all over the state. He graduated from Kilgore High School and, after a brief stint at Alvin Junior College, he followed the advice of his high school agriculture teacher to pursue a Farm Scholarship at East Texas State University in 1967. There, he worked on the university

farm, pledged Alpha Sigma, and even became the 1968 Champion Bull Rider at the annual Fall Rodeo. Ted's early life already reflected the hallmarks of the man he would become: ambitious, adventurous, and unafraid to take risks.

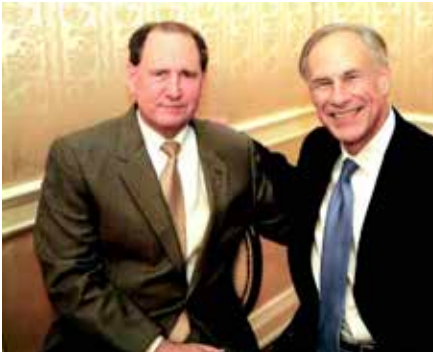
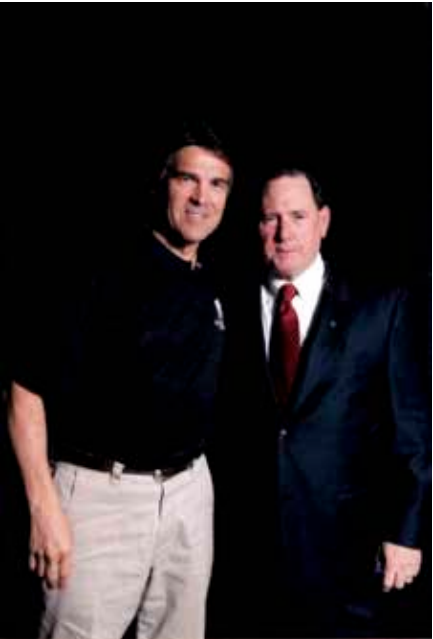
College wasn't always smooth sailing. After leaving ETSU due to grades, Ted worked on an offshore drilling rig to save money, only to be drafted into the United States Marine Corps in 1969. His time in the Marines was transformative. He earned two meritorious promotions, achieved the rank of Corporal in just 17 months, and qualified as an expert marksman, earning the Leatherneck Award in boot camp. Beyond the accolades, Ted often reflects on the Marine Corps' unique sense of brotherhood, a bond he carries with him to this day.

After his military service, he returned to ETSU, completed a bachelor's degree in Agriculture Education in 1972, and then a master's in General Agriculture in 1973. Even as a graduate assistant, living on the university farm and managing registered beef cattle herds, Ted was already blending his love of agriculture with leadership—a combination that would define his career.

Ted's professional journey began in 1974 with the Federal Land Bank Association of Tyler, where he quickly rose from loan officer to Vice President, and eventually President and CEO. Under his leadership, the bank grew from 10 employees and \$72 million in loan volume to 34 employees and more than \$277 million in assets. He foresaw the major changes coming to agricultural finance in the late 1990s,

earning a degree from the Southwest Graduate School of Banking at SMU, overseeing mergers, and transforming the institution into a direct lender authorized to issue agricultural real estate, home, equipment, livestock, and production loans.

Even after his formal retirement from banking in 2011, Ted's drive never slowed. He joined his son on the family farm, JV Cattle Co., LLC, and eventually transitioned into real estate. "Over the years, the real estate community has been welcoming," Ted told me, "I've met hundreds of agents at events and trainings. Attending and being involved is a great way to connect and make great friends." With more than three decades of experience in financing, his move into real estate felt almost natural—a continuation of his lifelong dedication to Texas land and communities.



For Ted, involvement isn't just about career. It's about legacy, relationships, and impact. He serves as Chairman of the Texas Agriculture Finance Authority, participates on the State Advisory Board for Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership, and is active with the East Texas State Fair Association, LEAD, and several other agricultural and civic boards. His leadership has been recognized repeatedly, including awards like the Bill and Mary Clements Award for outstanding leadership in agriculture and the President's Award from the Texas Ag Workers Insurance Company.

Yet, Ted's most meaningful work often comes down to family and mentorship. He lights up when talking about his six grandchildren, ranging in age from 11 to 24. I've got to admit, on paper, Ted is quite intimidating. But in person, he is gentle and kind and just like any other grandfather. Full of pride, he pulled out his cell phone to show me pictures of his grandchildren. Make no



mistake, agriculture remains central to his family life, too. He shared with me how his grandson earned money baling hay, and his 11-year-old granddaughter, Hallie, wanted to know how she could get involved and make some money, too. Ted quickly arranged a job for Hallie, and she now keeps track of the family cattle's births, reporting to her grandfather which cows birth a calf, if it's a heifer or a bull, complete with her own pay. "It's important they learn the value of hard work," Ted said. "That's how you pass on not just a legacy, but a way of life."

I asked Ted why he remains so actively involved even after decades of service on committees, boards, and organizations. With a laugh, he said, "There's only so much Andy Griffith you can watch after you retire. The best way to stay feeling young and active is to be involved and help others. My banking background led to politics and I learned a lot." He shared his philosophy

on relationships and influence: "People ask me, 'Do you know Governor Perry?' And I tell them, yes—but the important part is that he knows me. Keeping a personal relationship with these officials is important because if you ever have something to say, they'll listen and know who is talking." That concept is mind-blowing and is so impactful.

Ted's approach to life and work is best captured by his favorite quote from Theodore Roosevelt: "Credit belongs to those that are actually in the arena." "For me, that's the mantra I went by," he said. "To get involved and fight, whether you win or lose...stay in it. That's how I've lived my whole life. I was a risk-taker. From serving in the Marines to riding bulls, win or lose, I'm in it."

Even as he looks forward to scaling back his professional obligations, Ted's sense of purpose is unwavering. He plans to support his grandchildren at sporting events, spend more time with them, and downsize his home. But no matter how much he adjusts his schedule, he remains deeply committed to the communities and institutions that shaped his life, from ETSU to the Texas AgriLife Extension programs, and from local banks to state leadership initiatives.

Sitting with Ted, it's impossible not to be inspired by the breadth of his experiences, the depth of his knowledge, and the warmth he brings to everything he does. The man is truly a legend. He embodies a life lived fully—rooted in Texas, guided by service, and enriched by family, friends, and community. Whether you know him as a Marine, banker, rancher, educator, or realtor, one thing is certain: Ted Conover is a man who's always in the arena.





FROM
BOOTS TO
BLUEPRINTS

THE
Ashley
SALGADO
Story

WRITTEN BY DAWN SIMS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMK MEDIA

I’ve met a lot of real estate professionals over the years, but Ashley Salgado is one of those people you cannot forget, nor would you want to. From the moment I sat with her on the patio of a local Starbucks, it was evident that she was not only prepared but she exudes a sense of purpose, and a spark that told me she’s someone who doesn’t just work in real estate—she lives it. Sitting down with her, I felt like I was listening to a story that had been decades in the making, and although it is full of so many chapters, her story is just beginning.

Ashley’s life is grounded in both discipline and heart. She’s a Mexican-American Marine Corps veteran, married to her wife Daniela, and mother to their 15-year-old daughter, Alyssa. “I don’t crack under pressure,” she said with a measured smile. “Setbacks don’t define me. I’m aggressive when it comes to protecting anything I care deeply about—including my clients.” Hearing her say that, I could see exactly where that strength came from.

Her clients span the Hispanic community and the veteran population, and she’s known for going above and beyond. “Even if I have to find an agent out of state to help a fellow veteran, I will absolutely do that,” she shared. “There is a loyalty and trust in the veteran community. Many times, I’ll pay it forward by looking for a real estate agent who is also a veteran, knowing that the connection between client and agent will begin with trust and common ground. I live off referrals.”

Ashley will travel anywhere in Texas to help her clients, but East Texas is home. That’s where she and her family live, and where their story began together. Ashley met Daniela in 2015 at a local club, “two-stepping to country music,” in what she describes as



Photo by Moonlight Portraits, LLC

“the most East Texas way possible.” That’s right! And I know everyone reading this is nodding in agreement! Alyssa was just four years old at the time, and the couple married a year later in 2016. It was easy to picture the life they’ve built, full of laughter, love, faith, and a lot of hard work.

Before real estate, Ashley spent five years in active duty with the Marine Corps, traveling to Japan, Korea, the Middle East, and across the United States. “The military shaped me the most,” she said. “It taught me discipline, structure, and grit.” That background still influences the way she approaches her work today. “Veterans make great entrepreneurs because they have been trained to work under the worst circumstances. So, I don’t let a lot stress me out,” she explained. It’s that steadiness and focus that her clients notice immediately.

Ashley’s journey into real estate was inspired by personal experiences. The very reason she chose to serve her country played a big part in choosing real estate as a profession. She longed for structure and discipline and 5 years in active duty most definitely delivered. As much as Ashley loved her time in the service defending the country she loves and contributing her own part in defending our nation’s freedom, she longed for

some freedom of her own in how she carried out her daily life. Real estate offered the flexibility and opportunity to build a career she is so proud of. They say everything is bigger in Texas, and for Ashley Salgado, this sentiment couldn’t be more true. Her network proved to be much like the sprawling piney woods we are surrounded by, with branches of family members, fellow veterans and friends in East Texas turned out to be the perfect place for her to start. “Hispanic people need someone to guide them in the real estate process with integrity.” Prior to Ashley becoming an agent, she had her own personal experience buying a home, and it was not good. But like most things in life, her bad experience lit a fire in her and with her deep-seated faith, prayer, and determination, a now disciplined Ashley Salgado made something good...no, great, out of it. Her goal became clear: help families and veterans achieve homeownership while avoiding the mistakes she had experienced. Growing up, her father worked in remodeling and roofing, and she loved seeing the “before and after” of a project. This fed a burning desire to one day become a builder.

In 2021, she earned her real estate license while simultaneously finishing her bachelor’s degree and running Jumbo Party Rentals, her inflatable rental business. “That year was full,” she laughed, “but I’ve never been afraid of hard work.” The next year, she joined East Texas Preferred Properties, where she says she instantly felt at home. “We are like a big family there. My broker is a great mentor and someone great to look up to. She’s such a genuine soul and is always there when I need her.”

Ashley’s dedication and drive quickly translated into recognition. She’s been awarded Top Producer (2024), Top Transactions (2024), Platinum Award (2024), Hustle Award (2023), and was named a 40 Under 40 Hispanic Community Figure in 2024. “Success is knowing you can walk into a room and you are trusted,” she said. Her professional contributions extend beyond her business. Ashley currently serves as Vice Chair on the LAAR board in 2025 and is Chairman Elect for 2026, helping shape the future of Realtors in the Longview area.

Ashley’s dream of becoming a builder came true after only a year and a half in real estate, and not just with any name attached to it. Antonia Salgado, Ashley’s mother, passed away in 2007 when she was just 12 years old. It was only fitting that 15 years later, Ashley would honor her mother in naming her company after her: Antonia Custom Homes. “The death of my mother played a vital role in how my life has turned out,” she said. Ashley’s faith has always been a guiding light for her. A faith that provided peace in her loss. A faith that carried her through her days as a sergeant in the US Marine Corps, at times directing where to drop bombs. “A faith as small as a



Photo by Moonlight Portraits, LLC



“Setbacks don’t define me. I’m aggressive when it comes to protecting anything I care deeply about—including my clients.”



Believers like me and Ashley? We see exactly what God intended to say. “Yes, Ashley, it’s time.”

Family remains at the center of her life, and she’s intentional about creating balance. “I have workdays strictly for work, content days, finance days for all my new construction homes, and evenings reserved for my daughter. Sundays are for church and family—because work will always be there, family won’t always be,” she said. Even with that busy schedule, she finds creative outlets, producing her own marketing content with drone videography and editing, a hobby that keeps her energized and engaged. Yes, she sometimes works for fun, folks!

So what does the future look like for Ashley? In the very near future, she hopes to begin sponsoring a yearly college scholarship for a Tatum graduate. A 1st generation scholarship inspired by her own accomplishments. Ashley and her older brother, Jonathan were first generation high school graduates and Ashley is a first generation college graduate. No matter what was going on in Ashley’s life, she was destined for greatness. That greatness started with making a generational change, despite her circumstances. Her dad worked hard his whole life to provide for his family so his children could take the next steps. I now understand Ashley’s mantra in life, “Discipline builds a foundation but a heart builds a home.” She’s not done though, ladies and gentlemen. Ashley’s longterm goal is to open a center for youth to go to after school in her hometown of Tatum.

Somewhere within walking distance from the schools. A place with wifi, to play games, lounge, do homework or just socialize that will be safe with plenty of options to keep them busy and out of trouble. “There isn’t a place like this in Tatum and I would love to provide one.”

As our conversation wrapped, I reflected on just how much Ashley pours into everything she does—from her family to her clients to her community. “I am most grateful for the support I get from my wife, family, and friends,” she said. “Without them, I could not do

as much as I do.” That loyalty and gratitude is evident in every story she tells and every home she helps build. Admittedly, sometimes she misses being a sergeant, traveling and defending her country. But with Ashley’s combat boots tucked away, contracts and blueprints in hand, she knows she’s right where God wants her to be and it’s the place she calls home.

“
The military
shaped me
the most.”

mustard seed”, described in Ashley’s favorite bible verse, Matthew 17:20.

You see, Ashley prays before making any decision in her life...she always has. Prayer is her compass. It has proven to lead her paths and she intentionally listens to what God is telling her, in many ways that some may not even notice. She shared an example of one of those ways when she registered her business, Antonia Custom Homes, with the city and they assigned a number. “What was the number” I wondered. Ashley smiled and said, “My mother passed away on November 8th. When I received my assigned number, the first 4 digits were 1-1-0-8.” Sure, some people may think it’s a coincidence.

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competition and a shared commitment to raising the standard of excellence in East Texas real estate.

The event was a reminder of what happens when collaboration meets purpose — ideas are shared, partnerships are formed, and agents walk away motivated to level up their businesses.

As the event came to a close, one thing was clear: the **East Texas Real Producers community** continues to grow stronger with every gathering, creating a space where top agents and trusted partners come together to **learn, connect, and thrive.**

On Thursday, September 18th, *East Texas Real Producers* hosted its first **Top Agent Forum** at the **Greater Tyler Association of REALTORS®**, bringing together top-producing agents and preferred partners for a morning of powerful networking, collaboration, and inspiration.

This exclusive, invitation-only event was designed to help agents finish 2025 strong in a challenging market. Guests enjoyed a catered lunch from **East Texas Home Inspections** while engaging with six of the region’s top real estate professionals who shared valuable insights drawn from years of experience and success.

Panelists **Mark Coleman, Trina Griffith, Jake Ashley, Dee Martin, Melanie Northcutt,** and **Ryan Majors** each led discussions on a variety of topics that resonate deeply with today’s agents — from mastering marketing and time management, to navigating niche markets such as luxury, new construction, and farm and ranch properties.

Publisher and moderator **Cherika Johnson** guided the conversation, weaving together practical advice, personal stories, and moments of encouragement that left attendees feeling inspired and empowered. The energy in the room reflected the very essence of the *Real Producers* community — connection over





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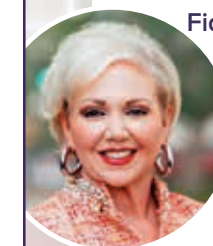
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