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COVER STORY

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MEET
Susan Salisbury

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“
What sets my business apart is my care
for my clients.” —*Susan Salisbury*

For **Susan Salisbury**, real estate has never been about transactions alone—it has always been about people. As a REALTOR® and Associate Broker with Blanchard and Calhoun Real Estate Co. in the Evans office, Susan has built her business around one guiding principle: treat every client like a treasured friend. That philosophy has earned her a loyal client base, an outstanding reputation, and recognition as one of the company’s top performers.

In 2025 alone, Susan closed 27 transactions and achieved \$11 million in sales volume. Her commitment to excellence earned her Blanchard and Calhoun’s prestigious Elite Award, the company’s highest honor,

as well as recognition as a Top Producer. Yet Susan’s path to real estate was anything but traditional.

Born in Los Angeles and partially raised in Sydney, Australia, Susan completed her original nursing education there before earning both a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in Nursing in the United States. Prior to entering real estate full-time, she enjoyed a successful career as a nurse and nursing educator, including serving on the faculty at Indiana University. Even while working in healthcare, Susan maintained a strong interest in real estate through rental property ownership and management. She managed her own investment properties as well as properties for others and eventually earned her broker’s license.





“Connect with people who share your interests.”

When Susan and her family relocated to Augusta 18 years ago after her husband was recruited by the Medical College of Georgia, an unexpected obstacle changed the direction of her career. Despite her advanced nursing degrees from U.S. universities, transferring her nursing credentials proved difficult because her original nursing education had been completed in Australia. Fortunately, another opportunity was waiting.

With an active real estate license already in hand, Susan transitioned from property management in 2001 to real estate sales in 2015. Encouraged by friend and fellow real estate professional Laura Dobbins, she joined Blanchard and Calhoun—a decision she says changed everything. “I LOVE Blanchard and Calhoun and cannot imagine working anywhere else,” Susan shares.

Today, the same compassion and service mindset that made her successful in healthcare define her approach to real estate. “What sets my business apart is my care for my clients,” she says. “I consider all of my clients friends, and my goal is to treat them as treasured friends.”

Susan describes her service as concierge-level, providing highly personalized support and guidance throughout every stage of the buying or selling process. She tries to anticipate concerns before they arise, communicates proactively, and works diligently to ensure smooth transactions that close on time.

Her greatest motivation is helping clients achieve their goals. “I love to make my clients’ goals into realities,” Susan says. “That gives me a great feeling of satisfaction. I love making dreams come true.” That’s a fitting philosophy for someone who proudly describes herself as a major Disney fan.

When asked how she defines success, Susan’s answer reflects the balanced perspective she has developed throughout her career and life experiences. “Success is a happy, healthy, wealthy, peaceful, and purposeful life.”

Outside of real estate, Susan remains deeply committed to serving her community. She has served on her HOA board for 16 years and has spent 17 years volunteering with the Newcomers Club, including serving on its board and chairing committees. She recently completed seven years on the board of the Jewish Community Center and Federation of Augusta, including serving as President. Over the years, she has also served on the boards of numerous organizations, including the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, school PTSOs, and other local community groups.



Family remains at the center of Susan’s life. She and her husband, Askiel Bruno, are proud parents of three accomplished sons, Ben, Michael, and Gregory Bruno. Their oldest son has lived and worked in Sydney for the past seven years. Their middle son, a graduate of the Medical College of Georgia, is currently completing an Emergency Medicine residency at the University of Virginia. Their youngest son has served six years as an active-duty Marine and is currently stationed in Okinawa, Japan.

When she’s not helping clients or serving her community, Susan enjoys traveling, reading, playing mahjong, and embracing her self-proclaimed status as a “Swiftie.” An avid reader, she belongs to four book clubs, including the Realtors of Greater Augusta Book Club. She and her sons also share dual U.S.-Australian citizenship, and she makes a point to visit family in Australia every year.

Looking ahead, Susan has no plans to slow down. “My goal is to keep working as long as I can,” she says. “That’s something I love about being a Realtor.”

For those entering—or re-entering—the real estate profession, Susan offers simple but powerful advice: build authentic relationships around your genuine interests. “Connect with people who share your interests,” she says. “If you love football, invite people to watch football. If you love coffee, let’s get a Starbucks. Take a genuine interest and run with it.” It’s advice Susan has lived throughout her career—a career built not just on sales and success, but on meaningful relationships, exceptional service, and helping people turn their dreams into reality. 🏡



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In the fast-paced world of real estate, agents are often the public face of the transaction. But behind every successful closing is someone managing deadlines, coordinating communication, solving problems, and keeping the entire process on track. For **Heather Navarrette**, owner of **Client's Choice**, that role is both a passion and a profession.

"I was first introduced to the real estate industry by my father, Keven Cleveland, in 2003, and that experience sparked a passion that has grown throughout my career." With more than a decade of experience supporting real estate professionals and the last five years dedicated specifically to

transaction coordination, Heather has become a trusted behind-the-scenes partner for agents navigating the complexities of today's market. "Once a contract is executed, my role shifts into full project-management mode," Heather explains. "I immediately review the contract for accuracy, deadlines, missing signatures, and compliance requirements."

From there, she creates a detailed transaction timeline and coordinates with agents, lenders, title companies, inspectors, and clients to ensure every milestone stays on schedule. Her days are filled with monitoring contingency deadlines, scheduling inspections and closings,

tracking outstanding documents, communicating updates, and troubleshooting issues before they escalate.

While much of her work happens behind the scenes, Heather understands the importance of the client experience throughout the process. "Even though I work behind the scenes, I know the transaction experience reflects directly on the agent I represent," she says.

Organization, communication, and proactive planning are the foundation of her success, especially when juggling multiple agents and competing deadlines. Heather relies heavily on

transaction management systems, deadline tracking, detailed checklists, and streamlined communication processes to keep transactions moving efficiently. "One of the biggest advantages of experience is learning how to anticipate bottlenecks before they happen," she says. "Staying proactive instead of reactive allows me to manage high-volume pipelines without sacrificing accuracy or service."

Heather's path into transaction coordination came from recognizing where her natural strengths truly aligned. While many people in real estate pursue sales, she discovered her passion was in operations, organization, and client support. "I genuinely enjoy creating structure in what can often feel like a very emotional and chaotic process," she explains. "Being a transaction coordinator allows me to play a critical role in the success of the transaction while supporting agents so they can focus on lead generation, negotiations, and client relationships."

One misconception Heather frequently encounters is the belief that transaction coordinators simply upload paperwork or serve as administrative assistants. In reality, she says, the role involves constant oversight of timelines, compliance, communication, risk reduction, and problem-solving. "A strong TC doesn't just process paperwork," Heather says. "We help protect the deal, the client experience, and ultimately the agent's reputation."

That level of responsibility becomes especially important when transactions become complicated — something Heather has seen firsthand. One memorable transaction involved a client who was simultaneously

selling her current home while purchasing another. Financing challenges, HOA requirements, moving logistics, contract amendments, and difficult negotiations created what Heather describes as an endless stream of obstacles.

"My experience and long-standing relationships with trusted industry partners were critical in keeping everything on track," she says. "By anticipating issues, managing expectations, and keeping everyone focused on the end goal, we successfully navigated a very complex

situation." In the end, both transactions closed successfully, and all parties walked away happy — a testament to the value of persistence, communication, and teamwork.

Heather also believes one of the most overlooked aspects of her role is emotional management. Buying and selling homes often comes with stress, uncertainty, and high emotions, and transaction coordinators frequently serve as the calm voice helping everyone move forward productively. "I try to bring consistency, calmness,

“
Sometimes clients simply need
someone who can explain the process
in a calm and organized way.”





Presley, the "unofficial team mascot"

and reassurance into every interaction," she says. "Sometimes clients simply need someone who can explain the process in a calm and organized way."

As technology continues to transform the industry, Heather has embraced digital signatures, remote closings, and automation tools that help improve efficiency. However, she believes technology can never fully replace the human side of transaction coordination. "Automation can help manage tasks, but it cannot replace judgment, emotional intelligence, or relationship management," she explains. "Real estate transactions rarely go exactly according to plan, and when issues arise, people still want guidance from someone they trust."

Originally born in Austin, Texas, Heather grew up in an Army family and lived throughout different parts of the country before eventually planting roots in the Augusta area. After marrying her husband, Sonny, in 2007 and following his retirement from the Army after 20 years of service, the couple chose Evans as their permanent home, where



“Real estate transactions rarely go exactly according to plan, and when issues arise, people still want guidance from someone they trust.”

they are now raising their two children, Natalie and Caleb.

Outside of work, Heather enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, and researching her family history through genealogy — a passion that reflects her appreciation for connection, history, and storytelling.

Looking ahead, Heather plans to continue growing professionally while expanding her knowledge of the real estate industry and providing exceptional service to the agents and clients she supports. Personally, she hopes to continue traveling, exploring historic sites, and uncovering more about her family's roots.

At the heart of it all is a deep commitment to helping others navigate one of life's biggest milestones with confidence



Natalie, Heather, Sonny & Caleb Navarrette

and peace of mind. And while transaction coordinators may not always stand at the closing table, professionals like Heather Navarrette prove they are often the steady force ensuring everything gets there successfully. ▀

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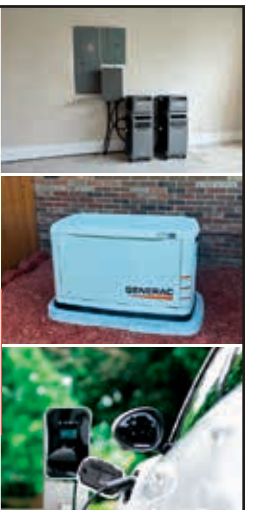
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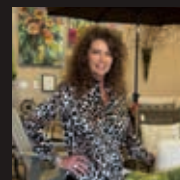
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Frank Mears:

The Teacher Behind Thousands of Real Estate Success Stories

When FRANK MEARS stands in front of a classroom, he's not simply teaching real estate. He's sharing nearly five decades of experience, leadership, and industry wisdom that have helped shape the careers of thousands of agents across Georgia, South Carolina, and beyond.

Photography
by Talen Rabun,
TMRO Pictures

For many agents throughout the Southeast, Frank was one of the first voices they heard when beginning their real estate journey. For others, he became a mentor, coach, and trusted source of guidance throughout their careers. While countless agents have built successful businesses under his instruction, Frank is quick to redirect the credit where he believes it belongs. “I may have taught them what to do,” he says, “but they were the ones who put that knowledge into practice and built their success.”

From the Stage to the Classroom

Long before real estate became his life's work, Frank was already developing the skills that would later make him one of the industry's most respected educators. As a teenager, he worked in the entertainment business, booking acts and performing in bands. In his early twenties, he transitioned into life and health insurance sales before serving his country in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War in 1968 and 1969. Upon returning home, Frank attended Augusta College on the GI Bill, majoring in business while continuing to perform music on weekends. It was during that time that his interest in sales—and ultimately real estate—began to take shape.

Frank's half-brother, Charles, owned a small brokerage called Mears Realty, and a close friend working in real estate encouraged him to pursue a license. In December 1977, Frank passed the Georgia real estate exam and joined Channel Realty in Augusta, beginning a career that would ultimately impact thousands of professionals nationwide.



Building a Career Through Leadership

Frank quickly established himself as more than just a successful agent. After earning his broker's license in 1984, he opened and managed the Columbia County office for Crowell and Company Real Estate, recruiting and training both new and experienced agents. His leadership abilities soon created opportunities far beyond the Augusta market.

In 1987, Frank relocated to Irvine, California, where he managed an office for Tarbell Realty, then the fourth-largest independent real estate company in the United States with more than 4,000 agents throughout Southern California. He later served as broker-manager for Plantation Realty at Fairfield Plantation near Atlanta. No matter where he went, one thing remained consistent: his passion for helping agents succeed.



1994,
First Sales
Person Pre-
license Class

defining professional moment came when he was recruited to teach for Floyd Wickman Courses, one of the most respected training organizations in the country. That experience revealed what would become his true calling. “It sparked my passion for teaching,” Frank recalls.

When longtime Augusta instructor Charlie Bird began preparing for retirement, he approached Frank about continuing his work. Frank obtained his instructor's license in February 1992, and what began as an opportunity soon became a lifelong mission. More than three decades later, he remains one of the most influential real estate educators in the region.



Frank with his Grandchildren

Discovering His True Calling

While recruiting, coaching, and managing agents had always been part of his career, Frank's

Turning Complex Concepts Into Real Understanding

One reason students connect so strongly with Frank is his ability to make difficult subjects accessible. Rather than relying solely on textbook definitions, he uses practical, real-world examples that students can immediately understand and remember. Take adverse possession, for example. Many students have never heard the legal term, but almost everyone understands the phrase “squatters' rights.” By connecting the two concepts and illustrating them through local examples, Frank transforms intimidating legal language into something meaningful and memorable.

His teaching philosophy is simple: education should inform, engage, and motivate. “The most important trait of an instructor is communication,” he explains. “You have to know the material thoroughly, explain it clearly, and keep students engaged.” His classes are intentionally structured in short, focused segments that maintain attention while delivering valuable information.



Frank with former student and star of HGTV, Egypt Sherrod

Preparing Agents for Reality

Frank often reminds students that passing the licensing exam is only the beginning.

“The textbook teaches you how to pass the exam,” he says. “The real world teaches you how to build a business.”

One of the most important lessons he shares with new agents is that success doesn’t simply arrive after receiving a license. Real estate requires initiative, persistence, and a willingness to create opportunities. He is also known for one of his favorite industry truths: “If you don’t list, you don’t last.” After decades in the business, Frank believes the agents who consistently build strong listing inventories are often the ones who achieve the highest levels of success.

A Voice Shaping the Industry

Frank’s impact extends well beyond the classroom. For more than 25 years, he has served on the Georgia Real Estate Commission’s Education



Frank's Family



Frank and his youngest daughter, Ashlyn, in Qatar



Frank with Kim Bragg, of Bragg & Associates, and graduate of Frank's first class

Advisory Committee, reviewing proposed law and rule changes before they are formally presented to the Commission. He was also selected as one of the instructors responsible for rewriting and updating the Real Estate Dynamics textbook used by real estate schools throughout Georgia.

His expertise has led him to speaking engagements for the National Association of REALTORS®, the National Association of Home Builders, numerous state real estate conferences, and international events in Canada and the Bahamas. Yet despite the

accolades, Frank remains focused on serving students and helping them navigate an ever-evolving industry.

Lifelong Learning in a Changing Industry

As technology and artificial intelligence continue reshaping real estate, Frank encourages agents to embrace change rather than fear it. He believes newer agents often adapt quickly because they have grown up with technology, while experienced professionals must remain committed to evolving their skills. The agents who continue learning, he says, will always have an advantage. That commitment to education is one reason Frank remains closely connected to top-producing agents both locally and across the country, ensuring his students receive relevant, current, real-world insights.

The Achievement That Matters Most

With 49 years in real estate, thousands of students trained, leadership positions across the country, and a reputation as one of the industry’s premier educators, Frank has accumulated plenty of professional accomplishments. Yet when asked about his greatest achievement, his answer has nothing to do with real estate. “My greatest achievement is raising three wonderful children—Leslie, Brandon, and Ashlyn.” All three are college graduates, successful in their careers, and have families of their own. Frank’s youngest daughter, Ashlyn, also has real estate flowing through her veins. Originally licensed in Georgia and South Carolina in 2009, she is currently a Senior Manager for Sales & Leasing at Nelson Park Properties in Doha, Qatar.

Frank often reflects on a favorite quote from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: “If you bungle raising your children, I don’t think whatever else you do well matters very much.” Then he smiles. “I’d like to think I did a pretty good job.”

Today, when he’s not teaching future real estate professionals, Frank enjoys spending time with his grandchildren, traveling, and observing life from the sidelines—something that may surprise those who know him best. After all, despite decades spent teaching, speaking, and leading from the front of the room, Frank considers himself an introvert at heart. Perhaps that’s part of what makes him such an effective teacher. He’s spent a lifetime listening, observing, learning, and then sharing those lessons with others. And for thousands of real estate professionals whose careers began in one of his classrooms, that influence continues long after the final lesson ends. ▀



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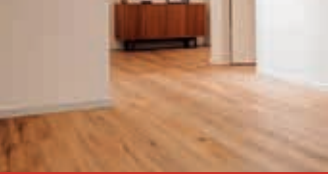
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