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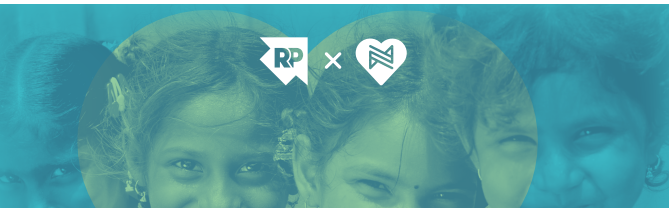
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THE BUSINESS OF RELATIONSHIPS

One of the things I love most about producing *Michiana Real Producers* is discovering the stories behind the success. While every issue highlights impressive achievements, production numbers, and professional milestones, there is almost always a deeper thread connecting the people we feature.

This month, that thread is relationships.

Our cover story features Dave Miller and Stacey Kidder, a husband-and-wife team whose success isn't built on being the same—it's built on embracing their differences. Dave's steady determination and negotiating expertise combined with Stacey's creativity and vision have created a partnership that serves clients at the highest level while allowing them to build a life they genuinely love. Their story is a reminder that sometimes our greatest strengths come from recognizing and appreciating what others bring to the table.

In our Rising Star feature, Jill Johnson Lebbin shares a similar philosophy. Despite being early in her real estate career, she has built a thriving business by focusing on people first. Through community involvement, authentic relationships, and a genuine desire to help others, Jill has demonstrated that trust and service remain some of the most powerful tools in our industry.

You'll find that same commitment to relationships in our Partner Spotlight with Nicole Read of Root Management. While property management often centers on metrics and performance, Nicole believes the real foundation of success is built on trust, communication, and transparency. Her approach highlights something many of us know to be true: real estate is ultimately a people business.

Whether you're helping a family find their next home, supporting an investor's long-term goals, managing properties, or mentoring the next generation of professionals, our work is about more than transactions. It's about the connections we create, the trust we earn, and the impact we leave on the communities we serve.

As summer winds down and the busy season continues, I encourage you to take a moment to appreciate the relationships that have helped shape your own journey. The clients who became friends. The mentors who shared their wisdom. The partners who helped make your business stronger. Those relationships are often the true measure of success.

Thank you for being part of the *Michiana Real Producers* community. We are honored to share your stories and celebrate the professionals who continue to raise the bar throughout our region.

See you next month.

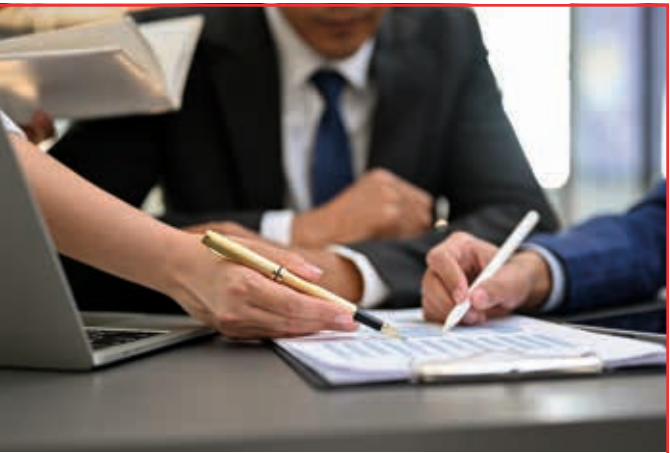


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Nicole Read

Rooted in Relationships: Nicole Read's Passion for Property Management

PHOTOS BY MEGAN WILLIAMSON PHOTOGRAPHY

In the world of real estate investment, success is often measured by occupancy rates, cash flow, and asset appreciation. But for Nicole Read, Business Development professional at Root Management, the true measure of success comes down to something much more personal: relationships.

"Property management is more than just numbers," Nicole says. "It's relationships, trust, and transparency."

That philosophy has guided her throughout a career that spans nearly two decades in the property management industry. Since entering the field in 2008, Nicole has built a reputation for helping property owners achieve their goals while fostering strong connections with clients, tenants, brokers, and the communities she serves.

Today, she brings that experience and passion to Root Management, a women-owned property management company based in South Bend that is

quickly becoming a trusted resource for investors throughout Michiana.

A Career Built on Growth

Nicole's journey into property management wasn't something she stumbled into—it was something she grew to love.

"I've been in property management since 2008," she shares. "I love this industry. It's fast-paced and constantly evolving, so it's never boring."

Over the years, she has worked with several respected local firms, gaining valuable experience from each opportunity. Those experiences shaped her understanding of the industry and helped develop the leadership approach she brings to Root Management today.

Her enthusiasm for the business remains as strong as ever because no two days are alike. Every property presents a different challenge, every owner has unique objectives, and every market cycle creates new opportunities to learn and adapt.

That mindset has made Nicole a valuable partner for investors seeking professional guidance and strategic management solutions.

More Than Property Management

Root Management offers a comprehensive suite of property management services throughout Michiana. From single-family homes and multi-family communities to student housing, short-term rentals, commercial properties, homeowners associations, and facilities management, the company oversees a diverse portfolio designed to meet the needs of investors at every stage.

With approximately 35 team members, including property managers,



maintenance professionals, and finance specialists, Root Management provides a full-service approach to protecting and maximizing property investments.

What makes the company particularly attractive to real estate professionals is its commitment to partnership.

"We want local brokers to know that we are here to support them and their investor clients," Nicole explains. "We do not sell real estate. Their clients remain their clients."

That commitment creates a unique opportunity for Realtors who work with investors. When an investor is ready to buy another property or sell an existing asset, Root Management refers them back to their Realtor partner.





Rather than competing for business, the company focuses on helping both investors and agents succeed over the long term.

Helping Investors Reach Their Goals

Ask Nicole what she finds most rewarding about her work, and her answer comes quickly.

“Stabilizing properties for our clients and helping them meet their goals,” she says.

Whether an investor is focused on leasing up a newly acquired property, maximizing returns during a short-term hold, or building long-term wealth through real estate ownership, Nicole and the Root Management team take the time to understand the owner’s vision.

“Every asset has a different purpose,” she explains. “We work hard to understand what our clients want and then create a strategy to help them achieve it.”

Equally important is the resident experience. Nicole believes successful property management benefits everyone involved—not just property owners.

“Making sure every tenant is in the right space at the right price point for their success is incredibly important,” she says.

By focusing on both owner and tenant satisfaction, Root Management creates stronger communities and healthier investments.

Embracing Change While Staying Grounded

Like many industries, property management has undergone significant changes during Nicole’s career. The most transformative shift has been technology.

“Technology has been the biggest driver of change in property management,” she says. “Processes that were once manual, like rent collection, maintenance requests, and owner reporting, are now handled through integrated software platforms and automation.”

These innovations have improved efficiency, communication, and transparency for both owners and residents.

Looking ahead, Nicole expects technology and artificial intelligence to continue reshaping the industry. However, she believes there is one thing technology can never replace.

“The core of our business will always be relationships, communication, and trust.”

It is that balance between innovation and human connection that continues to guide both Nicole and the Root Management team.

Community-Minded Leadership

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Nicole has consistently demonstrated a commitment to serving her community.

She has volunteered with St. Margaret’s House in South Bend, helping support women and children facing economic hardship. She has also worked with

Technology has been the biggest driver of change in *property management.*”



Junior Achievement, teaching middle school students about business principles and financial literacy.

Her dedication to community involvement even led her to run for public office in Elkhart.

“I believe strongly in being actively involved in the communities we serve and helping shape their future,” she says.

Her leadership and service have not gone unnoticed. Nicole was honored as an IREM Candidate of the Year for two consecutive years and was also featured in Vibrant Communities for her professional and community contributions.

Life Beyond the Office

While Nicole is passionate about her career, family remains at the center of her life.

She and her husband recently celebrated 25 years of marriage and share a love for hiking and outdoor adventure. Together, they have traveled extensively in search of the country’s most beautiful trails.

When she’s not exploring nature, Nicole enjoys reading, gardening, cooking, and spending quality time with her children. Whether she’s thrifting with her daughter, hosting family dinners, or enjoying conversation and music around a backyard fire with her son, she treasures opportunities to connect with the people she loves.

Those same values—connection, authenticity, and care—are evident in the way she approaches her professional life.

At Root Management, Nicole is proud to be part of a women-owned company that is committed to protecting investments, creating positive resident experiences, and strengthening the communities where people live, work, and play.



For investors, Realtors, and property owners throughout Michiana, that commitment is making a lasting impact—one relationship at a time. ➡

**CONTACT
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Root Management is headquartered in South Bend and provides professional property management services throughout Michiana, including single-family homes, multi-family communities, commercial properties, HOAs, student housing, short-term rentals, and facilities management.

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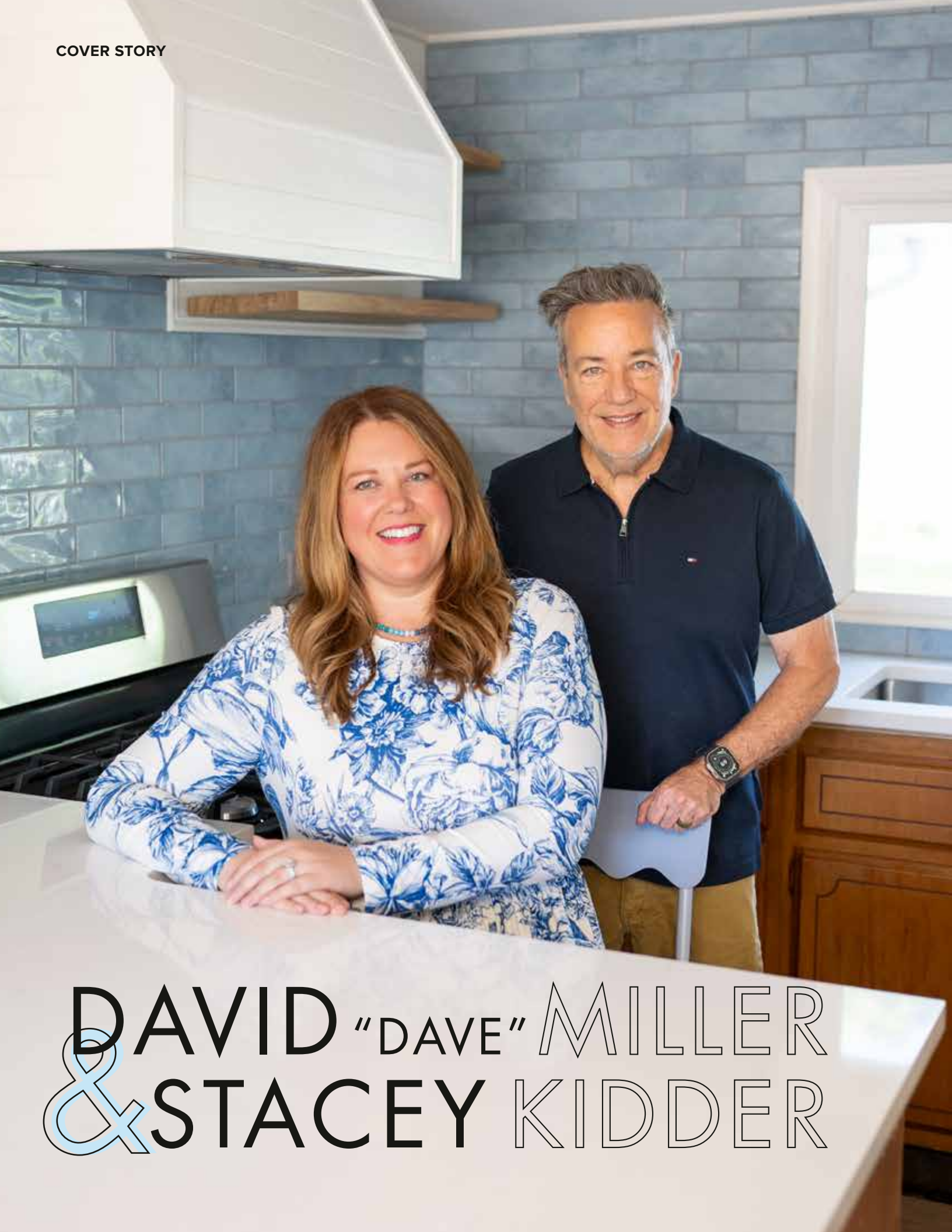


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DAVID "DAVE" MILLER & STACEY KIDDER

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BY JESS WELLAR • PHOTOS BY VELVET & STONE MEDIA

ome partnerships work because two people are remarkably similar. Dave Miller and Stacey Kidder would argue the opposite. After many years working side-by-side in real estate, they've discovered that their greatest strength comes from bringing entirely different talents to the table.

Today, the husband-and-wife team has built a business that blends Dave's relentless work ethic and nationally recognized production with Stacey's creativity and eye for design. Together, they closed \$14.1 million across 47 transactions last year while serving clients throughout Indiana, Michigan, and Florida. Yet ask either of them what has made the partnership successful, and the answer has less to do with numbers than it does with balance.

"We love working together as spouses. We compliment each other really well, which feels important," Stacey explains. "I also think we are opposite sides of the same coin."

Different Roads Converge

Long before they tied the knot, both Dave and Stacey found their way into real estate through very different circumstances.

Born and raised in Elkhart, Dave attended Purdue University to study horticulture before launching a series of entrepreneurial ventures. He operated a retail kiosk for half a dozen years, and later owned a nightclub and bar for several more, experiences that taught him valuable lessons. Eventually, however, he realized it was time for another change.

"The night club wasn't going anywhere so I got out of that business and I needed employment, but there weren't a lot of jobs out there that matched my personality," Dave recalls.

"One of my older sisters had gotten her real estate license, so I thought that sounded like something I could also do and went full-time in the business."

What began as a necessary career pivot evolved into an extraordinary career. More than 35 years later, Dave has been ranked the number one agent nationally within the Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices network twice and has finished in the top 10 more than 10 times among a field of over 60,000 agents. Remarkably, he achieved it all as a self-taught professional who simply refused to quit.

A Goshen native, Stacey entered the business shortly after high school when an unexpected opportunity arose while working as personal

assistant to former-Realtor-turned-politician Wes Culver.

"Wes had plenty of applications coming in since he ran a high-producing team," Stacey remembers. "But he offered to send me to real estate school so I got my license in 2005 and went all-in on his team."

The business immediately felt like a natural fit. Stacey loved the housing market, appreciated the flexibility, and quickly discovered she enjoyed helping people navigate important decisions. Along the way, Wes became an important mentor but another guiding influence would soon play an even bigger role in her life.

A Perfect Balance

Ironically, the partnership that would eventually define both



their personal and professional lives began because of foreclosures. During the housing crisis, both Dave and Stacey were working with bank-owned properties, a niche that relatively few agents specialized in at the time. Looking for guidance, Stacey reached out to Dave with a few questions. What started as a professional conversation quickly turned into something more.

“We ended up talking on the phone all night and soon started dating... Very romantic background story, I know!” Stacey laughs.

Nearly two decades later, their complementary strengths continue to shape the way they serve clients.

“Dave’s the sales person and the even keel workhorse who is licensed in Indiana and Michigan,” Stacey elaborates. “He is also the scariest negotiator I have ever witnessed! He’s not afraid to push back on people and remains calm and quiet, which can be very effective.”

Dave sees Stacey’s contributions as equally important. While he focuses on execution, she constantly looks for ways to maximize efficiency and bring fresh ideas to the table.

Never one to rest on her laurels, Stacey is licensed in Indiana while simultaneously running her own Florida brokerage, House of Miller Coastal. She’s also pursuing her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Interior Design online through Rocky Mountain College of Design in Colorado, and recently launched House of Miller Designs, her growing interior design business.

“Stacey is the creative one, very warm and funny, and much more eloquent than me,” Dave adds. “I just state the facts. I definitely married up!”



Together, their shared appreciation for architecture and properties helps the business feel less like work and more like something they genuinely enjoy. More importantly, they both value the relationships that have emerged along the way. Over the years, many clients have become close friends, something they both consider one of the most rewarding aspects of their profession.

The Little Things

For all of the accolades and years of experience, the feedback Dave and Stacey receive from clients often comes down to something surprisingly simple.

“Our clients are always impressed because Dave actually answers his phone every single time,” Stacey remarks. “That is the number one comment we get.”

“...Which isn’t great for Stacey!” Dave quips.

Still, that commitment to accessibility reflects a larger philosophy they both share. In an industry where relationships

matter, being present matters. Answering the call, responding to questions, and being available when clients need guidance are habits that have helped sustain their business.

When asked what advice they would offer aspiring agents, Stacey doesn’t hesitate.

“Answer your phone and find a mentor,” she suggests. “Real estate agents who’ve been in the business a long time have a lot of knowledge to give that you cannot learn in a classroom.”

Life By Design

Dave and Stacey have been together for 19 years now and married for a dozen. Beyond their work, the couple keep on their toes raising four-year-old twins Atlas and Aria.

“Our kids!” Stacey says when asked about her favorite way to spend time away from work. “Toddlers are time consuming, in the best way possible.”

These days, much of their free time is spent enjoying life on Simonton Lake or traveling to their second home on North Captiva Island, a remote barrier island off Florida’s Gulf Coast accessible only by ferry or

private plane. They also own several Airbnb properties, which provides another outlet for their shared interest in homes, design, and renovation.

In his precious spare time, Dave maintains an impressive collection of tropical plants, while Stacey channels her creativity into remodeling projects and studying for her interior design degree. She is also busy preparing to publish her first fiction novel, *Winterborn: The Letters*, a lifelong dream she’ll see realized in early 2027.

Looking ahead, both Realtors remain open to growing their team thoughtfully some day while continuing to expand their various ventures. But for now, they feel remarkably fortunate about where life has taken them thus far.

“In terms of our personal dreams, we feel like we are there, really,” Stacey concludes. “Flexible schedules that allow us to have slow mornings with our kids, evenings off to put them in bed every night, and we love to travel.”

“We are so lucky and just feel like we wouldn’t be living this lifestyle without our success in real estate.” 🌿



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BUILDING SUCCESS ONE RELATIONSHIP AT A TIME

PHOTOS BY VELVET &
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Some people discover their career path through careful planning. For Jill Johnson Lebbin, it started with a dollhouse.

Long before she ever considered becoming a real estate professional, Jill spent hours rearranging miniature furniture, creating new room designs, and imagining the stories of the families who lived within those tiny walls. Looking back now, it's easy to see the early signs of a future career.

“My interest in real estate started long before I ever considered it as a profession,” Jill says. “I loved thinking about how a home could be

used and how it impacted the people living there.”

Today, that childhood fascination has evolved into a thriving real estate career. Although she has been in the industry for less than five years, Jill has quickly established herself as a trusted advisor, community leader, and rising star within the Michiana real estate market.

For Jill, real estate is about far more than contracts and closings. It's about helping people navigate some of life's most significant transitions.

“What began as creative play evolved into a genuine love for helping people find a place to call home,” she says. “I find so much fulfillment in helping clients envision the possibilities a home can offer and achieve their real estate goals.”

Like many successful agents, Jill's early years in the business came with important lessons. One experience in particular left a lasting impact.

Her very first listing was a beautiful vacant lake property in Granger. The home attracted plenty of attention and generated steady showing activity, yet weeks passed without an offer. Feedback from prospective buyers consistently centered on one issue: the home's mix of flooring materials throughout the house.

As a new agent, Jill knew identifying the concern was only part of the challenge.

“I quickly learned that finding solutions is what creates results,” she recalls.

Seeking guidance, she turned to her brokerage's training team. The recommendation was simple but powerful: stage the home.

The transformation was immediate. Professional staging helped buyers focus on the property's strengths and imagine themselves living there. Shortly afterward, multiple offers followed.

“That experience taught me that success isn't always about changing the property itself,” Jill says. “Sometimes it's about helping buyers see its full potential.”

The lesson became a cornerstone of her approach to real estate—creative problem-solving, strategic marketing, and always looking for ways to serve her clients better.

While many agents focus heavily on lead generation tactics, Jill has built her business on something much more traditional: relationships.

Her philosophy is straightforward. Deliver



exceptional service, earn trust, and allow word-of-mouth referrals to grow naturally.

“I truly believe real estate is a people business first,” she says. “Everything else follows from that foundation.”

That mindset extends well beyond her real estate career. Having lived in the community nearly her entire life—apart

from her years attending Purdue University—Jill has developed deep roots throughout the region.

Community involvement has become one of the defining characteristics of her success.

Most recently, she completed a three-year term as President of the Penn-Harris-Madison Education Foundation and continues

JILL JOHNSON LEBBIN



serving on its board. The experience allowed her to collaborate with local leaders and support educational opportunities for students throughout the district.

She also volunteers regularly through her brokerage's partnership with Cultivate Food Rescue, helping support families across the region.

Faith plays an important role in Jill's life as well. As a member of St. Pius X Catholic Church, she values the relationships and sense of community that have enriched both her personal and professional life.

Her commitment to service doesn't stop at the Indiana state line. Licensed in Michigan as well, Jill has expanded her involvement through the Edwardsburg Chamber of Commerce, seeking opportunities to contribute to another growing community she serves.

Ultimately, her growing client base reflects the same values she brings to every aspect of her life: authenticity, consistency, and genuine care for others.

"People know when you're truly invested in your community," Jill says. "When they see that commitment, they naturally think of you when it's time to buy or sell."

Despite her rapid success, Jill remains committed to continuous growth. She regularly attends trainings, educational events, and brokerage workshops to stay informed about market trends, negotiation strategies, contracts, and emerging technologies.

"I genuinely enjoy learning," she says. "Real estate is constantly evolving, and continuing to grow professionally keeps me motivated."

That dedication has already earned significant recognition. Jill has been named Rookie of the Year and has achieved rankings within the top 11 percent and top 6 percent of agents throughout the Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices network—impressive accomplishments for someone still early in her career.

Yet when asked about her proudest moments, Jill doesn't point to awards or production numbers.

Instead, she reflects on the relationships she's built along the way.

"Real estate is never just about the house," she says. "It's about the people, their



goals, and the transitions they're experiencing."

Whether she's helping first-time buyers purchase their dream home, assisting growing families who need more space, or guiding sellers through emotional moves, Jill finds fulfillment in being a trusted advocate during important life moments.

The support she's received from mentors has also played a critical role in her success. She credits her sister-in-law, Chanda Johnson of Indianapolis, for providing valuable guidance and encouragement throughout her career.

Within her brokerage, Managing Broker Stephanie Weldy and Director of Training and Education Scott Klein have also been influential mentors, helping her navigate challenges and continue developing professionally.

"I feel very blessed to be surrounded by people who are willing to share their knowledge and support my growth," Jill says.

As for balance, Jill recognizes that real estate can be demanding. Fortunately, she has built a career that naturally aligns with her personal values and relationships.

“
WHEN THEY SEE
THAT COMMITMENT,
THEY NATURALLY
THINK OF YOU
WHEN IT'S TIME TO
BUY OR SELL.”



Many of her clients are also friends, neighbors, and community connections, creating an authentic overlap between work and life. Even so, she understands the importance of stepping back when needed and making time for family and personal priorities.

"It ebbs and flows," she says. "When things get especially busy, I make a conscious effort to reset and focus on what matters most."

With her dedication to service, passion for lifelong learning, and unwavering commitment to her community, it's clear that Jill Johnson Lebbin's success is only beginning. Her journey serves as a reminder that the strongest real estate careers aren't built solely on transactions—they're built on relationships, trust, and a genuine desire to help others find a place to call home. 🏡





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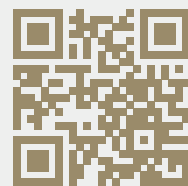


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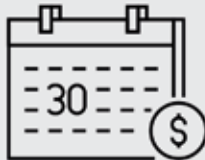
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