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BY LUCY REYNOLDS AND PHOTOS BY
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TYLER LETNER

Wallace Real Estate-Twin Lakes

WORKING HIS WAY HOME

For Tyler Letner, real estate brings a deep-seated pride in the place he calls home. A Lenoir City native through and through, he recently achieved a milestone that brings his career full circle: opening the new Wallace Real Estate Twin Lakes office in the heart of old downtown Lenoir City. For a man who literally bought the house right next door to where he grew up, “going home” is more than a sentiment—it’s a business model.

Although Tyler grew up with the influence of a close friend’s mother who was a prominent local agent, he didn’t catch the real estate bug himself until college. While studying business and finance, he took a real estate law elective that shifted his perspective. “I thought, *One of these days when I grow up, I want to have my own firm and do my own thing*,” he recalled. But after witnessing the effects of the 2008 market crash, he avoided the industry at first. Instead, he spent six and a half years at Denso as a business planning specialist.

It took the persistent nudging of a good friend—real estate agent Cheryl Headrick—to finally get him to take the leap. “Every single time I saw her or talked to her on the phone, she’d say, ‘When are you going to get into real estate? You’d be great at it,’” Tyler recalled. “And eventually, the corporate world made me mad enough that I decided to dip my toes in, which quickly turned into a career change. I left the corporate world for good and jumped into real estate head-first with no real plan or surety at all. But I’ve loved it ever since, and I’ve never looked back.”

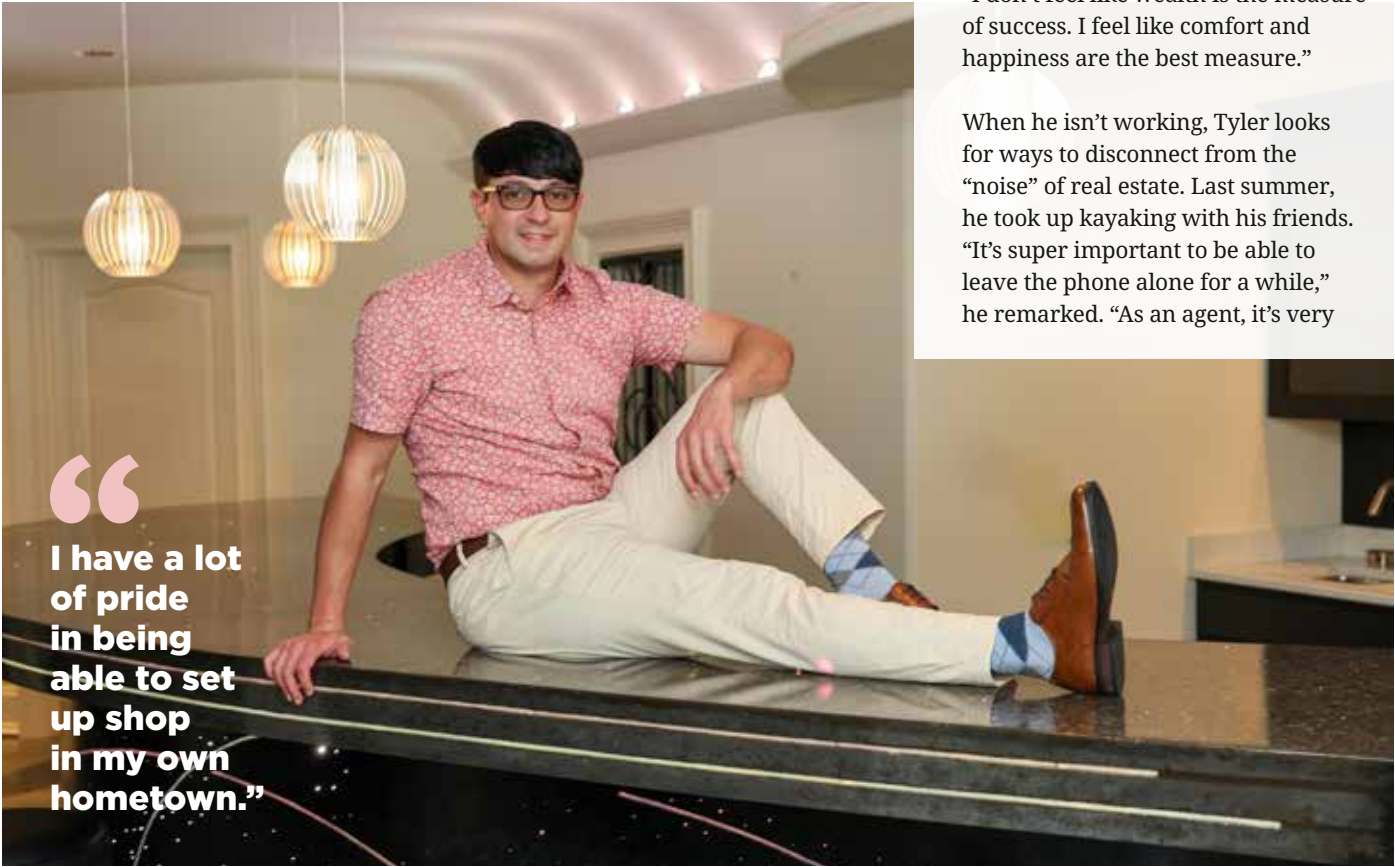
Tyler chose Wallace Real Estate from the beginning, and now, with seven years of experience as an agent and two as a broker—and multiple years as a top producer—he has earned the leadership’s confidence and trust. So, when George and Jim Wallace were looking to expand their footprint into Lenoir City, Tyler was the ideal choice to lead the charge. “They really needed someone they could trust to grow into

this area that maybe they weren’t as familiar with,” Tyler explained. “I grew up here. I’m established here. So for me, it was a no-brainer. I have a lot of pride in being able to set up shop in my own hometown.”

The new office is located in the historic Lacy Hotel building on A Street. “It was built in 1917, and it still has all of the old-world charm that I absolutely love,” Tyler described. “We’re right on the corner in the historic district, where Lenoir City started. Being able to lock in this little space has been such a labor of love. I was in here physically tearing out walls and rebuilding and painting and putting in cabinets, covered in plaster dust every day.”

Beyond the bricks and mortar, though, Tyler’s vision for success in Lenoir City is rooted in mentorship. After being lovingly and effectively mentored by Beth Bradley, he is eager to pay it forward. “For me, success is getting to the point where I can teach others and help them be successful,” he explained. “I don’t feel like wealth is the measure of success. I feel like comfort and happiness are the best measure.”

When he isn’t working, Tyler looks for ways to disconnect from the “noise” of real estate. Last summer, he took up kayaking with his friends. “It’s super important to be able to leave the phone alone for a while,” he remarked. “As an agent, it’s very



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stressful to leave your phone, but it’s great to just get out in nature and enjoy it.”

Also, Tyler’s extended family all live nearby, so there’s always someone to visit—in fact, when he moved back to Lenoir City three years ago, he bought the house right next door to his grandparents. “I went *all* the way home,” he joked. Although he’s a bachelor with no children, he does have animals: chickens, a snake, a dog, and two cats—“a little bitty zoo,” as he calls it.

With the grand opening of the Twin Lakes office, Tyler is excited to focus on growing the Wallace business in the town he loves. “A lot of people can’t wait to leave their little town, but this is home for me,” he said. “Lenoir City is growing, but it still has that small-town feel. People are friendly, and everybody knows everybody. I feel like that’s a bonus for us. I mean, just about everywhere you go, you run into somebody you know—and I love that.”

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ROOTED IN FAMILY & INTEGRITY

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When Darle and Jackie Canova established American Foundation and Waterproofing in Maryville back in 2007, they did so with a deep desire to help homeowners navigate the complex—and stressful—world of structural repairs. Originally from Florida, they were drawn to East Tennessee by the mountains, the lakes, and their extended family nearby. Since then, the Canovas have built a business that is 100% local and 100% committed to a simple, unwavering philosophy: *Do what's right, no matter what.*

Darle first began doing catastrophic sinkhole remediation and foundation repairs in 1992. He loved helping people and learning about structures—and now, 34 years later, his passion

for the industry has only grown. Today, he continues to work alongside engineers on homes with extreme settlement or geotechnical issues.

With the Canovas, the goal isn't a hard sell; instead, it's about providing accurate information so each customer can make the best decision for their home. "We focus on quality work and on being ethical and responsible," Darle explained. "It's not just about making money; it's about helping people and supporting them."

With Darle out in the field, Jackie handles the books and operations in the office (and she jokes that keeping up with Darle is a job in itself)—and the next generation of the family is now taking on more responsibility with the company

as well. Darle and Jackie's son, Hunter, has been part of the business for seven years now, starting at the very bottom when he was 16. "First he worked in the shop, sweeping floors and arranging materials," Darle recounted. "Then he joined a crew and worked up to crew foreman. He's 23 now, and he recently became a crew supervisor."

Despite being the owners' son, Hunter has insisted on earning his place. "We've been told he's the hardest worker out there," Jackie noted. "He wants it earned, not just given to him. A lot of newer crew members don't even know he's our son." From Darle's perspective, Hunter's most defining characteristic is how much he cares—not only about the quality of the

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L to R: Larkin, Kylie, Bella the dog, Jackie, Darle, Madison, and Hunter



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”

jobs he supervises but also about the guys on his crew.

The Canovas’ daughter, Kylie, is also bringing her high-level expertise to the family. A graduate of Maryville College and the University of Tennessee, she is a structural engineer with a minor in geotechnical engineering—the exact science behind what American Foundation and Waterproofing does every day. She currently works for Bechtel, designing steel for multi-story commercial buildings, and she also helps the family business with marketing and social media (as does Hunter’s girlfriend, Madison, a recent college graduate who works at Denso).

Like her father, Kylie isn’t one to sit still behind a desk. “She wants to work and do her job,” Darle said. “She wants to be out

in the field looking at stuff and getting her hands dirty.” Kylie may eventually work side by side with her parents, or even open a separate engineering firm that supports their work and serves other clients as well.

Also part of the family business is Kylie’s husband, Larkin, who has spent the last five years working his way up to crew leader. Together, Larkin and Hunter are learning all the ins and outs of the company, from production to sales and management. “They’re both maturing and doing very well,” Darle said. “They’re continuing to learn and taking a lot on their shoulders. We’re really proud of them and very much looking forward to what they can bring to the entire team.”

With around 45 staff members and eight to nine crews running

full-time, American Foundation and Waterproofing has grown significantly over the years. Darle credits much of their success to a dedicated staff that includes General Manager Scott Frazier, Sales Manager Scott Flanary, and Production Manager Addison Taylor.

At the end of the day, Darle and Jackie define success as delivering quality, ethical work to their customers and seeing their employees grow into great people. As they look to the future, they’re excited to see how the next generation will help to grow the business. “Jackie and I have always taught our children that you do what’s right, no matter how hard it gets,” Darle emphasized, “and doing what’s right for our customers is our biggest priority. That’s what we will always do.”

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JENNIFER SCATES

Jennifer Scates is a self-described “nerd” who doesn’t believe in doing anything halfway. A Knoxville native, she earned her bachelor’s at Carson-Newman and later an MBA—achieving both degrees with nearly a 4.0 GPA. “I just love to learn,” she explained. “That’s one thing that drives me in real estate, because I’m always learning in our industry.”

After a brief stint as a flight attendant in her early 20s and then nearly 12 years in business banking at Bank of America, Jennifer began to discover her real estate calling through her experiences in buying, renovating, and reselling houses. “I always say I was flipping houses before it was cool,” she joked. “The very first one was an old house on an acre of land for \$19,000—and I bought it on my credit card. It was crazy!”

Drawing on the design eye she developed during her high school and college years working in her mother and aunt’s interior design store, she did more and more flips—at one point cranking out 20 houses in a single year. Obviously, that’s when she realized she should get her own real estate license! “I was unhappy in my job at

the bank,” she recalled, “so I jumped into real estate with both feet and off I went.”

Now, with nearly 17 years of professional real estate experience under her belt, she is a broker with the Jennifer Scates Group at Wallace Real Estate. Beyond her work, however, her life truly revolves around her two daughters, ages 16 and 8. “They’re my world,” she emphasized. “My youngest is a comedian—she’s hilarious; I never know what she’s gonna say—and she never meets a stranger. My oldest is kind of like me. She’s independent and very studious. She’s a 4.0 student doing dual enrollment. They both amaze me every day, and I’m a very proud mama.”

As a single mother, she’s quite candid about the realities of managing both a family and a career. “There is no balance,” she admitted. “You just have to set boundaries. With work, I have a lot of systems in place, and I have a lot of support. I think what you do has to be intentional, but it’s never going to be equal. There’s just too much. But my kids come first, always.” Whether it’s serving as room mom for her younger daughter’s school parties or helping her older daughter navigate dual enrollment, she isn’t afraid to tell clients when she has

to put a hard stop in place to be there for her girls.

In 2020, Jennifer’s faith and grit were put to the ultimate test when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. “I actually had four different types of breast cancer, which is uncommon,” she described. “But my mom says if I’m going to do anything, I do it big!”

While some may have slowed down or even stopped after such a diagnosis, Jennifer forged ahead. She never stopped working. In fact, she had some of the biggest years of her career during that time—despite undergoing six surgeries and losing all of her hair. “I’m a single mom, and I have zero help,” she remarked. “What was I supposed to do? Sit in the corner and cry and feel sorry for myself?”

“Actually, my work was a good distraction,” she said. “It kept my mind off of what was happening to me. I mean, I had a double mastectomy. I lost pretty much everything that makes you a woman. That is hard...so hard. I think pouring myself into my job is what saved me.”

“I love my work, and I love my clients,” she added. “This year marks four



years since I transitioned over to Wallace, and that was the best decision I ever made. They are an amazing family company, and I can't say enough good things about them."

“
*I LOVE MY
WORK,
AND I
LOVE MY
CLIENTS.*
”

Outside of work, Jennifer stays grounded through her faith and her close-knit family. "I have two older brothers nearby, and I'm very close to my mom and dad," she said. "My girls and I go to church with my mom every Sunday. We like to travel when we can, but mostly we just love to be at home watching movies or playing games. We're an Uno family—my youngest is the Uno queen; she just beats the stuffing out of us."

For Jennifer, success isn't about the next closing; it's about the peace of being with her girls after a long, busy day. "I run all day, every day," she said, "so my girls and I just want to be at home, sitting on our sofa, eating popcorn, and watching a movie. That's it. It's great to just 'be' and enjoy being together."

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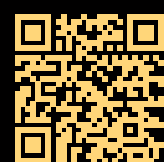
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