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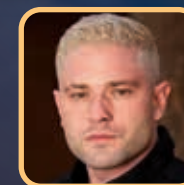
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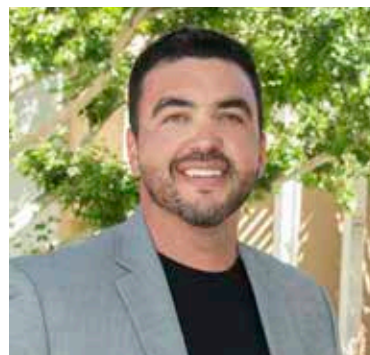


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We caught up with **Ben Schroeder**, owner of Benco Electric, to learn his personal story.

Every business has an origin story—what’s yours, and what made you take the plunge?

My story really started long before Benco Electric LLC officially existed. I grew up around construction and hands-on work, and I always appreciated the satisfaction that comes from building something real and useful. I got into the electrical trade because it challenged me mentally while also allowing me to work with my hands every day. Over time, I realized I wanted to create a company that operated differently—one that focused on quality workmanship, honest communication, and long-term relationships instead of just chasing the next job. Taking the plunge into business ownership was definitely intimidating, but I believed Albuquerque needed an electrical contractor that clients could genuinely trust. I knew if I stayed consistent, treated people fairly, and delivered quality work, the business would grow the right way.

What do you bring to the table that no one else can, and why do clients love it?

One thing that sets us apart is our responsiveness and attention to detail. In construction, communication can make or break a project. Clients appreciate that we answer calls, explain things clearly, and stay proactive throughout the job. We also bring a practical mindset to problem-solving. Electrical systems can get complicated quickly, especially in commercial and industrial environments, and I enjoy finding efficient solutions that save clients time and money without sacrificing safety or code compliance.

I think clients also appreciate that we genuinely care about the finished product. We’re not interested in cutting corners or rushing through work.

We want installations to look clean, function properly, and hold up over the long term. That level of pride is shown in the final result.

Have you had an “aha!” moment that changed the game for your business?

One major realization was understanding that systems and organization are just as important as technical skills. Early on, I thought success was simply about working harder and putting in longer hours. While hard work matters, growth really happened when we improved our processes, communication, scheduling, estimating, and documentation.

Another big moment was realizing the value of educating clients. Many homeowners and business owners don’t fully understand the electrical process, permits, utility coordination, or code requirements. Once we focused more on communication and education, projects ran more smoothly, and clients felt more confident throughout the process.

Every business hits bumps in the road. What’s been your biggest challenge, and how’d you tackle it?

One of the biggest challenges has been balancing growth with maintaining quality. As demand increases, it can be tempting to expand too quickly. But scaling a company while keeping the same level of workmanship and customer service requires careful hiring, training, and leadership.

We tackled that challenge by focusing on building a strong team culture. We look for people who take pride in their work and want to continue learning. Technical skills can be taught, but attitude and work ethic are huge. Staying organized and improving our internal systems has also helped us manage growth without losing what made the company successful in the first place.

**BENCO
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BY ELIZABETH MCCABE
PHOTOS BY KATE RODRIGUEZ



“
A lot of people want immediate success, but strong businesses are built over time.”



How do your values show up in your day-to-day work and client relationships?

Integrity is probably the biggest one. We try to be straightforward with clients about timelines, pricing, and expectations. If something changes on a project, we communicate it early rather than surprise people later.

Safety is another major value for us. Electrical work has serious risks, so we never take shortcuts when it comes to code compliance or safe installation practices. Beyond that, respect matters a lot—to clients, employees, other trades, and inspectors. Construction projects work best when everyone operates professionally and collaboratively.

If you could whisper one piece of advice to someone starting out—or even to your younger self—what would it be?

I'd say: focus on consistency and patience. A lot of people want immediate success, but strong businesses are built over time. Keep learning, stay humble, and don't compromise your integrity for short-term gains.

I'd also remind my younger self not to be afraid of taking calculated risks. Growth usually happens outside your comfort zone. If you're willing to work hard, adapt, and stay committed to doing things the right way, opportunities will come. ▀

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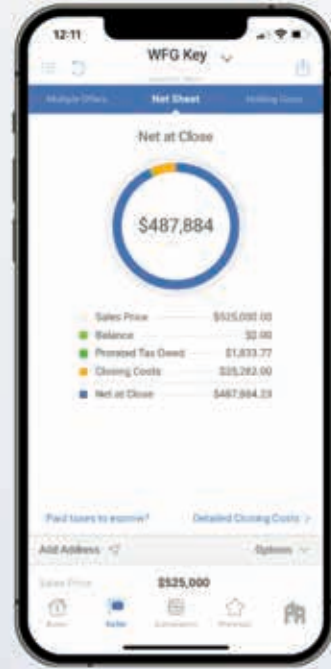
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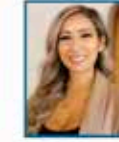
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BY ELIZABETH MCCABE
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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS of Real Estate and Counting!

“There’s not enough duct tape in the world to secure me to an office desk,” jokes Lynn Porter. Instead of being confined to a cubicle, Lynn ventured into real estate in 2001.

“Every day is a new experience,” she raves. “It’s not for the faint of heart,” she laughs. Prior to real estate, Lynn worked in the carpet industry for years. “I was a commissioned salesperson in retail flooring for 10 years. That’s when I realized it was more profitable to work on commissions than on an hourly wage.”

Ironically, a REALTOR® by the name of Anita Carr wanted Lynn to measure for flooring at one of her listings. “Right then she started talking me into real estate,” Lynn laughs. “A couple of years later when my carpet company was dissolving,

Anita said, ‘Now will you go to real estate school?’” Lynn said YES!

“I kept my day job but as soon as I passed the test, I started at Pargin Realty. It wasn’t a walk in the park, however. The journey has been exciting, grueling at times, but joyful, and rewarding.”

“I could not have chosen a more gratifying career, not just because of the income, but because of the relationships I have built along the way.” Lynn has made friends with her clients, built relationships with vendors, and made connections with countless individuals.

With her clients, she has become the “family REALTOR®.” When her clients’ children want to buy a home, they call her.

When those children have babies of their own, they call Lynn. “Being the go-to REALTOR® for so many families is so fulfilling.”

Built to Last

Since Lynn began her real estate career, she has weathered market volatility, battled the Great Recession, and more. She admits, “Market changes have been challenging. I survived the crash of ’07, COVID, and interest rate challenges. I have buckled down and worked harder to overcome those challenges, in most cases with great success.”

She never gives up, even when it’s tough. That’s why 2008 was “one of the best years in real estate in seven years.” During COVID, it was a record year with her company, ERA Summit. Lynn surpassed her own

production record and had \$10 million in sales.

How does she do it? “It’s my work ethic and drive,” she points out. “I don’t do anything halfway because I love what I’m doing.” Each morning, she puts her feet on the floor and keeps going. “The business isn’t going to fall through the living room ceiling,” she laughs.

Family + Friends + Fun

When not working, it’s all about family time. She is married to her husband, Kurt. “He’s fairly new to New Mexico,” she says. That’s why they like to take small day trips together. “It’s our hobby to hop in the car, pick a place in New Mexico, and go have a picnic.” This past June 10th, they celebrated their third wedding anniversary at Carlsbad Caverns.



I DON'T DO ANYTHING HALFWAY
because I love what I'm doing.

“We met online, which is something that I never thought I would do. We knew instantly that we were the ones for each other,” she says. They began dating in 2019, started talking about marriage shortly thereafter, but were sidelined due to COVID. “We couldn’t do a big party with our friends and family, so we waited until after COVID to get married.” The wedding was worth waiting for, especially since it was a beautiful backyard wedding at their first home together.

Lynn also has a daughter named Marie, who is studying to be a court reporter while working full-time at Whole Foods. “We are very close,” she says. Fortunately, Marie lives in town and they enjoy getting together frequently.

To relax, Lynn loves cooking. “It’s my escape to engage in something other than numbers and real estate details,” she laughs.

Another fun fact? “I love to garden, but vegetable gardening is not my forte.” She prefers Southwest

plants instead, and loves designing landscapes. “I have landscaped the last several homes that I’ve owned. I like to design a yard where various plants are blooming at different times of the year to create lots of texture and life.”

Lynn loves New Mexico, especially Albuquerque. “I’m quite fond of our mountains,” she says. “Watching the mountains turn pink gives me so much joy. I was a child when my family moved here and I had a school project where we had to draw the mountains and figure out what ‘sandia’ meant. That has always struck a special place in my heart.”

Final Thoughts

After twenty-five years in real estate, Lynn still gets excited about helping people find a place to call home. She loves the relationships, the challenges, and the feeling that every day brings something new. She’s in it to win it. Her excitement for real estate has grown with time, making dreams come true for countless clients over the years. ❏



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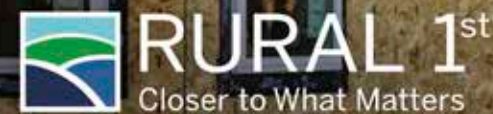
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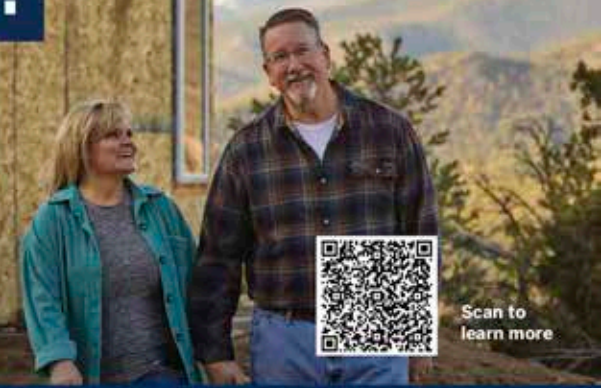
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2025

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Nicholas Peña

Found His Future
in Real Estate

BY ELIZABETH MCCABE
PHOTOS BY LIZ LOPEZ PHOTOGRAPHY

For many Americans, the pandemic was a time to pivot. Nicholas Peña was no exception.

“In 2020, my walking historical culinary tour business got completely shut down for 365 days,” he says. Not one to be discouraged, Nicholas used the time to reinvent himself. “I’ve always been resourceful in using my time wisely,” he points out.

“I had always been interested in real estate,” he adds thoughtfully. His grandparents had investment properties and he knew he was going to follow in their footsteps in due time in investments or getting his real estate license. With time on his hands, he decided to start real estate classes in late 2020.

“I had a three month program with Bill McCoy, an amazing REALTOR® in Albuquerque,” he raves. He earned his license in April 2021, jumped on a team with Keller Williams, and had his first house sold that same week.

“Then I started working with Marcy and Steve Blunier, a married couple with 30 years of production, who mentored me. I didn’t know how important mentorship in real estate was,” he admits. “I was grateful to work for them and learn from them.”

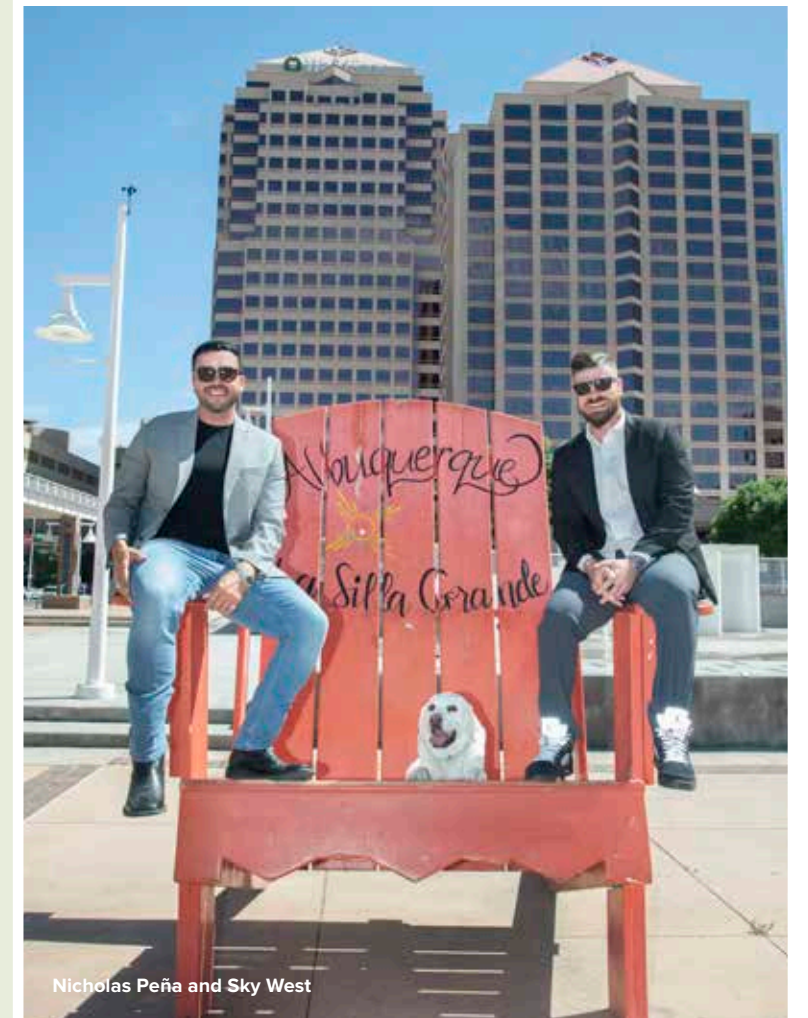
Nicholas immediately approached real estate as a business. He says, “I interviewed with seven different brokerages and twelve to thirteen team leaders.” He wanted a team for mentorship, education, and potential lead sources.

The first year, he did around four million in production, some of which was from Santa Fe. When the Bluniers retired after three years, Nicholas joined another team before preparing to fly solo and start a team, which he did in February last year. That’s when he and his team were ranked number two in their office, which was their first year in business. “That was pretty cool,” he says.

Secrets to Success

When it comes to skyrocketing in real estate, Nicholas can trace his ascent to two things: communication and service.

“I came from a service-based industry,” he comments. His company, Food Tour New Mexico, started in early 2011, bringing people together for walking historical culinary tours in Santa Fe, Knob Hill, and downtown Albuquerque. Ranked number eight in “Things to Do”



Nicholas Peña and Sky West

by *USA Today*, tourists and locals alike got to eat all sorts of delicious dishes to please their palates. Nicholas also excels in treating real estate as a full-time business.

“I focus on quality service, communication, understanding, and patience. I know my craft, go above and beyond, and impress that to all the people I work with,” he says. He is also a man of consistency, commenting, “I see a lot of people get excited about a couple of deals under contract and then take their foot off the gas.”

Instead, Nicholas follows up with or nurtures leads and connects with his sphere of influence. “I stay in front of my sphere so I stay top of mind as their go-to REALTOR® without being pushy, flashy, or having a big ego,” he points out.

Active Interests

With a booming real estate business and working the administrative side for Food Tour New Mexico (which he jokes is “all the boring stuff”), Nicholas is asked how he does it all.

"I'm 43 and single," he laughs. In his free time, he likes going to the gym, cooking, being outdoors, and fly fishing. You can catch him in action at his cabin north of the mountains in Santa Fe. It's also where he has built tables, chairs, and other furnishings.

"I also love to travel," he adds. It's a great way to reset. "It's important to have boundaries relative to mental health," he says. Taking time to decompress and recharge is priceless. In the past months, he has visited Guadalajara, Tequila, and Mexico City, traveled to Kauai, and gone fly fishing near Cabo.

In his free time, he works on building his short-term and long-term investment portfolio as well as flips. He also has a heart to serve others, recently participating in Keller Williams' Red Day at the Albuquerque Children's Home.

"We helped a family move to a house that was finished," he says. Nicholas built furniture and organized everything, making a difference for the new homeowners.

What's Next?

Nicholas finds great satisfaction in real estate.

"I love being a REALTOR® and working with clients," he raves. "I love helping them get what they want. But I really enjoy the investment aspect of it as well."

Over the next decade, he wants to be more involved in investments, build up his team to five to seven brokers, and generate \$80-100 million a year in sales. Lofty goals? Maybe. But Nicholas always accomplishes what he puts his mind to. If his first few years in real estate are any indication, Nicholas is just getting started. ▀



"I know my craft, go above and beyond, and impress that to all the people I work with."



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Bricena

FROM RANCH
GIRL TO REAL
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Aragon

Roping. Rodeoing. Ranch-style living. That's how Bricena Aragon grew up. Since the age of two, she has lived in Valencia County. "That's where I still reside," she smiles. "I grew up in a farming community with lots of animals and horses."

BY ELIZABETH
MCCABE
PHOTOS BY
LIZ LOPEZ
PHOTOGRAPHY

To this day, she still does team roping. "I don't rope as much as my husband does," she laughs. "My youngest also ropes." Riding horses each day and rodeoing each weekend came naturally to her. That's also where she got her solid work ethic.

Today, Bricena has eight horses and several cattle. She loves the ranch life. "This is what I do," she says simply. Initially, she wanted to be a horse veterinarian. After she had children, she thought about going into medicine.

"I wanted to be a surgical nurse," she says. A long conversation with her husband redirected her path.

"Real estate has always intrigued me," she admits. "I followed the market and the trends." Once her two oldest children were in school, she planned on getting her real estate license and then going

to nursing school. "Go to real estate school," said her husband. "If that doesn't work, then go to nursing school."

Bricena took his advice and got her real estate license in 2002. "The rest is history," she says. She's been one of the top REALTORS® in her county ever since. "I got in with the right people and at the right time," she says. Specializing in new construction, vacant land, and development has been essential to her success.

Bricena has built her business on hard work, combined with honesty. "I have never been one to sugarcoat things," she says. People appreciate that.

"The best part of my job is to make people's dreams come true," she says. How? She custom builds their homes, even picks

the lot, develops the land and the floor plans. "I've been working with one builder for 24 years. We have built over 450 homes in this county." It's very rewarding.

Blessed and Finding Balance
"God has blessed me in so many ways in my career," she adds.

With all the new commercial development in the region, it has been a tremendous blessing. She established herself as a leader in the market, even owning her own real estate brokerage at Keller Williams, before transitioning to Real Broker in Los Lunas. At one point, she managed 25 agents with 14 working directly on her team.

"I've gotten a lot of pleasure training new REALTORS® who come in and watching them thrive," she says. "I like bringing in agents who are struggling and helping them find their niche."

Over the years, she has learned the importance of maintaining balance while continuing to grow a successful career. "I had to find a happy medium in family, work, and putting God first and foremost. That has been a huge part of my success."



Team Member Korriah Martinez and Bricena

A Proud Mother

“On Mother’s Day, I found out that I’m going to be a Grandma for the first time,” says Bricena with delight. She couldn’t be more excited. Her two oldest live out of state and she sees them often. “Traveling is going to happen more and more, which is fine with me.” Her 30-year-old son earned a doctorate in physical therapy and specializes in sports medicine. Her daughter, who resides in Jacksonville, Florida, is a cardiac assistant surgeon.

“My youngest helps my husband run his construction company,” shares Bricena. He also ropes

several times a week and each weekend. What’s more? He hails from Russia. “We adopted him in 2007 when he was 2. My mother used to tease me, ‘You have to go to Russia to find a cowboy?’ But I did,” she laughs.

When she isn’t working, Bricena and her husband enjoy spending time at their home in Ruidoso, a place where they can relax and recharge while enjoying the lifestyle they have worked so hard to build.

Must Love Dogs

In addition to her family, furry friends are near and dear to Bricena’s heart.

“GOD HAS *blessed* ME IN SO MANY WAYS IN MY CAREER.”

“I give back to the local animal shelter,” she adds. She saw a need – there was no place to introduce dogs to family members – and was determined to fix it. So Bricena, her husband, and her coworkers built a beautiful half-acre dog park. Now dogs can play fetch, meet potential pet parents, and run until their hearts are content.

Eventually, she hopes to establish a private rescue focused on helping dogs find loving homes.

Final Thoughts

Whether she’s helping a family build their dream home, mentoring a new REALTOR®, supporting local animal rescue efforts, or spending time with her children and soon-to-be grandchild, Bricena approaches life with the same values she learned growing up on the ranch: work hard, tell the truth, and take care of people.

That’s what guided her from rodeo arenas to development projects across Valencia County. And if you ask her, that’s a life worth building. ▼



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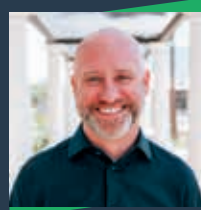
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