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JULY 2026

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Making A  
Difference:  
**KEN & VIKKI  
GRODNER**

Partner  
Spotlight:  
**VETERANS  
HEATING  
& AIR**

# Mary Martin Brown

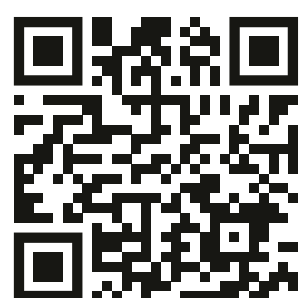
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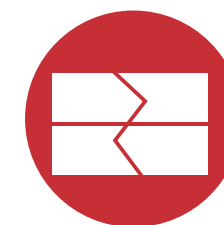
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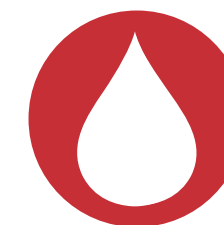
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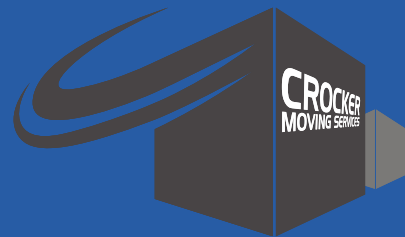
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## 2026

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18,946



TOTAL  
TRANSACTIONS



44

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THE MARKET



17

MEDIAN DAYS ON  
THE MARKET



AVERAGE  
SALES  
PRICE

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## Birmingham Real Producers Top 300 Agents



### CONGRATULATIONS ON MAKING THE LIST!

**C**ongratulations on making the *Birmingham Real Producers* 2026 Top 300 Agent list! The list is based on 2025 sales according to the MLS, and as part of this exclusive community of the top real estate agents in Birmingham, the top 300 agents will receive the magazine each month and be able to attend our exclusive events for agents and RP preferred partners in the city.

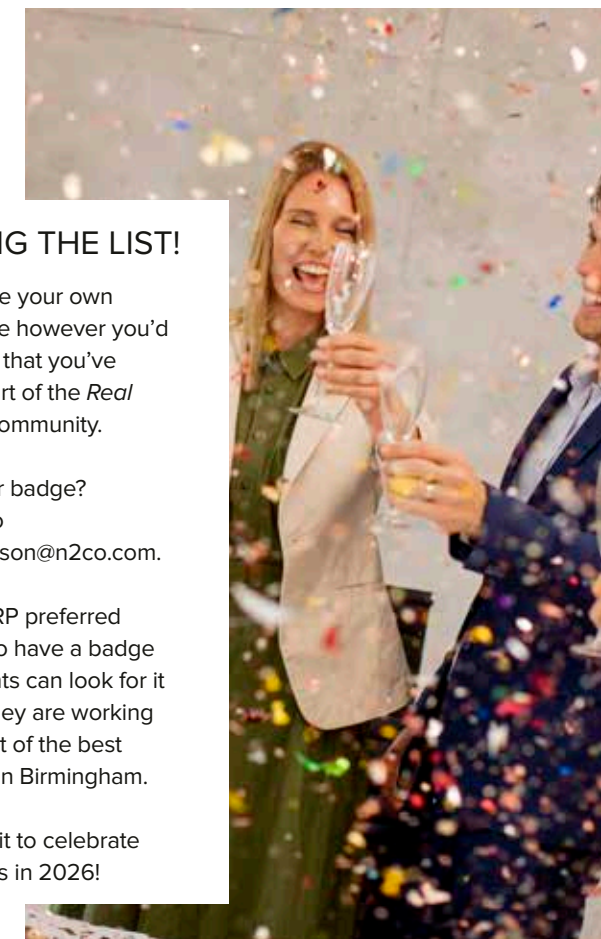
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We can't wait to celebrate your success in 2026!





# VETERANS

## HEATING & COOLING

### MORE THAN HEATING AND AIR

WRITTEN BY  
ELIZABETH  
MCCABE  
PHOTOS BY  
CARNAGGIO  
PHOTOGRAPHY

#### How Military Values Continue to Drive Veterans Heating & Cooling

Long before Brian Green was helping families stay cool during Alabama summers, he was helping transport cargo for the United States Air Force. He loaded aircraft, coordinated shipments, traveled throughout the Middle East during deployment, and participated in one of the military's most solemn responsibilities: dignified transfers for fallen service members returning home from war.

That taught him valuable life lessons: Attention to detail. Accountability. Service before self. Years later, those same values have become the foundation of Veterans Heating & Cooling, the company Brian founded in 2022 and has steadily grown into one of the area's trusted heating and cooling providers. Today, the company provides residential and commercial heating and cooling services, including repairs, preventative maintenance, equipment installation, duct cleaning, indoor air quality solutions, and emergency service.

"We're the right-size company," he says. "We're not so big that we have to charge exorbitant prices, and we're not so small that we can't get to customers quickly."

One thing that immediately sets the company apart is its team. Every full-time employee is a military veteran.

"That military attention to detail carries over into what we do every day," he explains. "We're not just looking for one thing wrong with a system. We're evaluating everything. We want to leave a customer's home better than we found it."

That commitment extends beyond technical expertise.

Brian believes understanding people is just as important as understanding equipment. Military service exposed him to individuals from countless backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Those interactions taught him the importance of compassion.

"You learn that everybody's situation is different," he says. "You learn how to treat people with respect and understanding."

The company's reputation has also grown within the real estate community. Brian's wife, Amber, is a real estate professional, giving him firsthand insight into the unique challenges buyers, sellers, and agents face during transactions. When evaluating

HVAC systems during a home sale, Brian focuses on practical solutions rather than unnecessary expenses.

"We present every option," he says. "If a system can be repaired for a fair price, we'll tell you that. If replacement is the better option, we'll explain why. We help buyers and sellers find common ground."

That straightforward approach has earned the trust of agents and homeowners alike.

Yet perhaps the most meaningful part of Brian's work happens quietly behind the scenes. Each year, Veterans Heating & Cooling provides free services to veterans in need and works with local organizations to help families facing difficult circumstances. During the winter months, Brian and his team often repair heating systems at no charge for individuals who otherwise couldn't afford the work.

When he's not working, Brian enjoys spending time outdoors with his family. Whether he's boating, racing cars, or enjoying Alabama's lakes and waterways, he appreciates every opportunity to be outside.



Family is everything to Brian. He and Amber returned to their hometown after military service to be closer to family, and their son, Brody, has even helped with the business during the summer.

As temperatures continue to rise, Brian offers one piece of advice homeowners should never ignore.

“Change your air filter,” he says with a laugh. “That’s the first question I ask almost everybody who calls.”

“  
**WE HELP  
BUYERS &  
SELLERS  
FIND COMMON  
GROUND.”**

Simple advice, perhaps. But then again, some of the most important lessons are. After all, whether he’s maintaining an HVAC system, serving a customer, supporting a fellow veteran, or helping a family stay comfortable during the hottest days of summer, Brian approaches every task the same way he learned in the Air Force: Pay attention to the details. Take care of people.

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# Ken & Vikki GRODNER

## *A Lifelong Dedication to Service and Community*

WRITTEN BY NICK INGRISANI • PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY KEN GRODNER

For this wife-and-husband team, the impulse to serve others is the force that drives their real estate business and shows up in everything they do.

Fresh out of the University of Alabama with a public relations degree, Vikki launched her career with the Birmingham Stallions (the first version), a spring football team. When the league folded, Vikki didn't look for the next job posting. She looked for the next problem worth solving.

At 25, with \$700 from the Stallions' booster club, she founded Camp Smile-A-Mile — a nonprofit camp for children with cancer that still serves more than 450 pediatric oncology patients and their families each year, more than three decades later. That same instinct for community-building followed her through 18 years of living everywhere from New York to Atlanta, where she worked as a marketing director for law firms and professional services organizations, learning how to help institutions communicate more meaningfully with the people they serve.

When she returned to Birmingham in 2007, Vikki brought those skills back to the city that shaped her. She went on to found Sisters Chaverim, a relationship-building organization connecting Birmingham's Jewish and Black professional communities. She coordinated a dignified

clothing relief effort called Dressing Up! Tuscaloosa after the 2011 EF4 tornado, distributing over 10,000 brand-new women's garments through a setup designed to feel like a high-end boutique rather than a disaster site.

She also organized an event she called a "Sandy Hook Heartwarmer," a Valentine's Day gathering for first responders, victims' families, and the full grammar school community in Newtown, Connecticut. Numerous victims' families chose to attend this special event over attending congressional hearings in Washington for the chance to reconnect with their community, two months after the tragic event. Vikki and Ken describe it as one of the most meaningful events of their lives.

"I'm a very curious person, so I like to really explore all the things that are of interest to me. I tell my husband, some days it's really hard to be in my head because I have so many ideas."

Today, Vikki has channeled that energy into a niche she identified before most agents saw it coming: college-town real estate. As host of The College Real Estate Coach podcast, she has built a platform educating parents, students, and investors on the opportunities around major universities — including why Tuscaloosa has been named one of the top college towns in the country for real estate investment. Her certified

interior design background gives her a rare dual perspective: She sees homes as both financial assets and spaces worth inhabiting beautifully.

If Vikki is the creative force, Ken Grodner is the anchor holding it steady. A former business and IT executive with decades of experience solving complex problems for some of the world's largest organizations, Ken brings a meticulous, data-driven approach to every transaction he touches. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from the University of Alabama and applies that financial rigor to real estate with the same seriousness he once applied it to corporate boardrooms.

As Membership Chair of Birmingham Sunrise Rotary, Ken has recruited more new members in the past two years than the club had seen in the previous fifteen combined. He also serves as Treasurer for Redemption Earned, a nonprofit law firm founded by former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb, to lend his financial expertise to advocacy for elderly and critically ill individuals in Alabama's prison system. He created a foundation in honor of his parents that gave rise to Generation XYZ — Extra Years of Zest — a senior adult programming initiative at Temple Beth El in Birmingham. And at the University of Alabama, he led an initiative called Quest for Excellence aimed at creating a safer social environment for students.





“It’s a privilege to not only help clients achieve their real estate goals, but to also make a broader impact in the communities we serve.”



His approach to giving back extends directly into his real estate practice. Rather than handing clients a cutting board at closing, Ken donates in the client’s name to a cause they choose. In recent months alone, those closing gifts have benefited more than a dozen organizations, from the Greater Birmingham Humane Society and the UAB Benevolent Fund to Stop Soldier Suicide and Alabama Possible.

“It’s a privilege to not only help clients achieve their real estate goals, but to also make a broader impact in the communities we serve.”



When *Birmingham Magazine* featured Vikki’s Tuscaloosa gameday home in 2019, it set off a chain of events that would reshape both her career and the short-term rental landscape in the city. Their REALTOR® had neglected to mention one inconvenient fact: short-term rentals weren’t permitted in Tuscaloosa at the time.

Rather than retreating, Vikki brought together a coalition of homeowners interested in offering short-term rentals under a movement she called The Tuscaloosa Hospitality Network, then led sustained engagement with the

Tuscaloosa City Council to help shape sensible guidelines for short-term rentals in the city. Guests from her gameday events began asking her to help them invest in similar properties. So she got her real estate license. And a City employee was so impressed by how she handled the process that he left his position to join her team.

One story of a couple they helped shines a light on Ken and Vikki’s ethos and approach. John came to them needing to sell their home and find a new home that met their needs.

On the sale side, Vikki brought her interior design eye to recommend paint colors and lighting adjustments to elevate the home’s appeal. The team connected the Martins with contractors to work through their repair list. Adam Tessler, who led Strategic Initiatives and Client Experience for Vikki and Ken, managed the sale of furniture on Facebook Marketplace. ReStyle Staging and Home Design was brought in to complete the transformation with curated furnishings and window treatments. The result of all that preparation: The Martins were under contract in three days, above list price, and closed in two weeks.

On the buy side, Ken ran a methodical search anchored in the Martins’ detailed criteria. They evaluated dozens of homes. Then, through the team’s network, they learned of a property about to come to market and secured it before it was ever publicly listed. This is just one example of the ways that Ken and Vikki go above and beyond for their clients.

Ultimately, Ken and Vikki arrived in real estate with decades of experience making communities, organizations, and lives better for the people around them. Real estate simply became the newest arena for their skills and dedication to shine. The Hospitality Network Group reflects that: a team built on service, grounded in analytical rigor, and shaped by the belief that showing up for people goes well beyond the closing table. 🏡





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FIVE QUESTIONS THAT COULD  
CHANGE HOW YOU SEE RETIREMENT

SUBMITTED BY RICHARD SELF, EDWARD JONES

Saving for retirement is important, but it's only part of the picture. If you're within five to 10 years of your target retirement date, it's time to start thinking about what you actually want your retirement to look like. After all, getting to retirement isn't the end goal — it's what you want to do once you're there that matters.

Start by asking yourself these five questions.

**1 / When do you want to retire?** The age at which you retire matters more than you may realize. Retiring early sounds appealing, but it means saving more and having less time to do it. It can also create gaps in health care coverage and income before key benefits kick in. For example, Social Security benefits can begin at 62, but at a reduced amount. Full benefits are available between ages 66 and 67, depending on birth year, and waiting until 70 means the maximum benefit. Medicare doesn't start until age 65, and penalty-free withdrawals from retirement accounts generally aren't allowed until age 59½.

For couples, timing gets even more complicated. Staggering retirement dates can sometimes maximize benefits; in other cases, retiring at the same time works better.

A financial advisor can help you sort through these decisions and find the approach that makes the most sense for your situation.

**2 / How do you want to spend your time in retirement?** Many new retirees are surprised to find that having unlimited free time feels disorienting rather than freeing. Thinking ahead about how to fill the days with meaningful activity — whether that's travel, volunteering, pursuing hobbies or spending more time with family — can make the transition smoother.

It helps to sketch out what a typical week, month or even first year might look like. If there are big gaps, it's worth thinking now about what might fill them in rewarding ways.

**3 / Where do you want to live as a retiree?** Some retirees stay put, while others downsize or relocate entirely. Either way, it's wise to consider whether a chosen location will work well as you get older, taking into account factors like proximity to family, access to health care, cost of living and climate.

**4 / What will your retirement lifestyle cost?** It's not uncommon for retirees to discover that their travel, entertainment or leisure expenses were higher than expected. The more active and involved you plan to be, the more you will likely need to budget.

**5 / Does your retirement involve giving back?** Retirement often brings both the time and motivation to be more generous. Whether the goal is helping family members, donating to charity or volunteering in the community, it's worth defining those goals and building them into an overall plan.

Now that your vision is taking shape, turn it into a plan. Work with your financial advisor to align your savings with the life you want — and revisit that plan as your priorities evolve so your retirement keeps pace with you.

*This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.  
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“  
If you carry  
yourself with  
*confidence  
& composure,*  
your clients will  
follow that.”

# Mary MARTIN BROWN

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH MCCABE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRENDON PINOLA PHOTOGRAPHY

## Skyrocketed in Real Estate

“Things have gone better than I ever imagined in real estate,” says Mary Martin Brown. That’s not something she expected to say when she got her license at the end of 2019.

At the time, she was 24 with a newborn at home, trying to figure out what work would look like in this next chapter of life. She knew one thing for sure: “I didn’t want to report to someone else.” With a background in sales and customer service, she already understood her strengths. She was good with people. She was motivated. And she thrived in environments where effort directly impacted income. Real estate made sense.

“The barrier to entry is lower than a lot of other fields,” she explains. “I needed something I could get into quickly without a degree or years of experience.”

So she did just that. She got licensed at the end of 2019. Her first client came in January 2020. And then everything took off.

“In my first year, I sold a little over 20 homes,” she says. “And it’s grown every single year since.”

What started as a way to contribute financially quickly turned into something much bigger. The business grew to the point where her husband, Mackenzie, eventually left his job to join her full-time. “It has exceeded our expectations in every single way,” she says. “I had no idea it would go like this.”

### Repeat and Referrals

Part of what makes Mary Martin’s business stand out is what she doesn’t do. No cold calling. No door knocking. No chasing leads. Everything comes from social media, referrals, repeat clients, and her sphere of influence.

It’s a strategy that works because it’s built on trust

and relationships. “I’ve lived in Birmingham my whole life,” she says. “I have deep roots here. Pair that with hard work and being a people person... it just comes together.”

That work ethic isn’t new, either. “I’ve been working since I was 15,” she says. “I’ve never not had a job. At times, I had two or three jobs.” That drive shows how she handles her clients, too, especially during high-stress moments.

“If you carry yourself with confidence and composure, your clients will follow that,” she explains. “There are no emergencies in real estate,” she adds. “If it’s a true emergency, you’ll have to call 911, not me.” That line keeps clients grounded and keeps deals moving to the closing table.



Authenticity Matters

Looking ahead, Mary Martin sees the industry continuing to shift, especially in marketing. “Everything is very social media and video driven,” she says. “Love it or

hate it, it’s a train you have to be willing to jump on.”

When she first started, she didn’t have a marketing budget, so she used what was free: social media. Seven



Mary Martin and her assistant, Madeline Ryczek

years later, she’s still using it. “People need to see your face and the most authentic version of you online,” she says. “You’re helping them through a major milestone in their life.”

And while technology continues to evolve, she’s clear about one thing. “There’s a human element to this business that you can’t replace,” she says. “People hire you for you.” That belief is something she shares often with newer agents, many of whom she’s mentored over the years.

A Happy Household

When not working, Mary Martin treasures time with



Mary Martin and her husband, Mackenzie Brown

“People need to see your face and the most authentic version of you online.”



her husband. They’ve been married for eight years, having met years ago at a restaurant called Real & Rosemary, where he helped open and develop the menu. She was working there at the time, juggling multiple jobs. A few months after meeting, they started dating. A year later, they were engaged.

Today, they have two kids, Lyla, 7, and Tucker, 5, who have grown up watching their parents build this business together. “They’ve never known a world without it,” she says. “It’s important for them to see us work.” They especially love seeing the progress on Mackenzie’s house flips, something that brings the business to life in a tangible way.

When they’re not working, the family makes the most of their flexibility. They’re big Disney fans, frequent travelers, and love spending time at the beach or the lake. “Real estate has given us the ability to step away when we need to,” she says.

To recharge, Mary Martin takes time for herself. “I have a personal trainer and take Pilates a few times a week,” she smiles. She also likes meeting with her friends for coffee and taking girls’ trips. There’s always something going on with family, work, and friends, but that’s exactly how she likes it.

She has built the life of her dreams and it started by taking a chance on real estate. She bet on herself and it paid off! ■



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