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Steve Bottom

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Rising Star
ARPITA SHAH

Partner Spotlight
BRYAN & JESSICA WAGNER
of JB Wagner Septic

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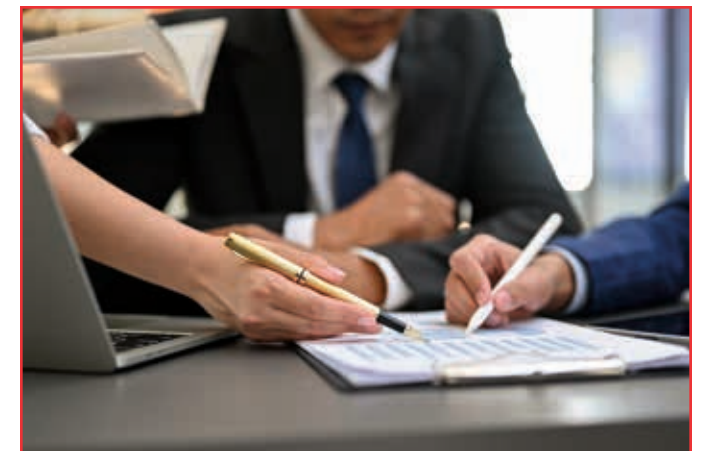
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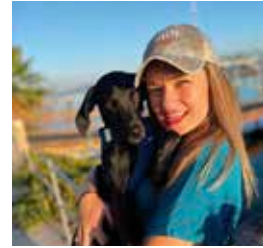
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

July always feels like the heartbeat of summer here in Michiana. The days are longer, the schedules are fuller, and somehow this season has a way of reminding us what matters most—family, community, relationships, and the people who make a lasting impact on those around them.

That spirit is woven throughout this month's issue of *Michiana Real Producers*.

On our cover, you'll meet Steve Bottom, a Realtor whose career has been built not on pressure or flash, but on trust, consistency, and genuinely caring for the people he serves. Steve describes himself as a "facilitator" rather than a salesman, and after

reading his story, you'll quickly understand why so many clients and colleagues respect him. His relationship-first mindset, dedication to family, and commitment to serving the industry are a reminder that success in this business is often built quietly over time through integrity and authenticity.

We're also proud to spotlight Bryan Wagner and Jessica Wagner of JB Wagner Septic. Their story is one of grit, hard work, and creating a business centered around honesty and service. In an industry many people know very little about, Bryan and Jessica have become trusted educators and advocates for both homeowners and Realtors across Michiana. What stood out most to me while reading their story was their willingness to lead with heart—to help people during stressful moments, to educate instead of upsell, and to show up consistently for their community. That kind of reputation cannot be manufactured. It's earned one interaction at a time.

And in this month's Rising Star feature, Arpita Shah reminds us that purpose is one of the most powerful motivators in business. Her journey from programming and education into real estate is inspiring not simply because of her impressive growth and production, but because of the "why" behind it all. Arpita's passion for helping people feel informed, supported, and empowered shines through every part of her story. She represents the future of this industry in all the best ways—relationship-driven, community-focused, and deeply committed to serving others well.

One thing all three of these stories have in common is this: people remember how you make them feel.

In a business driven by contracts, deadlines, negotiations, and numbers, it can be easy to forget that at the center of every transaction is a human being navigating a major life moment. The professionals featured in this issue have found success because they never lost sight of that truth. They lead with care. They communicate honestly. They invest in relationships. And they understand that long-term success is built through trust.

That's what makes the Real Producers community so special.

This magazine has never simply been about production numbers or accolades. It's about highlighting the people behind the business—the stories, values, sacrifices, and relationships that shape our local real estate community. Every month, I'm reminded how fortunate we are to have so many professionals in Michiana who genuinely care about serving others and elevating the industry as a whole.

As you enjoy the rest of your summer, I hope this issue encourages you to continue investing in the relationships around you—both personally and professionally. The impact of showing up consistently, treating people well, and leading with integrity reaches farther than we often realize.

Thank you for being part of this community and for continuing to make Michiana real estate such an incredible industry to be part of.

See you next month.

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STEVE Bottom

Friendly Facilitator

"I call myself a facilitator, I'm not a salesman," Steve Bottom begins. "I tell my buyers when you walk in a home, it should feel like home to you... and don't feel bad if it doesn't. We will go look at 50 homes if we need to for you to experience that special feeling."



That patient perspective has guided Steve's real estate career for the past 25 years. As co-owner of Realty Group Resources in Elkhart alongside Pam Tice and Cory White, Steve has built a reputation not as a high-pressure salesperson, but as someone clients trust to guide them through one of the biggest decisions of their lives with a friendly demeanor, honesty, and plenty of experience.

In 2025 alone, Steve closed more than \$6.6 million across 17 transactions while continuing to operate the same relationship-driven business that has sustained him for decades.

From The Keystone State To Hoosier Turf

Steve grew up in Blairsville, Pennsylvania, a small town east of Pittsburgh where his blue-collar roots and love for sports still run deep today. He later attended University of Pittsburgh, earning a degree in anthropology with a minor in history before realizing the academic path was not the future he wanted.

"There wasn't a lot of opportunity in Pittsburgh after I graduated," Steve recalls. "I installed pool tables for about a year, and met my wife during that time at a Steelers game! She is from the Elkhart area, so we tried the long-distance relationship thing for about six months before I decided to start my life with her in Indiana."

After relocating, Steve spent eight years working in RV manufacturing, but even then, he knew it was not where he ultimately wanted to stay. The turning point came while he and his wife Michelle were preparing to buy their first home.



"As we started the house hunt I thought, why not get licensed and save some money buying that home as a Realtor while allowing for greater flexibility at home," Steve remembers.

What started as a practical idea in 2001 quickly evolved into something much bigger. Steve initially balanced real estate part-time while continuing to work in manufacturing, slowly building momentum before making the leap full-time four years later as business "snowballed."

Relationships Over Recognition

Over the years, Steve's business has grown steadily, built less on flashy marketing and more on consistency and building trust with the people he serves.

"I really genuinely care about my clients and I just love what I do," Steve points out.

That straightforward approach has not only earned him loyal clients, but also the respect of his peers. In 2022, Steve was named Realtor of the Year by the Elkhart County Board of Realtors, and he currently serves as President of the organization through 2028.

Even after decades in the business, Steve still approaches the work with the same mindset he had when he first got started, focused less on volume and more on helping people navigate major life moments with confidence and clarity.

“As a Realtor, this is a relationship-based career, and over half of my business is repeat clients and referrals so I must be doing something right!” he chuckles. “I don’t actively seek out reviews, but clients can sense that I care about them and that I’m always looking out for their best interests.”

That philosophy also shapes the advice he gives newer agents entering the business today.

“Love what you do and I hope you are in this business for the right reason—to help people,” Steve suggests.

True Family Man

For Steve, success has never been defined strictly by production numbers or awards. What matters most is the flexibility his career has created for his family life over the years.



“*I don’t actively seek out reviews, but clients can sense that I care about them.*”

“Real estate allowed me to be more flexible with my schedule when the boys were young, and I will always be grateful for that,” he acknowledges. “I was able to coach their games in the evenings and weekends, and be more present as a father and husband.”

Today, Steve and Michelle have been married for 26 years and

are proud parents to Trevor (24) and Luke (22), while also embracing a new chapter as grandparents to five-year-old Kane.

Much of their free time together revolves around family, close friends, and enjoying the slower pace of lake life at their cottage on Dewart Lake during the summer months.

Steve’s Pittsburgh roots are still impossible to miss. He proudly sports license plates reading “YINZER1” and “YINZER2,” Three Rivers City references that spark conversations almost everywhere he goes. He’s also a diehard Steelers fan with season tickets.

“Attending a Steelers Superbowl is a bucket list thing for sure!” Steve affirms. “I go to their games with a core group of four guys and I have the stickers on my car, the Terrible Towels, everything. We try to do one travel game per year together and it makes it fun.”

“

Real estate agents don’t die, they just fade away.”

When he is not cheering on his beloved Pittsburgh teams, Steve enjoys hunting, fishing, golfing, and spending every free minute he can outdoors.

Looking ahead, Steve’s ambitions remain refreshingly simple: continue enjoying the work, spend more time with family and friends, and travel more in the years ahead. Australia remains high on his travel list, along with eventual trips to Thailand and Japan.

“I’m very happy where I’m at in my life,” Steve concludes with a grin. “I like the joke that real estate agents don’t die, they just fade away. I enjoy the work and can’t ever see myself just up and stopping.”



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ARPITA SHAH

GUIDED BY
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PHOTOS BY MEGAN WILLIAMSON PHOTOGRAPHY

For Arpita Shah, real estate was never just about properties—it was about people. Her journey into the industry didn't begin with open houses or listing appointments, but with a deeper calling rooted in service, connection, and impact. Today, less than five years into her career, she is not only building an impressive portfolio across both residential and commercial real estate, but also redefining what it means to truly guide clients through life-changing decisions.

Before stepping into real estate, Arpita's professional path looked very different. After earning her bachelor's degree in computer science in India, she began her career as a programmer. While stable and rewarding in its own way, something felt incomplete. "I was grateful for the opportunity," she shares, "but I felt like something was missing." That realization led her to explore work that felt more meaningful.



to leave my job at the school and commit to real estate full-time," she says. That decision marked a turning point, allowing her to fully invest in her clients and elevate her business.

What sets Arpita apart is her approach. In an industry often driven by metrics and transactions, she leans into authenticity. "One of the most effective strategies for me has simply been being myself," she

says. "Clients can feel when you are genuine." She makes it a point to step into her clients' shoes, asking herself what she would want if she were in their position. That perspective shapes how she communicates, negotiates, and ultimately delivers results.

Her motivation is rooted in something simple yet powerful: purpose. "I want every family to have the opportunity to learn, grow, and make informed





couldn't speak English and help them learn and grow was deeply fulfilling," she says.

That experience became the bridge to her real estate career. Arpita recognized that the same passion she had for helping students could translate into guiding families through one of the most important decisions of their lives. "I realized I wanted to help even more families," she explains, "this time by guiding them through buying or selling a home."

Like many rising agents, Arpita's early years came with challenges. She began in real estate while still working part-time, juggling multiple responsibilities and working to build momentum in a competitive industry. "It was not easy to manage my time and grow my client base at the same time," she recalls. But consistency became her greatest ally. Through dedication and a commitment to her clients, her business began to steadily grow.

Eventually, she faced a pivotal decision: continue balancing both worlds or take a leap of faith. "With growing demand and confidence in my work, I chose

decisions," she says. That "why" has carried her through moments of doubt, including a time early in her career when she questioned whether she truly belonged in the industry.

The answer came from her own personal experience. When she once considered purchasing a home, she lacked the guidance she now provides to others. "That experience stayed with me," she reflects. "It became my mission to educate others so they understand the benefits of homeownership and the steps it takes to get there."

One particularly meaningful transaction reinforced that mission. Arpita worked with a client from out of the country who became overwhelmed after reviewing inspection reports and was ready to walk away from the deal. Instead of letting fear dictate the outcome, Arpita took the time to walk through every detail with him. "We went through everything together," she says. "I helped him understand what was manageable." With clarity and confidence, the client moved forward—and today, he remains grateful. "He still calls

and messages me to thank me," she shares. "Moments like that remind me why I do what I do."

Her results speak volumes. Arpita has consistently achieved over \$10 million in residential sales volume for the past three consecutive years. In the commercial space, she earned the prestigious Power Broker Award from CoStar, a recognition reserved for top performers. She was also honored with a Rising Star Award after more than doubling her production in a short period of time. And while her professional accolades are impressive, she proudly adds a personal one with a smile: "I've also received the #1 mother trophy 17 years in a row from my children."

Beyond production, Arpita is deeply invested in her community and the industry as a whole. She actively serves on multiple committees with the South Bend Area Realtors, including Education, Grievance, and DEI. She is also involved with the India Association of Michiana, where she has spent the past five years giving back and building meaningful connections. "Networking isn't just



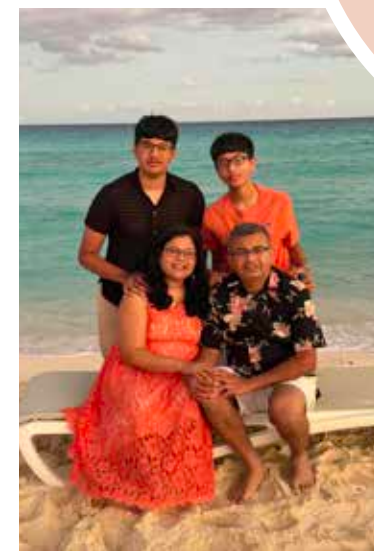
“
It became my mission to **educate others** so they understand the **benefits of homeownership** and the steps it takes to get there.”

the-clock commitment, she remains intentional about balance. "My first priority will always be my family," she says.

about business," she says. "It's about building trust, learning from others, and making a difference."

That balance, much like her business, is rooted in relationships. Many of her clients become close friends over time—an extension of the connection-driven approach that defines her career. For Arpita Shah, success isn't just measured in deals closed, but in lives impacted, trust earned, and relationships built along the way. ❏

At home, Arpita's world is centered around her family. She has been married to her husband, Suchit, for 21 years, and together they are raising two sons, Kris and Kavan. While real estate can easily become an around-



She eventually found that purpose working in a school's English as a New Language (ENL) department. There, she supported students from diverse backgrounds who were learning to navigate a new language and culture. Fluent in Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu, Arpita was able to connect with students in a way that went beyond academics. "Being able to support and guide students who



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BRYAN & JESSICA WAGNER OF JB WAGNER SEPTIC

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For Bryan and Jessica Wagner, owners of JB Wagner Septic, this business has never just been about septic systems—it's about helping people during stressful situations and doing right by their community. In just over two years, the husband-and-wife team has built one of the area's most recognized septic companies, known throughout Michiana for honesty, reliability, education, and a commitment to going the extra mile.

Jessica's connection to the septic industry goes back to 1987, when her father purchased his septic company. As a kid, "going pumping with Dad" was less of a fun family outing and more of the punishment handed down by Mom when she got in trouble. What once felt like the world's grossest chore eventually became the foundation for the career and business she and Bryan have built together today.



That future started taking shape in 2020 during COVID. Jessica had lost her job just as her father and brother's septic business became overwhelmed with calls. With more people stuck at home, septic systems across the area were working overtime—and failing faster than ever.

Jessica initially stepped in to help answer phones, but it quickly evolved into far more. Within weeks, she was organizing accounting, cleaning up years of outstanding invoices,

handling scheduling and dispatching, managing social media and marketing, building the website, and helping oversee daily operations.

The following year, Jessica's brother purchased the business from their father, who was ready to retire. At the time, the company focused primarily on pumping and didn't have anyone dedicated to repairs or inspections. That's when Jessica convinced Bryan to join the industry.





Bryan brought 15 years of experience from Comcast, where he spent 10 years as an installer before becoming a corporate trainer, traveling nationally teaching safety, driving, and installation techniques. Septic work was completely new to him, but he immersed himself in learning the industry. Within a month, he earned IOWPA state certifications for all three system installation categories, followed by Indiana state inspection certification, national inspection certification through NAWT, and SludgeHammer certification. Continuing education remains a major priority, and the couple regularly attends training events and industry conferences like the WWETT Show to stay current on the latest tools, technology, and regulations.

When Jessica's brother later decided to downsize and

focus solely on pumping again, Bryan and Jessica launched JB Wagner Septic.

What followed was rapid growth fueled by long days, hard work, constant learning, and a strong reputation for treating customers fairly. Within a year and a half, the company was voted #1 in General Maintenance Home Services on Michiana's A-List. Since opening, they've earned more than 225 five-star reviews and become one of the area's most trusted names for septic inspections, diagnostics, and repairs.

But awards and certifications are only part of the story.

The Wagners built their company around one simple goal: bringing honesty, integrity, trust, consistency, excellent service, and fair pricing back to the industry.

That philosophy carries into every inspection and

repair they perform. Their reports are known for being detailed, consistent, and educational, and they regularly include additional services at no charge, such as filter cleanings, camera inspections, minor fixes, and answering questions for nervous buyers and homeowners. Their goal is never to upsell unnecessary work, but instead to provide accurate information and practical solutions customers can trust.

That approach has made them especially valued within the real estate community.

Unlike many septic contractors, Bryan and Jessica are heavily involved with the South Bend Area Realtors association and the local real estate industry as a whole. They attend nearly every function they can, sponsor events and community gatherings, participate in networking opportunities, and work closely with agents to better understand what Realtors need to help transactions move smoothly and on time.

Jessica also brings previous experience in mortgage processing and residential and commercial property management, giving her firsthand understanding of the pressures and deadlines involved in real estate transactions. She currently serves on the SBAR Outreach Committee helping organize events and strengthen relationships within the local Realtor community. Bryan has also worked alongside local health department leadership, government affairs representatives, and IOWPA

to stay ahead of changing regulations and help improve consistency and professionalism within the septic industry.

Education has become another major focus for the business. The Wagners created a detailed FAQ section and downloadable brochures on their website to help Realtors and homeowners better understand septic systems and common misconceptions. Bryan, drawing from his background as a corporate trainer, also hosts lunch-and-learn events for brokerages, title companies, banks, and community groups interested in learning more about septic systems and property transfer inspections.

That educational component has become increasingly important as Indiana continues revising septic regulations and property transfer practices. The Wagners have seen firsthand how inconsistent inspections and misinformation can leave homeowners facing major repairs shortly after moving in.

Their belief is simple: inspectors must hold themselves to high standards, whether regulations require it or not.

Looking forward, Bryan and Jessica believe the future of the septic industry will continue moving toward stronger certifications, better education, improved oversight, and more accountability. Through their involvement with IOWPA and ongoing continuing education, they hope to help raise industry standards

while protecting local water quality and public health.

Outside of work, family remains the center of their lives. Together they have six children and a growing number of grandchildren, making life at home just as busy as life at work. Between inspections, repairs, school events, sports, holidays, and family gatherings, there's rarely a quiet moment—but they wouldn't have it any other way.

Community involvement is also deeply important to them. JB Wagner Septic sponsors local organizations and youth sports teams, including Southside Little League, and supports countless Realtor and community events throughout the year. They also offer discounts to military members, veterans, police officers, firefighters, nurses, teachers, seniors, and individuals on limited incomes. When possible, they work with customers on payment arrangements because they understand that septic emergencies rarely happen at convenient times.

Whether donating to food drives, school supply collections, clothing drives, or simply helping someone in need, the Wagners believe in showing up for their community whenever they can.

They've also become increasingly recognized throughout the national septic industry. Jessica previously earned the Exceeding Every Expectation Award at Cressy Commercial Real Estate and was nominated for Caretaker



of the Year through Real Services. JB Wagner Septic has earned multiple recognitions through SBAR events, including Best Booth at the Affiliate Fair for two consecutive years and Best Costume at Trunk or Treat. Industry companies such as T&T Tools have invited the Wagners to collaborate on social media and marketing initiatives, while CrustBuster is currently designing custom themed apparel for Jessica's appearances at future WWETT Shows, where she has become well known for her unforgettable septic-themed outfits and energetic industry presence.

CONTACT US!

To learn more about JB Wagner Septic or to schedule a service, visit jbwagnerseptic.com or call 574-339-9557. Whether you're a homeowner or a real estate professional, Bryan and Jessica are reliable partners every step of the way.

At the end of the day, though, Bryan and Jessica measure success far differently than most.

For them, success is earning the trust of a nervous homebuyer, helping save a deal for a Realtor, repairing a system instead of forcing an unnecessary

replacement, educating homeowners honestly, and giving customers peace of mind during situations that can often feel overwhelming.

Their mission remains simple: serve people well, work hard, tell the truth, and leave every customer better off than before they called. 🏠



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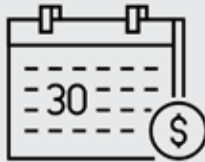
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