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A Night To Remember

I'm *still* smiling from this year's Real Estate Awards Gala, masterfully presented by Shepherd Insurance Group. What a beautiful evening celebrating the people who make Wichita real estate such a special community. From the laughter and hugs to the glam, dancing and unforgettable moments, this issue is filled with photos that capture just how much fun we had together.

A huge thank you to our incredible Gala sponsors for helping bring the evening to life: Kihle Roofing, MTG Family Mortgage, Kansas Secured Title, Jabara's,

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As you flip through these pages, I hope you enjoy reliving some of the magic from the night and spotting plenty of familiar faces along the way. Wichita real estate truly knows how to show up, celebrate each other and make memories together.

With gratitude,
Sam

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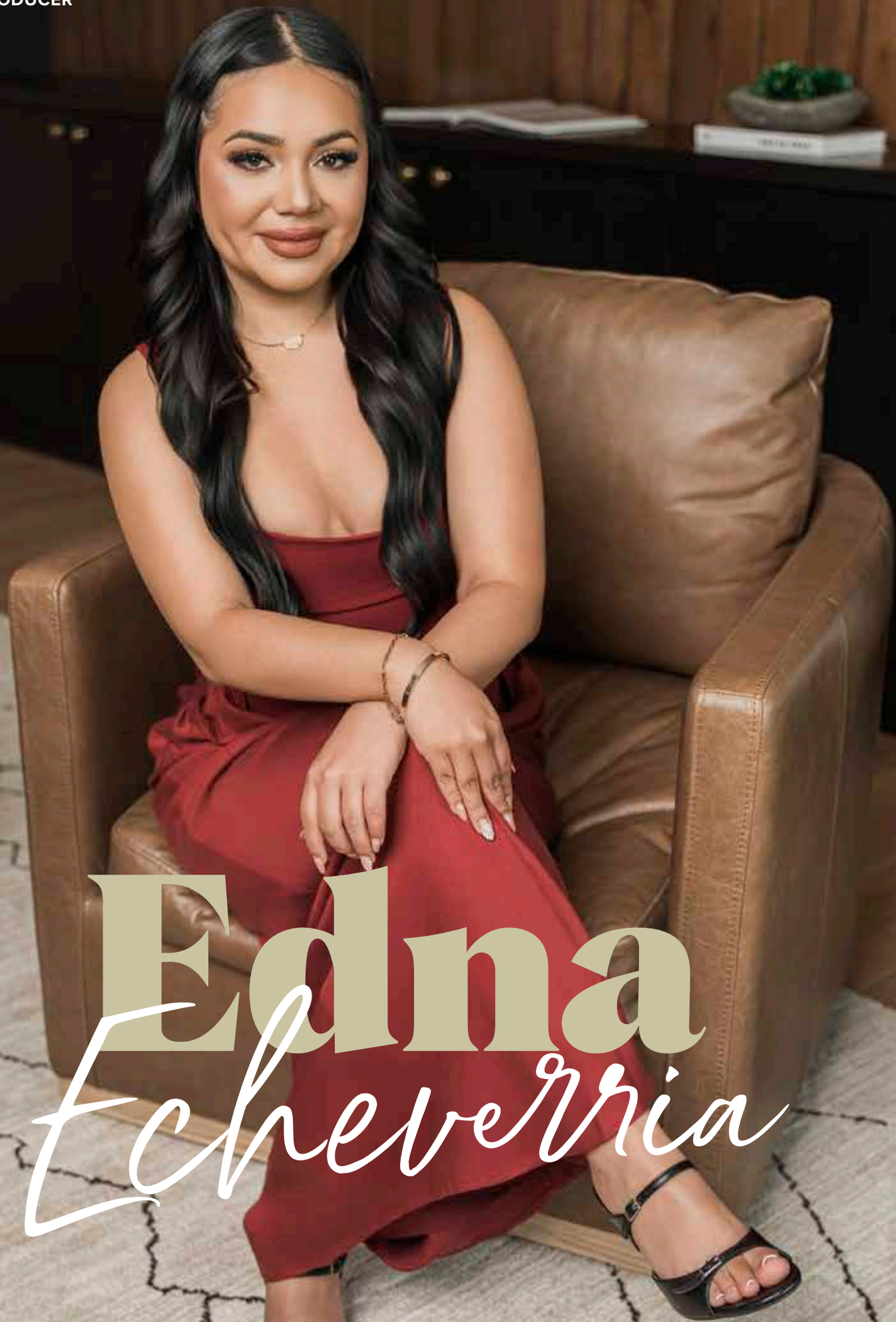
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When Edna Echeverria talks about her real estate career, she doesn't begin with numbers or accolades. She starts with family, perseverance, and a deeply personal journey that began long before she ever earned her license.

Born in Mexico and now building a thriving career in Wichita's real estate market, Edna's story is one of resilience, opportunity, and a belief that success is created through effort—not circumstance.

Today, she is a licensed real estate agent with Real Broker and the team leader of Buying ICT, a growing group of six to seven agents. In just two years, she has built a business driven almost

entirely by referrals, closed more than \$22 million in production in her second year alone, and helped nearly 50 families in her first year enter new homes.

But for Edna, those milestones are just part of a much bigger picture.

A Decision That Changed Everything
Edna didn't stumble into real estate—she chose it, even if the path wasn't entirely straightforward at first.

"I always knew I wanted to do something in real estate," she explains. "I just wasn't exactly sure what direction."

Her early interest leaned toward flipping houses and real estate

investing. But it was her father who helped push her from interest into action. Already considering a transition into a family business venture, he encouraged Edna to take the leap and pursue her license.

At the time, Edna was working in collections, a job she had held since she was 18 years old. It provided stability, income, and the ability to work from home—especially important as a young mother of three.

"I was comfortable," she says. "I had good income and flexibility. It was hard to imagine leaving that."

Still, her father paid for her real estate classes, and with that investment came a commitment



she couldn't ignore. She completed the coursework, passed her exam, and stepped into an entirely new career.

"I took the classes, passed the test, and I actually really enjoyed it," she says. "And now I can't imagine doing anything else."

Building a Business Through Relationships

In an industry often driven by marketing budgets and paid leads, Edna has taken a different approach—one rooted in relationships.

"I've never bought a lead," she says simply. "Everything I've done has been referrals or word of mouth."

That distinction matters. In just two years, Edna has built a reputation based on trust rather than advertising. Clients don't just find her—they recommend her.

Her approach is personal from the start. She makes a point to meet every client face-to-face, something she believes sets the tone for the entire experience.

"I like to take the time to meet my clients," she explains. "I want them to know who I am, and I want to know who they are."

That philosophy has translated into repeat business, referrals, and rapid growth—without the traditional marketing engines many agents rely on.

Motivation Rooted in Family and Experience

Behind Edna's drive is a story shaped by responsibility at a young age and a strong sense of purpose.

"I became a young parent," she shares. "I had my first child at 18, and by 24, I already had three kids."

Those experiences, she says, shaped her perspective on work and life. They also strengthened her motivation to create something better for her family.

"My biggest motivation is my kids," she says. "But I've also always had this drive to do better, because my family didn't come from a lot. I was born in Mexico, and I've always seen this as part of my American dream."

That mindset—combining gratitude, ambition, and responsibility—has become the foundation of her success.

Leadership and Growth Through Buying ICT

As her business grew, Edna took another major step forward: building her own team. Today, she leads Buying ICT, a group of agents focused on expanding service and support across the Wichita area.

Building a team so early in her career wasn't something she initially planned, but it became a natural extension of her growth.

"I have about six or seven agents on my team now," she says. "It's been exciting to build something together."

Leadership, for Edna, is not about authority—it's about impact. She views her role as both a mentor and a motivator, helping others find their footing in a competitive industry.

Balancing Business, Family, and Life

Despite her rapid professional growth, Edna remains grounded in her personal life. She credits her success not only to her own determination, but also to a strong support system.

"My mom, my dad, and my sister are a huge part of my life," she says. "And my sister especially helps me a lot with my kids."

That support allows her to balance a demanding career with raising three children—something she does not take for granted.

When she does find free time, it's intentional. She enjoys reading and traveling whenever possible, even if it's just a short weekend getaway.

"I don't get a lot of free time," she admits with a laugh. "But when I do, I like to read or travel a little. It helps me reset."

Advice for the Next Generation of Agents

Having entered the industry only recently, Edna has already developed a clear perspective on what it takes to succeed.

Her advice to new agents is direct and grounded in experience.

“

My biggest motivation is my kids. But I've also always had this drive to do better, because my family didn't come from a lot. I was born in Mexico, and I've always seen this as part of my

American dream.”



“Make sure this is really what you want to do,” she says. “Don't do it just for money. If your passion is truly helping people, you'll do well.”

She also emphasizes effort and accountability.

“You get out of it what you put into it,” she explains. “You can't compare yourself to others if you're not putting in the same work and time.”

How She Hopes to Be Remembered

At the heart of Edna's journey is a simple hope: that people see her as someone who makes a difference.

“I hope they see me as helpful,” she says. “Someone who motivates others and lifts people up.”

It's a fitting reflection of a career still in its early chapters—but already marked by impact, intention, and remarkable momentum.

From a young mother working in collections to a team leader closing millions in production, Edna Echeverria's story is still unfolding. But one thing is already clear: she is building more than a business. She is building a legacy shaped by determination, service, and belief in what's possible. ▀

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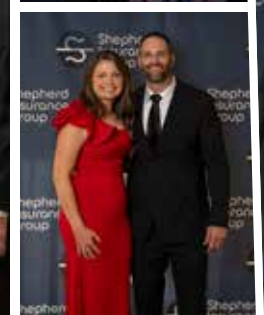
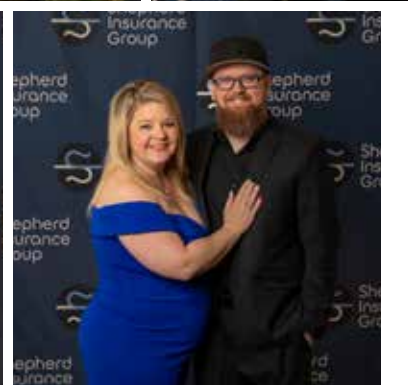
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AWARDS GALA RECAP

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MORE THAN MONEY: HOW BEN BENJAMIN BUILDS TRUST THROUGH LIFE'S BIGGEST MOMENTS

PHOTOS BY KIM STIFFLER
WRITTEN BY DAVE DANIELSON



For Ben Benjamin, wealth management has never been just about numbers on a spreadsheet. It is about people, relationships, and helping clients move from uncertainty to confidence through every stage of life.

As a wealth management advisor with Sterling Edge Financial, Benjamin has built his career around being accessible, relational, and deeply invested in the lives of the people he serves. Clients may initially walk through his door seeking financial guidance, but often leave with something more meaningful: peace of mind and a trusted relationship.

“Most people come in because something hurts,” Benjamin explains. “There’s usually a pain point, some anxiety, or something keeping them awake at night. My hope is that over time they can move beyond that scarcity mindset and begin thinking about who they want to become long-term.”

That perspective has shaped the way Benjamin approaches financial planning. Rather than focusing solely on products or transactions, he emphasizes transformation — helping clients position themselves for the future they envision.

An Unexpected Path Into Finance

Benjamin’s entry into the financial industry was somewhat accidental. Before becoming an advisor, he worked at Sprint when a friend encouraged him to meet with someone at what was then AXA, now Equitable.

“I went and talked with a guy named Cole,” Benjamin recalls. “Not too long after that he said, ‘If you can get licensed, we’ll sponsor you.’ So I passed the tests and became an advisor.”

What began as an unexpected opportunity soon evolved into a career centered around service, trust, and long-term relationships.

Today, Benjamin says one of the most rewarding aspects of his work is watching clients achieve meaningful milestones.

“I love seeing clients reach goals or have an epiphany about what they really want their lives to look like,” he says. “That’s the part that excites me most.”

Yet some of the moments that have impacted him most deeply have little to do with investment performance.

The Human Side of Wealth Management

Benjamin believes the emotional side of financial advising often goes unseen by the outside world. His work regularly places him alongside clients during some of life’s most meaningful moments — both joyful and heartbreaking.

He recalls being asked by a client’s family to serve as a pallbearer after the client passed away.

“What an incredible honor that was,” he says.

On another occasion, Benjamin visited a hospitalized client simply to sit and spend time with him.

“That’s part of the business people don’t necessarily see on TV,” he says. “In the same day, I might talk to one client who’s having the worst day of their life and another who’s having their best day. Being emotionally available for both outcomes — that’s the business in a nutshell for me.”

Those relationships are what continue to fuel his passion for the profession. Clients frequently update him on graduations, retirements, career changes, and growing families. One client recently texted him shortly after welcoming a third child into the world.

"I remember thinking what an honor that was," Benjamin says. "I was important enough to make the list within 48 hours of their child being born."

For him, those moments reflect the trust that develops over years of working together.

A Relational Approach

Benjamin describes his business style as highly relational. As an independent advisor, he values the ability to focus on what he believes best serves each client rather than being tied to a particular company or product line.

"I try to be a good friend with wise advice," he says.

That philosophy resonates strongly with clients who appreciate his approachable communication style and emphasis on trust. "If we're working together, clients are trusting me with things they've spent decades building," he says. "That trust matters."

Benjamin also works closely with clients to evaluate cash flow, tax strategies, retirement planning, and major life decisions such as purchasing a home. He frequently helps clients determine how financial choices today may impact their long-term goals.

"Often people want to know, 'Can I really afford this next house, and how will it affect my financial future?'" he explains. "Those are important conversations."

Life Beyond the Office

Away from work, Benjamin enjoys spending time with his wife, Tate, and their dog, Bailey, whom he describes as "my whole world."



Golf is one of his favorite hobbies, and he admits a good cigar on the golf course makes for an especially enjoyable afternoon. In earlier years he also spent time snowboarding and longboarding.

Music remains another important part of his life. At home, Benjamin enjoys listening to records on his record player, sometimes with Tate and sometimes simply by himself.

"Maybe we dance, maybe we don't," he says with a laugh.

Ultimately, Benjamin sees his role as far more than managing finances. He views it as helping people navigate life's transitions with greater confidence and clarity.

"I just see a lot of life cycles," he says. "And it's incredible."

For more information, contact
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MORTGAGE PUNK

CHRIS WAIPA
PLAYS A NEW TUNE
IN THE INDUSTRY

As the founder of Mortgage Punk, Chris Waipa is on a mission to connect and serve homebuyers and the community in fresh ways. But to understand how he got here, you have to rewind to a very different stage—one filled with amplifiers, guitars, and a dream that had nothing to do with interest rates.

PHOTOS BY AARON PATTON
WRITTEN BY DAVE DANIELSON

From Rock Band Dreams to Real Estate Reality

Before entering the mortgage world more than two decades ago, Chris was chasing a completely different kind of success. Alongside his wife, he was part of a serious rock band—one with real momentum, a following, and aspirations of landing a record deal.

“If you would’ve told me back then I’d end up in mortgage lending,” he says, “I probably would’ve jumped off a cliff.”

Music wasn’t just a hobby—it was his identity. It was about creativity, connection, and using art to impact people’s lives. That passion never really left him. It just took a different form.

After transitioning into lending, Chris built a long and successful career. But as he approached his 20-year mark, something began to shift.

A Breaking Point—and a Better Way

“I got tired of watching customers go through a nightmare,” he



explains. “Not just with other lenders, but across the industry.”

The problem wasn’t just inefficiency—it was experience. Homebuyers were confused, stressed, and often misled by processes that felt anything but transparent. Chris knew there had to be a better way, even if he didn’t yet know what it looked like.

That search for answers led to a series of conversations with a digital marketing team. What started as discussions about social media strategy quickly turned into something much bigger.

“They told me people don’t connect with institutions anymore—they connect with stories,” he says. “And that’s when everything clicked.”

The Birth of Mortgage Punk

The breakthrough moment came from an unexpected source: a young graphic designer fresh out of college. During a brainstorming session, he casually mentioned designing something that looked like “mortgage punk.”



Chris didn't hesitate.

"I about fell out of my chair," he recalls. "Those two words don't belong together—and that's exactly why I loved it."

It was bold. It was unconventional. And it was undeniably him.

After testing the idea with colleagues and industry friends—who overwhelmingly encouraged him to run with it—Chris officially launched Mortgage Punk three years ago. What started as a branding experiment quickly evolved into something far more ambitious.

More Than a Brand—An Education Movement

At its core, Mortgage Punk isn't just about mortgages. It's about education.

Chris envisioned a platform that would make learning about homeownership, personal finance, and wealth-building accessible—and even enjoyable—for everyday people.

"There's so much people aren't taught," he says. "Credit scores, how the system works, how to build wealth through real estate—it's like a game, and nobody explains the rules."

His goal was to create content that breaks down those barriers, using the same energy and authenticity that once fueled his music career. Social media became a key part of that strategy, allowing him to connect directly with audiences in a way traditional institutions often fail to do.

But Chris didn't stop there.

Turning Up the Volume: A New Kind of Conference

Taking inspiration from high-energy business events and music festivals, Chris set his sights on something entirely new: a consumer-focused conference that blends financial education with entertainment.

The result is the American Dream Home Buying Conference—a first-of-its-kind event designed for aspiring homeowners, current buyers, and real estate investors alike.

"There's nothing like it in the consumer space," he says. "I wanted to create something that feels like a concert meets a home show."

The event features live performances—including a headlining artist from a nationally recognized music competition—alongside sessions covering everything from financing basics to long-term investment strategies.

It's immersive. It's energetic. And most importantly, it's designed to make learning feel less like a chore and more like an experience.

Challenging Industry Norms

Chris's disruptive mindset extends beyond branding and events—it also shapes how he approaches lending itself.

One of his biggest critiques? The industry's reliance on pre-approvals.

"Pre-approval is one of the most misunderstood concepts in lending," he says. "People hear 'approved,' but that's not what it actually means."

He believes this disconnect creates false confidence for buyers and unnecessary complications down the line. For Chris, fixing the industry means addressing not just processes, but the psychology behind them. It's a perspective that underscores his broader mission: to replace confusion with clarity and transactions with trust.

Family Time

Chris smiles when he talks about his family, including his wife, Kecia, and their children: Elise (19); Charlie (13); Henry (10) and Sebastian (4). "I am lucky to have such an amazing family. I wouldn't be who I am without them," Chris says with a smile. "Kecia supports me in all that I do."

A New Kind of Lender

In many ways, Chris's journey feels like a modern remix of an old story—the artist who never stopped being an artist, even after changing careers.

Today, instead of playing to packed venues, he's building a platform that reaches people where they are—on their phones, in their communities, and at pivotal moments in their lives.

Mortgage Punk may have started as an unconventional idea, but it's quickly becoming something more: a movement aimed at reshaping how people think about homeownership. ▾



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JORDAN NOONE

PHOTOS BY KIM STIFFLER
WRITTEN BY DAVE DANIELSON



AN EVOLVING PATH OF EXCELLENCE

For Jordan Noone, success has never been about standing still. It's about building—businesses, relationships, homes, and most importantly, a life that aligns with what matters most.

As a real estate agent with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices PenFed

Realty, Jordan has spent more than a decade helping clients navigate one of life's biggest decisions. But his story isn't just about buying and selling homes. It's about growth, adaptability, and the freedom that comes from creating your own path.

An Opportunity That Sparked Something Bigger

Jordan didn't set out with a lifelong plan to become a real estate agent. Like many in the industry, his journey began with a moment—one that, at the time, felt surprisingly simple.

Years ago, before he and his now-wife Ashley were even engaged, the two decided to purchase a piece of land together. Looking back, Jordan remembers how seamless the process felt.

"We did the newbie thing and called the sign," he recalls with a laugh. "At the time, I didn't know any different."

That experience planted a seed. Combined with exposure to family members in California who were involved in real estate investing, it sparked a curiosity that quickly turned into action. By December 12, 2012, Jordan had earned his real estate license—and a new chapter had officially begun.

The Freedom to Build a Life

From the start, Jordan knew one thing for certain: he wanted to be self-employed.

At the time, he was still in college at Wichita State University's Barton School of Business and running a lawn

care company he believed might be his long-term path. Real estate, however, offered something different—something more dynamic.

“I don’t think I could ever go back,” he says. “I enjoy being self-employed and having control over my day.”

That flexibility has become one of the most meaningful aspects of his career. While real estate rarely fits into a traditional nine-to-five schedule, it offers something Jordan values far more: time with his family.

He and Ashley are raising three children—Maya Veah (who often goes by Via), Maverick, and their youngest, Isla—within a home-centered lifestyle that includes homeschooling. For Jordan, the ability to be present for those moments isn’t just a perk of the job. It’s the point.

Redefining Success Along the Way

Like many driven professionals, Jordan’s definition of success has evolved over time.



“There’s always that drive to be successful,” he explains. “But what that looks like has changed for me over the years.”

Early in his career, success may have been measured in transactions or growth. Today, it’s more personal—centered around providing for his family and creating opportunities to live life on their own terms.

That shift has influenced not only how he works, but also the direction his career has taken.

From Agent to Builder

While Jordan remains rooted in real estate, his business has steadily expanded beyond traditional transactions. Early in his career, he found himself drawn to new construction, gaining

hands-on experience in developments and working closely with builders.

That exposure didn’t just add a skill set—it opened a new door.

Today, Jordan is also a general contractor and holds a roofing license in the state of Kansas. He now works with clients not only to find homes, but to build them from the ground up.

“THERE’S ALWAYS THAT DRIVE TO BE SUCCESSFUL. BUT WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE HAS CHANGED FOR ME OVER THE YEARS.”

“I really enjoy the building side,” he says. “Creating something custom for someone—that’s a different level of satisfaction.”

His work now includes custom home projects and involvement in new residential developments, positioning him at the intersection of real estate and construction. It’s a natural evolution for someone who thrives on growth and hands-on involvement.

Relationships First, Always

Despite the expansion of his business, one thing hasn’t changed: Jordan’s approach to people.

In an industry often associated with high-pressure sales tactics,



he has intentionally taken a different path.

“My goal is to become friends first,” he explains. “It’s almost like a dating relationship—we need to be a good match.”

That mindset has helped him build lasting relationships with clients who appreciate his low-pressure, personable approach. For Jordan, it’s not about closing deals—it’s about creating trust.

“I don’t want to be seen as pushy,” he says. “I want people to feel comfortable.”

It’s a philosophy that not only sets him apart but also creates a better experience for everyone involved.

Lessons for the Next Generation

With more than a decade in the industry, Jordan has learned firsthand what it takes to get started—and what can make the journey smoother.

His advice to new agents is simple but powerful: don’t try to do it alone.

“Find someone to latch on to,” he says. “A mentor can make all the difference.”

Early in his career, Jordan experienced the challenges of navigating the business without enough guidance. That experience shaped his belief in the importance of learning from others

and building a strong foundation from the start.

A Life Still Being Built

These days, Jordan’s schedule is full—balancing real estate clients, construction projects, and family life. Free time may be limited, but he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Whether he’s selecting materials for a job site or spending time with his kids, he finds fulfillment in the process of building—both professionally and personally.

For Jordan Noone, the future isn’t a fixed destination. It’s something he continues to create, one decision, one relationship, and one home at a time. ▀

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Penny Johnson

Respected Resource

PHOTOS BY
KIM STIFFLER
WRITTEN BY
DAVE DANIELSON

If you ask around the Wichita real estate community who they'd choose to build a business with, one name consistently rises to the top: Penny Johnson.

The reasons go far beyond production—though her results are undeniable. People point to her character just as quickly. Smart. Steady. Fun. Fearless when it matters most. She's the kind of leader others trust instinctively, follow willingly, and genuinely enjoy being around. In an industry often defined by transactions, Penny has built something more enduring—relationships rooted in consistency and integrity.

Since entering real estate in 1985, she has crafted a career that many admire and quietly



try to replicate. By her third year, she had already earned top-producer recognition, setting a pace she would maintain for decades. Long before consistency became a buzzword, it became her calling card.

But her story isn't just about production. In many ways, that's only the backdrop.

She Didn't Plan This— She Answered It

Penny didn't set out chasing a career path. She was focused on building a life.

Married to her husband Dennis for more than 50 years, she was deeply invested in raising their sons when a simple conversation changed her





trajectory. As their youngest prepared to start school, Dennis gently encouraged her to think about what might come next.

At first, she pushed back—she loved where she was. But instead of dismissing the moment, she did what would later define her leadership style: she paused, reflected, and leaned in with faith. She prayed for guidance.

➤ **For her, integrity isn't situational—it's foundational.**

She often explains it in simple terms: your “video and audio should match.” Who you are, what you say, and how you show up should align without contradiction.

The answer came unexpectedly. During a meeting with an insurance broker, something shifted. Mid-conversation, Penny stopped him and redirected the discussion entirely. “I’m sure it’s a great policy,” she said. “Now tell me about real estate.”

That instinct—to recognize a moment, pivot with confidence, and act decisively—set everything in motion. Within months, she was licensed. Within a few short years, she was leading.

Built for More Than the Easy Seasons

In 2007, as uncertainty loomed over the housing market, Penny made a decision that would define her career in a new way. While many hesitated, she moved forward and launched her brokerage.

It wasn't the safe choice. It was the right one.

Through one of the most challenging periods in real estate history, she didn't retreat—she led. What she built during that time didn't just survive; it strengthened. Today, her brokerage stands as one of Wichita's top-performing residential firms, maintaining that position for more than 15 years.

Longevity like that doesn't happen by accident. It requires clarity when others feel confusion, conviction when others feel doubt, and the willingness to make hard decisions without losing sight of long-term vision.

The Leader Everyone Wants in the Room

Penny has never needed to be the loudest voice to be the most impactful. Her influence comes from trust, not volume.

Over the years, she has served as President of the South

Central Kansas Association of REALTORS®, earned Broker of the Year honors, and been inducted into the Wichita Business Journal's Women in Business Hall of Fame. Yet accolades only tell part of the story.

What truly sets her apart is how people experience her. Agents don't just seek her out for business advice—they come to her for perspective. She has a rare ability to see both the numbers and the human story behind them, helping others grow not only in production but in confidence and clarity.

She doesn't just build a business. She builds people. And then she keeps building.

Equal Parts Grit and Joy

There's a balance to Penny that's hard to replicate.

She can navigate high-stakes decisions with precision, then turn around and bring lightness and humor into the room. She's just as comfortable in serious strategy sessions as she is diving underwater with her sons and

grandsons—scuba diving still very much part of her life.

She works hard, but she doesn't carry the weight of it in a way that dims her spirit. She laughs easily. She brings energy when it's needed, calm when it's missing, and perspective when situations threaten to spiral.

That combination—grit paired with genuine joy—is rare. And it's magnetic.

What Drives It All

At the core of Penny's life is a belief she lives out daily: a good name matters more than great riches.

For her, integrity isn't situational—it's foundational. She often explains it in simple terms: your “video and audio should match.” Who you are, what you say, and how you show up should align without contradiction.

It's a principle that shapes every decision she makes. It's why people trust her without hesitation. Why they stay connected long after

transactions close. And why so many grow under her leadership.

The Life She's Most Proud Of
For all her professional accomplishments, Penny's priorities are unmistakably clear.

Ask her what matters most, and the answer comes without pause: her family.

Her husband Dennis. Their sons. Their grandchildren. The time they share and the traditions they've built together are the foundation of everything else. Every deal, every award, every milestone—those all come second.

What's remarkable is that she hasn't had to choose between success at work and fulfillment at home. She's built both, intentionally and with care.

The Legacy She's Still Writing

Penny Johnson isn't slowing down. If anything, she's becoming even more focused.

Her attention today is on identifying the right people—often before they see their own potential—and helping them step into something bigger than they imagined. She has a gift for spotting leadership early, then nurturing it with the right mix of challenge and support.

She's building leaders who go on to build leaders.

And that kind of impact extends far beyond a single career. It multiplies. It reaches into businesses, families, and communities in ways that can't always be measured but are deeply felt.

For Penny, success has never been just about how far she can go. It's about how far her influence can reach through others—and how many people she can help rise along the way. ▀



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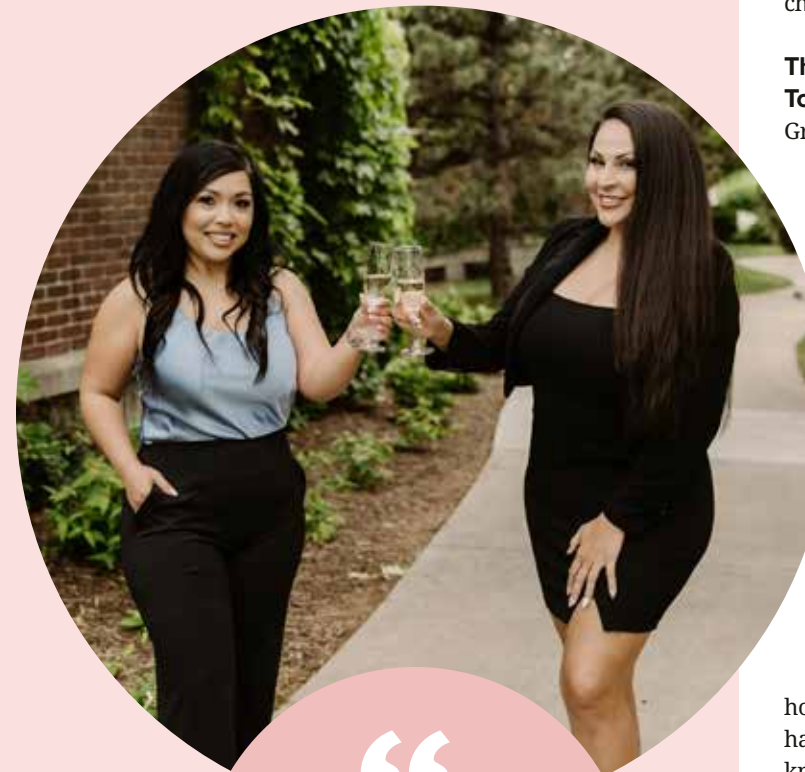


CRYSTAL TORRES

All In & Never Looked Back

PHOTOS BY ALLIE HENWOOD • WRITTEN BY ARIANNA REZA

For Crystal Torres, getting into real estate wasn't just about buying and selling houses – it was an opportunity for growth, stability, and a chance to become the person she had always dreamed of being. Now in her ninth year in the real estate industry and thriving with Heritage 1st Realty, Crystal has created the lifestyle she had always dreamed of for herself, her family, and her community.



“I decided to just leave it all and jump all in,” she recalled with a smile, “and I never looked back.”

A Vision for Life

Growing up as the youngest of four siblings to a hardworking single mother, Crystal learned a lot about the life she wanted. “As I was growing up, I always said ‘You know, I admire the way my mom works so hard to support her family, but I’m gonna do it differently. I’m gonna make sure that as I’m working hard, I’m also still going to play hard.’” Crystal wanted to be in business for herself and give her kids the world, but working in sales for corporate America just hadn’t been giving her that sense of fulfillment. As it turns out, that fulfillment would only come with big risks, a big change, and huge growth.

The Rocky Road To Success

Great Bend, Kansas, while a friendly and supportive hometown, just didn’t have the opportunities that Crystal was looking for. She knew that in order for her to succeed, she’d have to move elsewhere. Fortunately, her job at the time was looking to hire for a management position in Wichita. So, Crystal packed up her life and her two daughters, leaving her hometown in hopes for success. It was a hard decision, but Crystal knew it was the best one she could make. “In order for me to grow, I had to leave.”

The move to Wichita was rocky at first. She had moved for a better opportunity, but found herself being pulled to her limits. While in the beginning steps in

her real estate journey, she found herself struggling to juggle her time. “There was a time that I had three different jobs.” She recalled. Crystal, needing to provide for her family, also worked as a member specialist for the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and as a server at an upscale pizzeria. This constant balancing act left Crystal wondering though, “Am I living to work, or working to live?”

So, with her partner and friend Amanda Jolley, she decided to leave it all behind. Crystal decided to quit all of her side jobs and dive into real estate, giving it a real chance to change her life. She hit the streets and knocked on doors, giving real estate her all. “I decided to just leave it all and jump all in,” she recalled with a smile, “and I never looked back.” That next year, Crystal sold her first million in volume and has been thriving ever since.

A Generous Heart

During her transition to this new life, Crystal found herself missing that sense of community that she had left behind. So, she inserted herself. Crystal quickly fell in love with the people around her and wanted to share her passion for helping others. She became active in her church as a youth leader to help young girls in their walk with God, she serves for the Big Brother Big Sister organization to help mentor Wichita’s youth, and she participates in Operation Holiday every season. One of the most notable acts of community from Crystal, however, was the social media page that she

started in 2020 after small businesses in Wichita started feeling the financial effects of Covid-19. “I saw that businesses were struggling to get people in.” So, Crystal took it upon herself to help out her new community and started the “BOOST ICT” facebook page dedicated to highlighting local businesses. Each weekend, the community would go to a different local business and support them. Crystal managed to help five different businesses before the Covid-19 rules tightened, making a big impact for each of the owners.

Crystal’s love for people shines through in her day-to-day life even now. While continuing her volunteer work, she also feels that she gives back to her community in the form of a helping hand and as a guide to those who are starting their real estate journey. Crystal’s love of helping others, according to her, “translates really really easily.”

The Support Through It All

In this wild journey, Crystal wasn’t alone. She thanks her daughters, Alexia and Brianna, for being so understanding of her long hours, and thanks her mom for teaching her strength and resilience. She is also grateful for her many friends who supported her along her path. Crystal’s friend and partner Amanda Jolley kept her motivated, and was right there with her when they went door-to-door to advertise. Her friends Tariq Azmi and Danielle

Dillon convinced her to put herself first by getting into real estate, helping her to “work smarter, not harder”. And together, Crystal’s community showed her the love and unwavering support she needed to finally move into the life that she had been working so hard to live.

A Look into the Future

While the transition to Wichita was hard, Crystal is grateful to be where she is now and for all that her struggle taught her. She says the experience showed her the value of big risks regardless of whether they yielded good or bad results. Her new life also gives her the freedom she dreamed of having for her and her children, often having family dinners and vacations together.

Crystal’s look into the future shows a growing investor client base and more opportunities for others to get into business for themselves, just as she had. She hopes to launch a platform where she can continue to give her guidance and support to future investors.

For Crystal, real estate was never just about closing deals, it was about opening doors not only for herself, but for everyone willing to bet on their own potential. As she always says, “I build people, not just business.”

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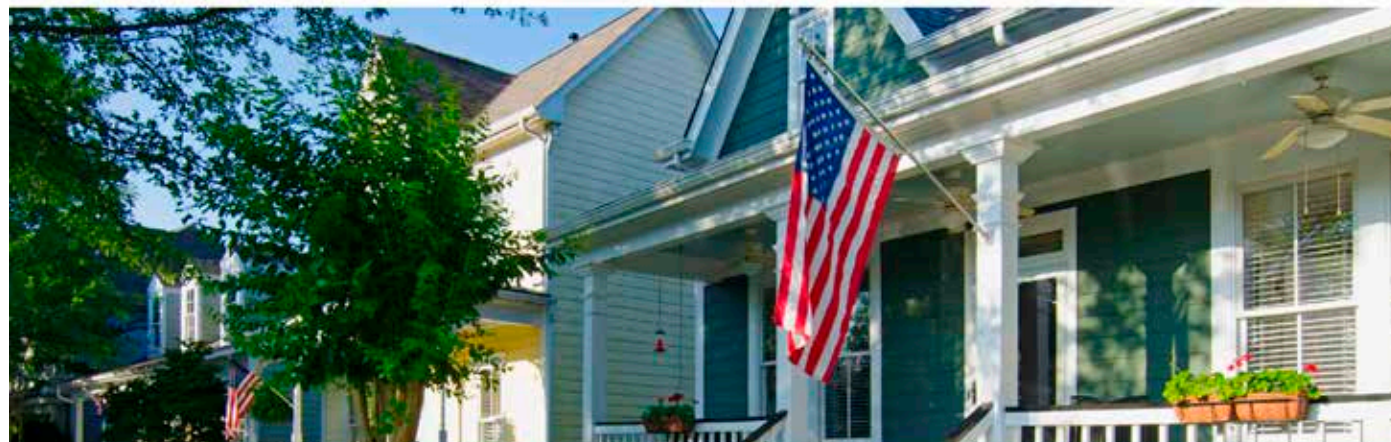
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WHEAT STATE INSURANCE GROUP

PHOTO BY KELLY REMACLE • WRITTEN BY DAVE DANIELSON

When the unexpected happens—a storm rolls through, an accident occurs, or something valuable is suddenly lost—having the right insurance coverage in place can make all the difference. In those moments, clarity and confidence matter just as much as protection.

For Kennton Hoffman, Founder and Owner of Wheat State Insurance Group, that responsibility is personal. With more than a decade leading his independent agency, and years of experience before that, he has built a business focused on education, relationships, and customized solutions designed around each client's needs.

Unlike captive agents who represent a single carrier, Kennton and his team work with multiple insurance providers, allowing them to tailor policies across personal, commercial, life, and even pet insurance. But what truly sets his approach apart is how he works with people—patiently, thoroughly, and without pressure.

Below, Kennton answers a few of the most common questions he hears from clients.

What is the advantage of working with an independent insurance agent?

Kennton: “The biggest advantage is choice. We’re not tied to one company, so we can shop multiple carriers

to find the best coverage and price for each individual situation. That flexibility allows us to truly work for the client, not the insurance company. As life changes—whether someone is buying a home, starting a business, or growing their family—we can adjust their coverage to match their needs.”

How do you make sure clients actually understand their coverage?

Kennton: “I don’t ever want someone to leave confused. Insurance can get complicated, but it doesn’t have to feel overwhelming. We take the time to walk through everything—liability limits, deductibles, what’s covered and what’s not. And I always tell people, if something doesn’t make sense, let’s

stop and talk about it. My goal is for clients to feel confident and informed, not unsure about what they have.”

Do you take a high-pressure approach when working with clients?

Kennton: “Not at all. We’re very low pressure. I would rather work with a smaller number of people who truly want help than try to push quick sales. We focus on building relationships. That means taking the time to understand someone’s situation and giving them the information they need to make the right decision. It’s not about ‘sell, sell, sell’—it’s about doing what’s right for the client.”

How does your referral program support the community?

Kennton: “Our Community Matters Referral Program is something we’re really proud of. Each year, we select four local nonprofits—one for each quarter—based on input from our clients and team. For every referral that

completes a quote, we donate \$10 to that organization and send a \$10 Amazon gift card to the person who referred them. We don’t require anyone to purchase a policy. It’s about making connections and giving back, not creating pressure.”

That relationship-first mindset has been at the core of Wheat State Insurance Group since its founding. After beginning his career as a captive agent, Kennton saw the limitations of representing just one company and decided to build something different—an agency that prioritized flexibility, transparency, and long-term trust.

Today, his growing team of agents and service professionals continues to serve clients across the region, with much of their business coming from referrals. It’s a reflection of the experience they provide—one where clients feel heard, informed, and supported every step of the way.

Outside of work, Kennton’s focus is firmly on family. He and his wife, Kyra, stay actively involved in the lives of their children—Emma, Kierran, and Lillian—supporting them in school activities and sports. That sense of commitment and care carries over into how he runs his business.

“I really love what I do,” Kennton says. “At the end of the day, I want people to walk away feeling like they understand their coverage and had a good experience. That’s what matters most.”

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