

NORTHWEST INDIANA

MARCH 2026

REAL PRODUCERS[®]

Andrew
Knies



Agent Spotlight

LESLEY SWEENEY

of Encore Sotheby's
International Realty

Rising Star

CAITLIN HOEKSTRA

of Haven Realty

Partner Spotlight

AARON SCHWARTZ

of Indiana Farm
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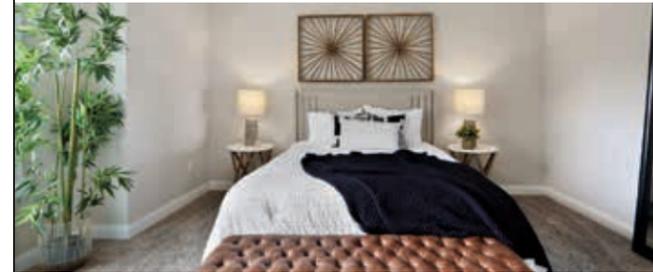


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New to Real Producers or just curious? Check out these quick facts about RP.

Q: Who receives this magazine?

A: The top 300 agents in NWI based on the previous year's volume and our Preferred Partners. We update our mailing list annually to ensure RP reaches the Region's top producers.

Q: Do agents pay for the magazine?

A: No! The magazine is mailed FREE to agents and funded by our partners.

Q: What kind of content will be featured?

A: Personal, in-depth stories that highlight the people behind the production. We go beyond the numbers and showcase the personal side of the industry to inspire stronger connections.

Q: Who are the partners?

A: Trusted professionals who make this community possible. They are top tier in their industry; they appear in every issue, attend our events, and come highly recommended by our agents. Our goal is to build a powerhouse network of the best agents and affiliates, growing stronger together.

Q: Does Real Producers have events?

A: Yes! We host quarterly, invite-only events where members connect, mastermind, and build relationships at local venues. Event details are shared through the magazine, email, and social media.

Q: What does it cost for an agent to be featured?

A: *Nothing.* \$0, zilch, nada. We are not a pay-to-play model. We share real stories of Real Producers, and agents do not pay to be featured.

Q: What is the process to be featured in the magazine?

A: Everyone in the magazine has first been nominated. We spotlight professionals who are collaborative, produce top numbers, and known for strong character. Attending our events and engaging with our platform helps us get to know your story!

Q: How can I nominate an agent?

A: We need on your input to uncover great stories! If you know an agent who's on fire and deserving of recognition, scan the QR code to submit a nomination.



Nominate a Feature

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Aaron Schwartz

OF INDIANA FARM BUREAU INSURANCE



From Service to Stewardship: How Aaron Schwartz's Military Experience Shaped His Leadership at Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance

BY ALI
KUCCHARZAK
PHOTOGRAPHY
BY MELINDA
NICOLE
PHOTOGRAPHY

When Aaron Schwartz first entered the insurance industry, he didn't view it as a departure from his past; it felt like a natural continuation of a life built around service. Today, as an Agency Manager with Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance, Aaron leads with a steady hand shaped by years in sales and his time serving in the U.S. Army. His journey reflects how discipline, adaptability, and empathy—skills honed in the military—can translate into meaningful leadership and lasting success in the insurance business.

Before insurance, Aaron built a strong foundation in sales, where he learned the importance of communication, follow-through, and understanding people's needs. Sales taught him how to connect, how to listen, and how to adapt his approach depending

on who was sitting across the table. But it was his military background that truly prepared him for the realities of insurance; an industry where high-pressure situations and critical decision-making are part of everyday work.

Insurance, at its core, is about protecting people during moments of uncertainty. For Aaron, the parallels between military service and insurance work are clear. Just as soldiers are trained to remain composed under pressure, insurance professionals must guide clients through some of the most challenging moments of their lives, whether that's a natural disaster, a major loss, or the death of a loved one. Aaron credits his Army training with giving him the ability to navigate those moments with clarity and compassion.

"The Army was a start to my customer service career in a way. I have an extremely high tolerance for difficult situations," he said. "The military helped me be empathetic toward people and understand their unique situations. I was exposed at a young age to all kinds of diverse people and situations."

Now serving as an Agency Manager, Aaron brings a leadership style rooted in integrity, accountability, and teamwork. He believes strong leadership starts with taking care of your people. He works closely with agents throughout his area, mentoring them not only on production and growth but also on how to build trust and long-term relationships with clients.

For Aaron, success in insurance has never been just about policies or numbers. He believes the true value of the job lies in the relationships created along the way.

"We can make the insurance experience better than the norm," he said. "It's all about being personable. We approach the job as a relationship and help them protect the things that are most important to them. Whether it's auto, home, business, or life insurance; we are protecting people from the kinds of disasters that really hurt families. We can help protect people's lives and there is power and meaning in that."

That philosophy is central to how he leads at Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance. Aaron emphasizes listening first, understanding each client's unique situation, and providing guidance that is both knowledgeable and compassionate. His military experience taught him that trust is earned through consistency and honesty, principles he carries into every client interaction and leadership decision.



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**“WE NEED TO GET
BACK TO OUR CORE
MISSION, PROVIDING
EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE
AND PUTTING OUR
CLIENTS FIRST.”**

It's not about the transaction. "It's about the relationship," Schwartz said.

His background in sales complements this approach. Aaron understands the importance of setting goals, tracking performance, and driving growth, but he believes those objectives should never come at the expense of ethics or relationships. He encourages his team to view success through a broader lens, one that includes customer satisfaction, community impact, and long-term loyalty.

"Our collective job is to take care of clients. If we make that a focus and a priority in our office, and do what is best for the customer, success will follow."

As an Agency Manager, Aaron also sees his role as building a strong, supportive culture among his agents. Clear communication, mutual respect, and



shared values are priorities, much like they were during his time in the Army. He leads by example, demonstrating that professionalism and empathy can coexist and that both are essential to long-term success in the insurance industry.

Looking ahead, Aaron's vision is focused on growth and community impact. His future plans include growing Indiana Farm Bureau Insurance's customer base throughout Northwest Indiana. He is committed to strengthening relationships within the communities he serves and ensuring that clients feel supported, protected, and valued for the long term.

"We need to get back to our core mission, providing exceptional service and putting our clients first," he said. "We have clients who have been with us for 40 years. We are only an Indiana company with offices in every county."

For Aaron Schwartz, the path from military service to insurance leadership has been less about changing careers and more about continuing a mission. The uniform may have changed, but the purpose remains the same: to serve others, to lead with integrity, and to stand beside people when they need it most.



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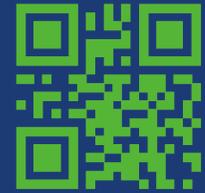


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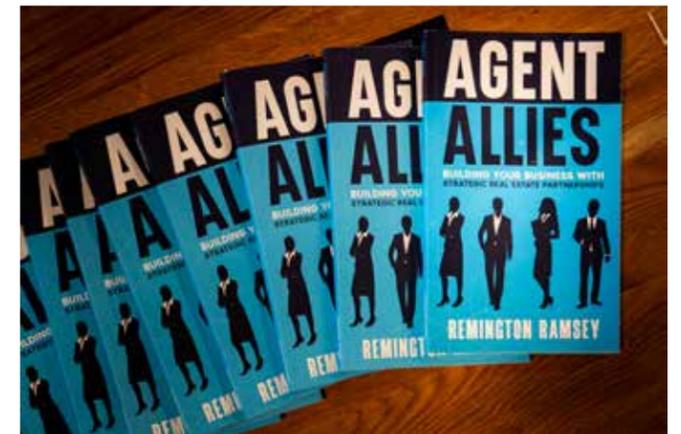
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On February 5th, we filled Lower Lincoln with our RP Preferred Partners for a partner only event—an afternoon focused entirely on their growth.

Speed networking gave Partners the opportunity to make meaningful connections in a short amount of time. Conversations were intentional, efficient, and full of possibility.

Jon Good, Ft Wayne Real Producers Publisher, shared practical strategies to help Partners maximize their visibility, relationships, and impact through the RP platform. His insights set the tone for intentional growth within the real estate community.

This event had rave reviews! We're excited to keep creating spaces where our partners can connect, collaborate, and grow together.



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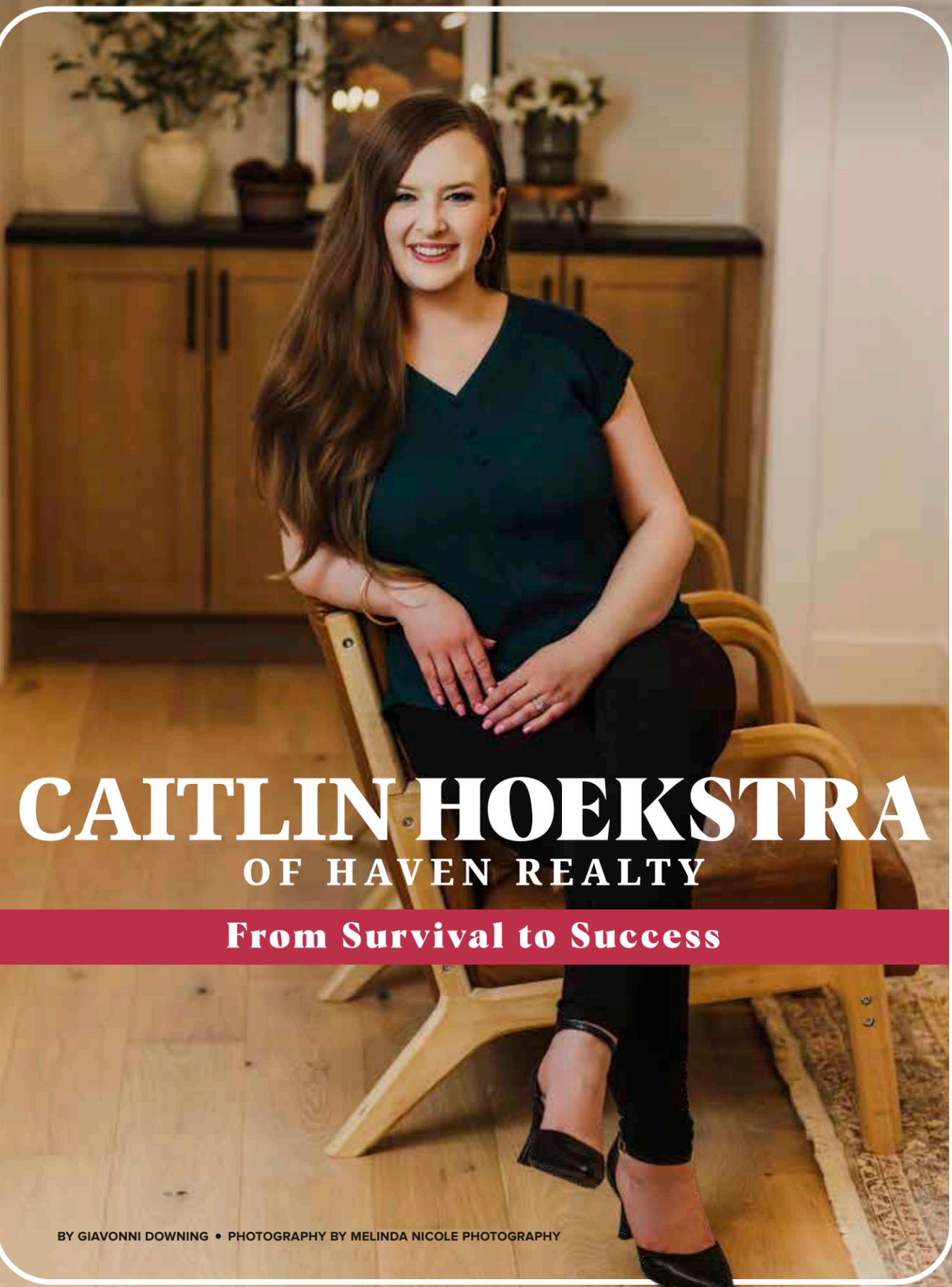
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OF HAVEN REALTY

From Survival to Success

BY GIAVONNI DOWNING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Caitlin Hoekstra describes herself as a “soft person” in a “hard industry.” But to hear her story is to realize that her softness is actually a profound, resilient strength built in the fires of chronic health crises and a childhood background that statistically should have pointed her toward a very different life.

In early 2022, Caitlin was a high-performing corporate recruiter for a Christian university, a role she viewed as a genuine ministry where she often prayed with potential students about their futures. Yet, despite her belief in the mission, the weight of corporate burnout and rounds of layoffs began to settle in. When her company restructured and eliminated her entire team, Caitlin and

her husband didn't panic; they had already spent months in prayer and fasting, seeking a peace that the corporate world could no longer provide.

The turning point came with a phone call she felt coming before the ringer even started. Her mentor in life and real estate, Dawn Magagnotti, called to invite her into the industry. Caitlin transitioned to full-time status in February 2023 with zero clients and no contracts under her belt because it felt right in her spirit. By the end of her first year, she was named Rookie of the Year, and by 2024, she had risen to become Haven's top producer.

The depth of Caitlin's strength is best understood through the magnitude of what she has overcome; she has stood at the threshold of life and death more than once. Her most grueling test arrived as a freshman in college, when a sudden and severe internal crisis led to a harrowing battle with a systemic infection that required months of intensive recovery and a complete reliance on her faith to see her through.

“I have seen the Lord's sustaining hand on me,” she says, reflecting on how her faith was solidified not in the pews, but in hospital rooms. That history of persistence allows her to be a steady, empathetic anchor for clients riding the emotional roller coaster of a home purchase. Because she has navigated her own complex PTSD and emerged without the need for medication, she views her real estate career as a way to lead others toward their



Away from the negotiating table, Caitlin finds restoration in the slow, **STRATEGIC ART OF SOURDOUGH BAKING.**



own places of safety and sanctuary. She understands that a home is an oasis.

Away from the negotiating table, Caitlin finds restoration in the slow, strategic art of sourdough baking. It is a “productive hobby” that mirrors the discipline of her professional life: it requires patience, a healthy starter, and an intentional plan. Using only organic flour, water, and sea salt, she bakes bread for her family and often shares it as a closing gift for her clients.

This spirit of restoration extends to her personal life as well. She and her husband, whom she jokingly says she “recruited”

during her time in higher education, bought a foreclosure house purely for the land. They have spent the last two years renovating it, including significant repairs found behind the drywall. This project has made Caitlin a far more effective Realtor. “I’ve learned so much about what to look for and how a house actually works,” she explains.

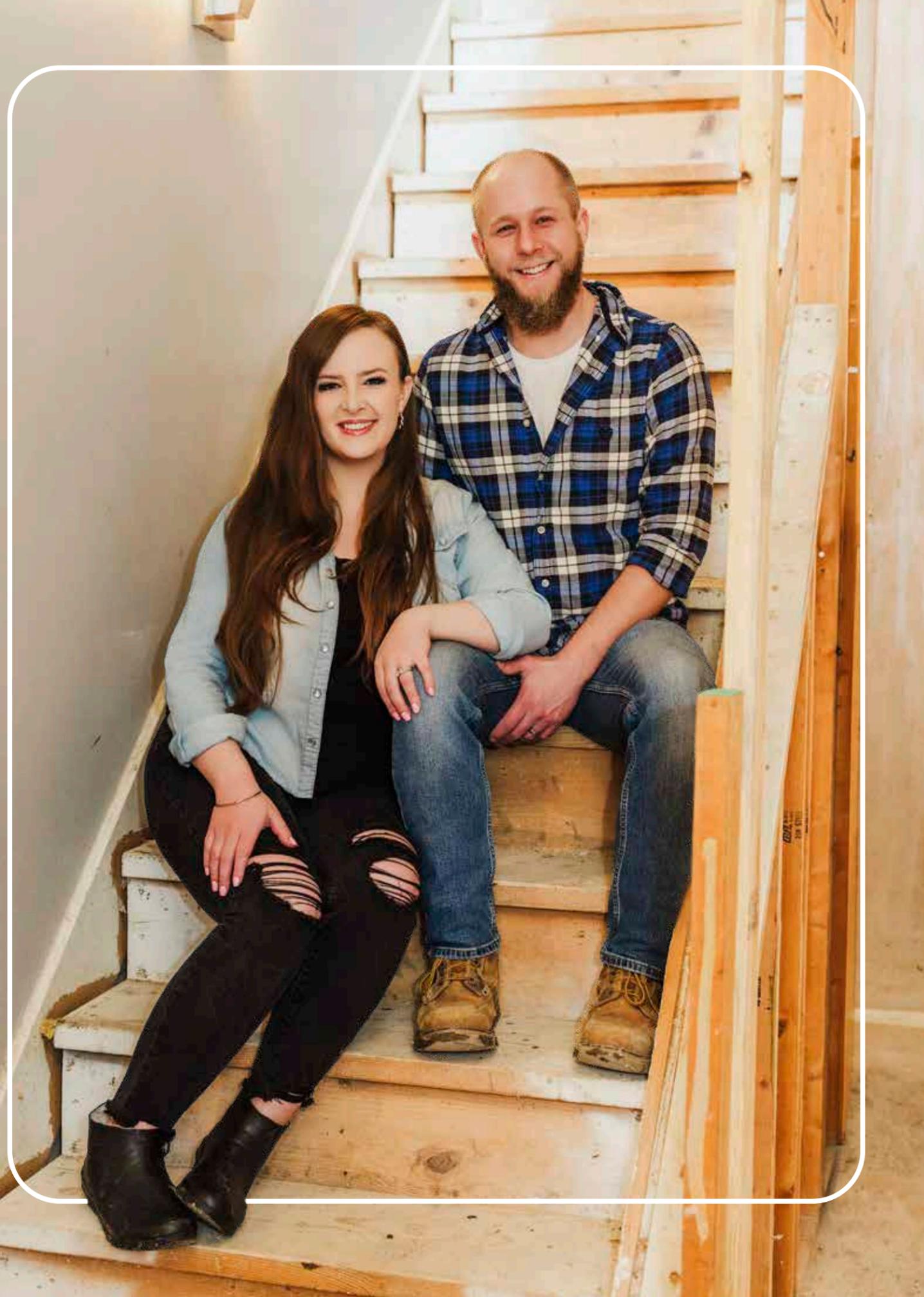
In a field where “thick skin” is often cited as the ultimate requirement for survival, Caitlin has found that her “softness” is actually her greatest competitive advantage. By refusing to ride the roller coaster of the transaction’s

stress, she remains a steady psychological anchor for clients who are often at their most vulnerable. She approaches every new challenge from the many surprises of a foreclosure to the emotional weight of a move, with a problem-solving mindset shaped by years of personal perseverance.

Her soft approach doesn’t mean she is easily pushed; rather, it means she is deeply sensitive to the promptings of her faith and to the needs of those before her. By leaning into her authenticity, Caitlin has built a business where atheists and believers alike feel seen, heard, and protected, proving that in an industry fueled by

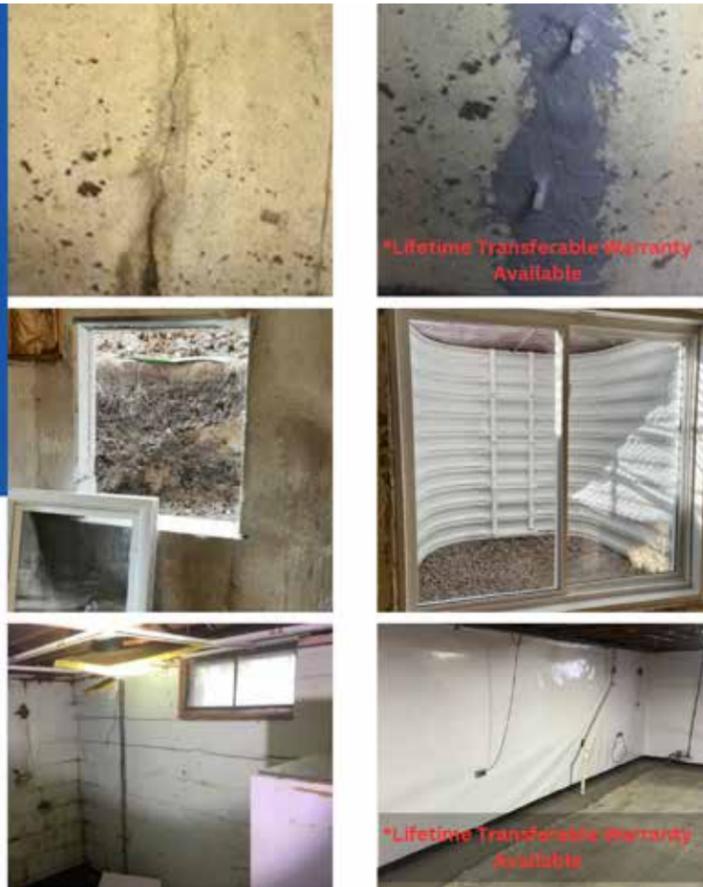
commissions, a heart fueled by grace is the most sustainable model of all.

As she and her husband prepare to welcome their first child this summer, Caitlin views her career and her life through a lens of eternal purpose. To Caitlin, success is a healthy marriage and family, a clear conscience, and the ability to be a conduit for encountering someone else’s stressful season. Caitlin Hoekstra stands as a reminder that you can be compassionate, ethical, and deeply “soft,” while still being a powerhouse who conquers every mountain along your path.



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LESLEY SWEENEY

OF ENCORE SOTHEBY'S INTERNATIONAL REALTY

BY GEORGE GROTHEER
PHOTOS BY ASCEND STUDIOS

There is a specific kind of composure required to manage the logistics of a \$60 million gubernatorial campaign or navigate the intricate financial layers of private equity. For Lesley Sweeney, that composure isn't just a professional byproduct; it is the foundation of her identity as a trusted advisor in real estate markets bridging Indiana and Illinois. Lesley has positioned herself as a consultant who treats every transaction with the precision of a CFO and the intuition of a seasoned strategist.

Lesley's accounting degree from the University of Notre Dame, followed by a Master of Business Administration from the University of Chicago, speaks to a mind that craves data and structural integrity. She navigated her MBA while working full-time, an early testament to her ability to balance heavy workloads with long-term goals. However, her transition into real estate in 2016 was driven by a deeply human necessity: the desire to be "the architect of her own time." After years of 7:30 AM starts and the rigid constraints of corporate life that made attending a simple parent-teacher conference a challenge, she sought a path that allowed her to be present for the moments she deemed non-negotiable for her three children.

Today, she bridges the state line, leveraging a dual license that offers her a rare vantage point. Having owned a home in Valparaiso since 2015, she understands the organic pull that draws Illinois

residents toward Northwest Indiana. "Covering two markets gives me increased perspective," Lesley notes. She watches as the micro-markets of Northwest Indiana perform in a different rhythm than the high-rises of Lincoln Park or Lakeview, using that data to tailor marketing strategies that are as analytical as they are aesthetic. Whether a client is looking for a primary residence or a second home along the lake, Lesley's ability to hear what they need across both states makes her an invaluable asset. She provides maximum exposure through the Sotheby's

International Realty platform, ensuring that every listing, regardless of price point, receives a high-end, thorough marketing rollout.

DEFINING SUCCESS THROUGH SERVICE: THE LESLEY SWEENEY PERSPECTIVE

Lesley's understanding of "home" is informed by a passport that has seen over 30 countries. She has traveled internationally since she was eight. Her global curiosity was sparked by her mother's Indonesian roots and led her to appreciate the diversity of human experience. She recalls her travels to Syria and Cambodia as particularly impressionable, places

that broadened her perspective and opened her eyes to cultures and socio-economic realities vastly different from her own.

These travels provided a reality check that she now imparts to her children, who are 14, 11, and 9. "It shows you just how much we have at home," she says, emphasizing that travel is as much about educational growth as it is about adventure.





This gratitude translates into a consistent commitment to service; Lesley has been a volunteer with Catholic Charities for over 20 years and is deeply involved with the House of the Good Shepherd, supporting survivors of domestic violence. For Lesley, being part of a community means staying engaged and giving back. She shares this value with her children by making 50 bag lunches together during the holidays and dropping them off for those who are hungry.

It's no secret that some professionals view real estate through a competitive lens, but not Lesley. She believes that collaboration pays far higher dividends than cutthroat competition, noting that the stronger the real estate community is, the better the overall service.

This philosophy extends to her internal team as well; alongside her teammate Logan, who provides vital



support in the Indiana market, she ensures that her approach remains highly personalized and data-driven. Lesley encourages newer agents to focus on the long term, advising a three- to five-year plan and emphasizing the importance of observing seasoned professionals to learn the nuances of strategy and client communication.

She views her role as much more than just an agent; she is a guide through the problem-solving and moving parts of every transaction.

Lesley defines success as the moment a client feels truly informed, confident, and supported through a stressful situation. She is a firm believer that delivering a high level of service consistently is the best reward. While she admits that balance is difficult in an industry that can easily take over, she is intentional about setting boundaries and shifting priorities to protect time for her health, family, and hobbies, such as wellness and travel.

It is the quiet reward of knowing that in the midst of a complex transaction that often spans multiple states, she can be the anchor of clarity who helps a family navigate their way home. As she prepares for her next season of growth, including a milestone family trip to Europe to celebrate her parents' 80th birthdays, Lesley continues to focus on improving her skill set every single day. In her world, excellence is not a destination, but an ever evolving journey.




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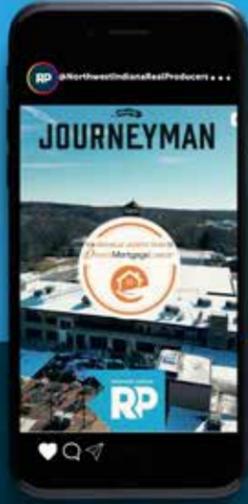
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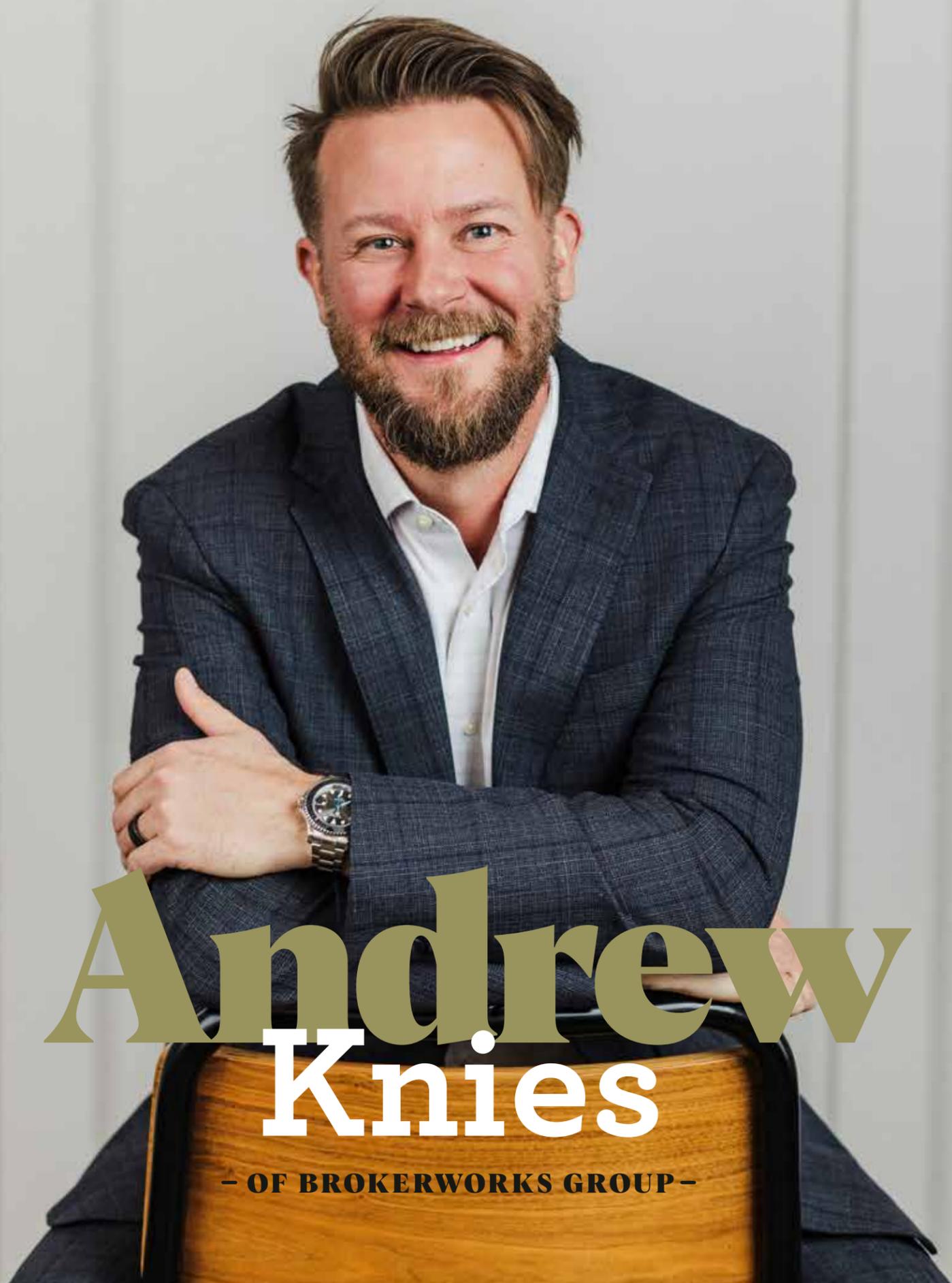
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Andrew Knies

— OF BROKERWORKS GROUP —

Beyond the Rankings: Stewardship Means Leading, Protecting, and Developing Others

BY GIAVONNI DOWNING
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrew Knies would prefer you not start with him.



He'd rather you notice the agents first, the ones who left predictable paychecks to bet on a vision that wasn't guaranteed. He'd rather you look at the families whose lives changed because someone finally believed they were capable of more. He'd rather you understand the work before you ever say his name.

Because for Andrew, leadership has never been about visibility.

It's been about responsibility.

In the spring of 2020, there was a heavy silence of uncertainty. While the world outside came to a grinding halt, Andrew Knies was in the dark, filming basement real estate videos and wrestling with a question that echoes in every entrepreneur's mind: Did I make the wrong choice?

Long before Brokerworks existed and before rankings or production reports ever mattered, Andrew was already working in the background. He rented a single cubicle inside a real estate office while running his own marketing business, absorbing the industry without any intention of joining it. "Once you're around real estate," he says, "it's really hard not to get sucked into it."

In October 2019, he walked away from the security of corporate job offers and went into real estate sales full time for the first time. He calls it his "shut up and sell houses" period. No shortcuts. No brand. Just learning the work from the inside by

doing it. That season became the foundation. It forced him to understand the pressure agents carry, the systems they actually need, and the responsibility that comes with asking people to trust you with their livelihood.

At the start of that journey, the pandemic hit. But for Andrew, the "trench" has always been a place of transformation rather than a pit of despair. It is where theory dies and true leadership is born.

Andrew's story started in Lake Station, where opportunity felt limited. "Nobody was really succeeding. We were kind of all stuck," he recalls. The "switch" first flipped at Fox Photography, a small family business owned by Scott and Nancy Fox in Hobart. There, he watched a business owner who didn't just manage employees but poured into them, teaching a young kid from humble beginnings about investments and the architecture of a dream.

That early mentorship would eventually lead to the formation of Brokerworks Group. Andrew didn't stumble into real estate for the love of the sale; he was sucked into it by the human element. Starting on the staff side in 2012, he found his calling not in the buyers, sellers, or houses themselves, but in the people who decided to sell them. He watched careers turn around and lives rewritten by a 45-hour course and a lot of grit.

"What some people may not realize is the level of excellence you must demand

“

My agents
deserve guidance
based on **real
experience,**
not guesswork.”



of yourself when others are counting on you,” Andrew says. For him, success isn’t a ranking report; it’s the “unfathomable” increase in income for a family that was once just scraping by.

By January 2023, the stakes reached a fever pitch. Andrew transitioned his team to an independent brokerage just as interest rates spiked. He wasn’t just responsible for his own family anymore; he had a roster of “younger agents” and their families looking to him for a signal.

Among them were people who had decided to follow his vision: Madison, who left the comfort of a big-brand logo; Danek, a former teacher with five children and a sixth on the way; and Caylie, who walked away from guaranteed leads.

“I took that challenge seriously,” Andrew says. His response wasn’t to retreat into a corner office. Instead, he stayed in production. “I

always want to talk from the trenches,” he explains. “If I’m going to recommend a tool or a system, I want to test it myself first. My agents deserve guidance based on real experience, not guesswork. That year we met every week in person to stay on top of the market. That year every one of our businesses grew.”

In just three years, Brokerworks cracked the top 10 in Northwest Indiana by sales volume. More impressively, when comparing the top 20 brokerages, they rank third in “deals per agent,” a testament to focus on development over recruitment.

If the brokerage is the engine, the fuel comes from the quiet miles Andrew runs alongside his wife and business partner, Misty. Their life is a series of “calculated risks” and “hill repeats.” Andrew describes himself as someone who “learned how to run by chasing her,” a metaphor that extends far beyond the pavement.

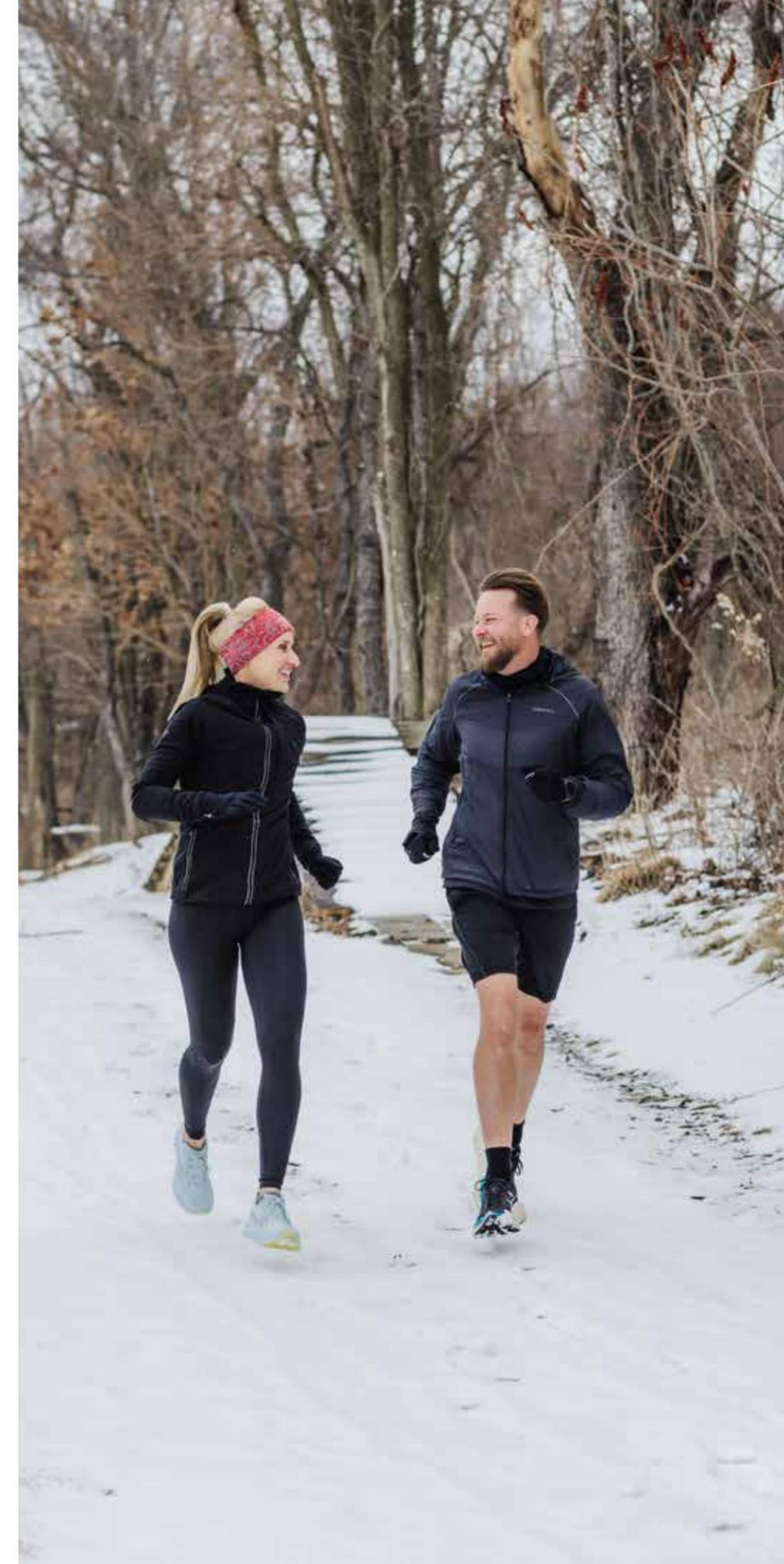
Misty, a seasoned athlete with over ten Boston Marathons, a hundred miler, and countless other achievements under her belt, is his constant “gut check.” Watching her coach women to find themselves again through fitness is the blueprint Andrew uses in the office. “Having someone as inspiring, hardworking, and frankly demanding of herself gives you no choice but to be your best,” he says.

Their vacations are rarely sedentary. Even in the Caribbean, Misty finds a way to build in runs or beach workouts, just as easily as she does logging miles through Colorado’s Front Range. This discipline, with the 4:30 AM wake-ups and the refusal to take a day for granted, is what allows him to balance the real estate day.

Despite the rapid agent production growth and the expansion into La Porte and Highland, Andrew remains allergic to the “bougie” pretenses of the industry. He describes the Brokerworks culture with a grounded simplicity: “We’re regular people selling regular houses to other regular people”.

This is most evident at their annual Chili Cookoff, where 800 clients and agents gather at County Line Orchard in a barn. It’s not a gala; it’s a community. For Andrew, this is the “bigger purpose.” It’s why he works so that their granddaughters, Ansley, Everly and the new baby on the way, see that whatever they want is possible.

“Success to me is simple: if an agent sets a goal, I want to be the broker that takes that seriously and helps them achieve it,” he says. Whether he’s helping navigate a developer through ballooning costs or pacing a rookie through their first 20 deals, Andrew Knies is doing exactly what he was meant to do: leading by example, one step and one transaction at a time.





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