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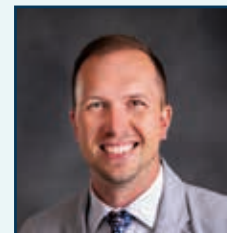
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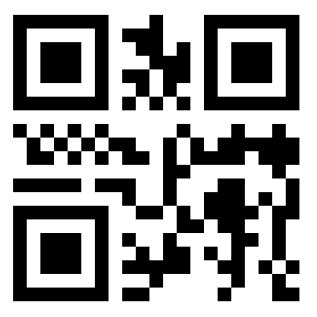
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BRETTON

Vredevoogd

Bringing Efficiency to the Forefront

PHOTOS BY JACOB HARR WITH PHOTOREAL

Bretton “Brett” Vredevoogd grew up immersed in the world of real estate, but for years, he had little interest in joining it. His mother, Pat Vredevoogd Combs, was deeply involved in the industry at the local, state, and national levels, making real estate a constant presence throughout his childhood. Despite the exposure, Brett envisioned a different path for himself.

“I grew up in real estate, and I really didn’t want to be an agent,” he admitted. “It wasn’t something that interested me for some reason.”

At Hope College, Brett studied communications with a focus on nonprofit and environmental work. After graduation, he moved to Bozeman, Montana, where he spent years working in residential construction. There, he learned firsthand how homes were built and gained exposure to innovative building practices focused on energy efficiency and sustainability.

“When I learned how to build and got these jobs out west, I was able to build for contractors who were doing super innovative things,” he recalled.

As Brett worked on homes throughout Montana, he began noticing something that would eventually shape his real estate career: Despite growing consumer interest in energy efficiency, very few people within the residential real estate industry seemed equipped to explain or market those features. “I’d walk through the NAR expo with my mother and I’d be like, ‘How come no one is talking about energy efficiency in residential real estate?’” he said.

Eventually, a different motivation brought Brett back to Michigan. While construction had provided valuable experience, the work was physically demanding and offered limited long-term financial upside. At the same time, starting a family prompted Brett to revisit advice his mother had shared years earlier.

“I remembered feeling like my mom’s maybe the only person I know



who has said she loves her job,” he said. “I do like this construction job, but I don’t love this job.”

Brett’s mother encouraged him to move back home, learn the business, and work alongside her. The opportunity to build a career while raising a family closer to relatives felt like the right move. “We thought it would be foolish to not jump on that chance and also be closer to family while we were raising kids,” he shared.

Today, Brett has built a business at Five Star Real Estate that blends traditional real estate expertise with a passion for

sustainability. While he serves buyers and sellers across West Michigan, he has become known for helping homeowners better understand and market energy-efficient features, including solar systems, insulation upgrades, and high-performance building components. “I am under the impression that it does give you a return on the investment, and I’m going to market it,” Brett said.

Brett’s commitment to the niche has led him to work closely with organizations focused on energy efficiency and home performance. He has also certified dozens of homes through programs designed to highlight

features that many consumers — and even some agents — often overlook.

Brett will admit that building a sustainability-focused business has not always been easy. He readily acknowledges that environmental features are not often top of mind for buyers and sellers in West Michigan. Even so, he remains committed to educating consumers and advocating for homeowners who have invested heavily in improving their properties.

“It is a very heartbreaking thing when I see an extremely energy-efficient house with solar go on the market and they don’t mention anything about the solar or the energy-efficient aspects,” he said.

Beyond his commitment to sustainable housing, Brett values another aspect of the profession: flexibility. Whether he’s working from a campsite in Colorado or negotiating a deal while traveling with his family, the career has allowed him to stay present during some of life’s most important moments. “It does allow me to have this ultimate flexibility where I can be there for them all the time,” he said.

Outside of real estate, Brett’s greatest source of pride is his family. He and his wife have three daughters — ages 15, 11, and 8. Whether attending dance competitions, softball games, basketball games, or musical performances, much of Brett’s time revolves around supporting the people he loves most. His oldest daughter has even

developed a passion for music and often performs alongside Brett’s band. “It’s really cool to see and very fun to play music with her,” he shared.

As he looks ahead to the future, Brett hopes to continue growing awareness around sustainable housing while helping more homeowners understand the value of energy-efficient improvements. One of his goals is to increase the number of solar-equipped homes he represents each year and ensure those features are properly documented in the MLS. By doing so, he hopes to provide appraisers with the comparable sales

data they need to accurately recognize the value of solar and energy-efficient improvements at the point of sale. He also remains committed to educating consumers about opportunities to improve both their homes and their long-term financial well-being.

Though he once resisted the idea of becoming a real estate agent, Brett has built a career that reflects both his personal values and professional passions. As he continues advocating for energy-efficient homes, he remains focused on helping families make informed decisions while staying present for his own. ▀



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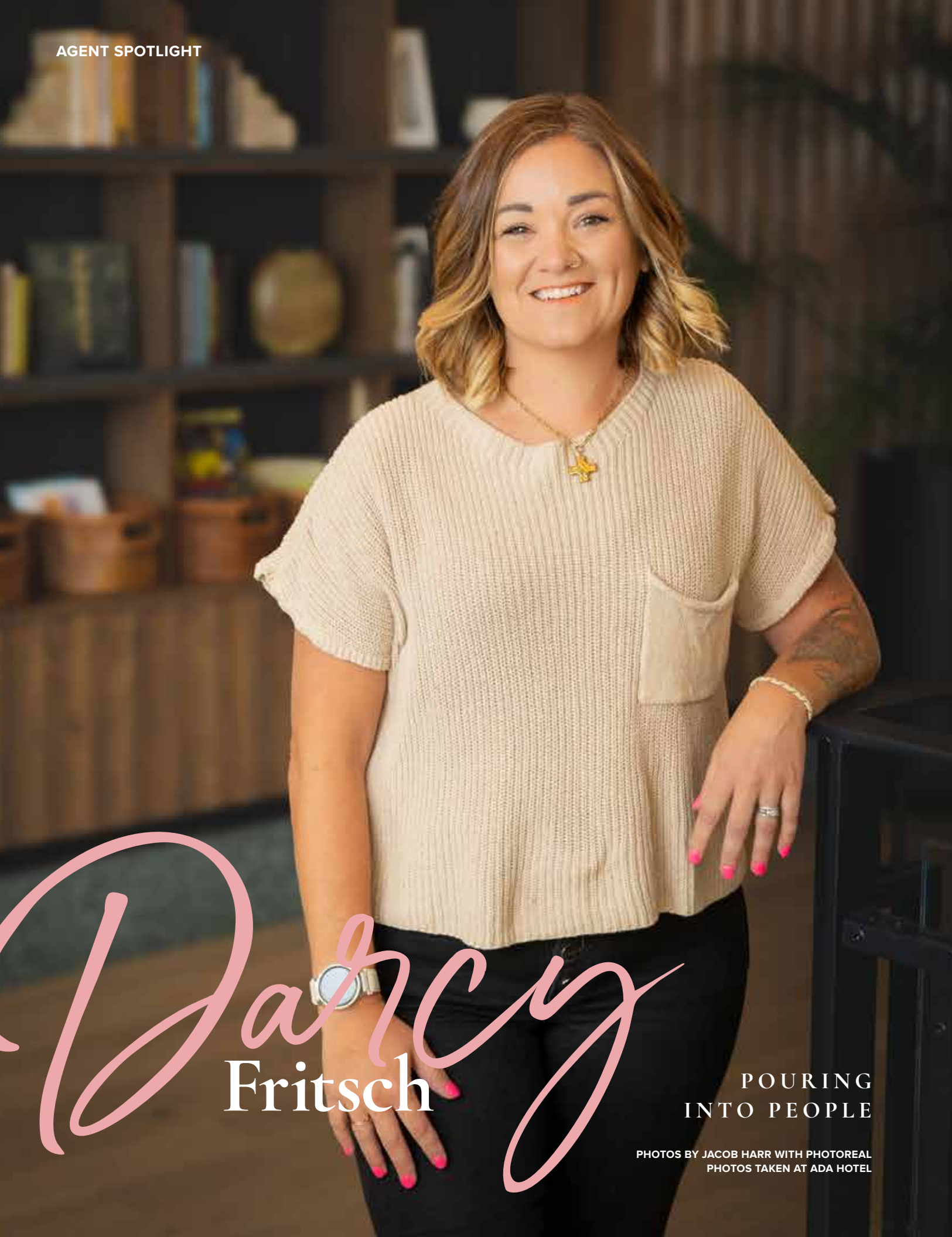
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Fritsch

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Darcy Fritsch has built her real estate career around helping people feel at home. Clients throughout West Michigan have come to trust her because of her perseverance, authenticity, and commitment to her community.

Darcy's path to real estate wasn't straightforward. After earning her degree in criminal justice with minors in psychology and juvenile justice from Grand Valley State University, she struggled to find work in her field. "Everybody wanted experience, and I couldn't get experience if I couldn't get a job," she explained. While she waited for opportunities to open up, she worked at White Flame Brewing Co. in Hudsonville — a place that would later become the unlikely foundation of her future career.

As life shifted, Darcy began searching for something more stable. "I was pregnant with my daughter and thought, 'I can't work at a bar for the rest of my life. I love it, but I've got to do something,'" she said. After years of hesitation, Darcy decided to try real estate in 2014. She took her courses, passed the exam, and began her new chapter while still working at the brewery. Her early clients came directly from those brewery relationships.

By the end of her second year in the industry, Darcy was contemplating giving up on her real estate career, but then her first break came at just the right time. "One of our customers at the brewery needed to sell his house," she explained. "I had told him I was an agent the year before, and when he came back, it gave me my chance." That opportunity marked the beginning of a thriving sales career that had its share of slow starts, self-doubt, and determination.



“It took a while, obviously,” Darcy added. “I’m not good at promoting myself, but I just kept going.”

Darcy’s persistence has since paid off. After working with several brokerages throughout her career, she found her home at 616 Realty, where she now serves as an associate broker. “It’s such a good culture,” she said. “Sometimes you just know where you’re meant to stay.” Her steady production and loyal client base eventually landed her among the top 200 agents in the Grand Rapids region. “For me, it has always been about helping people, not the statistics,” Darcy explained.

Amid her real estate growth, Darcy and her husband Dan launched a coffee roasting company called Quadrum Coffee Roasters during the pandemic. What started as a home hobby quickly became a full-fledged business. “Dan went down that rabbit hole during COVID,” Darcy said with a laugh. “We ended up buying a small roaster, started giving coffee to friends, and everyone said, ‘This is actually really good — you should sell it.’” Their venture grew into a brick-and-mortar shop operating out of White Flame Brewing Co., the same place where Darcy’s real estate career had quietly begun. Today, the coffee business supplies several local companies, including Journey Construction Group, Rockford Construction, Medtronic, and 616 Ministries.

Real estate, coffee roasting, and family life keep Darcy busy, but she wouldn’t have it any other way. Darcy and Dan have been married for 16 years and

have two daughters — Quinn, 13, and Norah, 10 — who keep their parents busy with softball and volleyball. Family time often means spending weekends at Sandy Pines, golfing, or exploring new vacation spots each year. “Traveling is important to us,” Darcy said. “It’s how we make sure to slow down together.”

For Darcy, the meaning of home was shaped by a childhood spent moving from place to place. Those experiences inspired her to create the kind of stability for her own children that she never had. “We rented everywhere, so for me, owning a home meant everything,” Darcy said. “I wanted my kids to grow up knowing what home feels like.”

Darcy’s empathy carries into her work with clients, especially first-time buyers. “I want people to know what they’re getting into and feel confident in their purchase,” she explained. “I didn’t have that when we bought our first home, so I make sure my clients do.”

Darcy defines success through the relationships she builds and her commitment to improving each year. “Every year I just try to be better than the last,” she said. “My goals aren’t always about numbers; they’re about staying connected and helping people.”

Whether she’s handing a client the keys to a first home or serving a freshly roasted cup of coffee, Darcy brings the same care and thoughtfulness to every interaction. It’s her steady commitment to people that continues to define both her career and the life she has built. ■



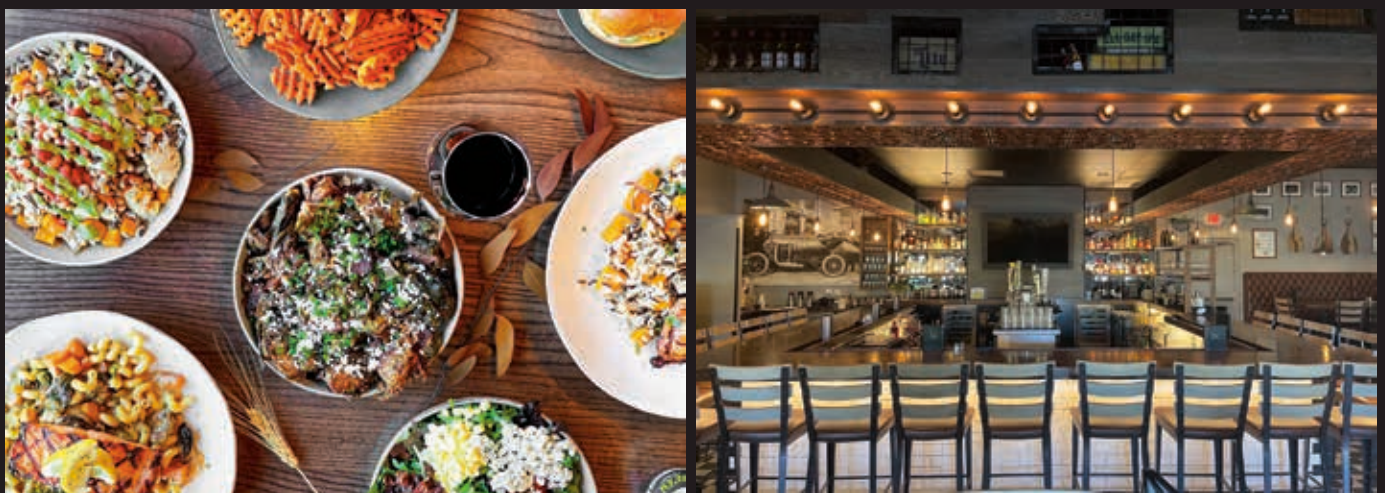
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For David Geurink, real estate was a dream he had carried with him for years. “My entire adult life, I’ve always wanted to sell houses,” he said. Although David wasn’t sure how to break into the industry, a conversation at church, followed by an unexpected meeting with a friend who worked in real estate, set everything in motion.



At the time, David was climbing the corporate ladder and facing the prospect of relocating for the next step in his career. He and his wife, Lori, knew that moving their four daughters — including Olivia, who has a rare genetic condition called tuberous sclerosis — would not be the right decision for their family. “We have really good resources in West Michigan,” David explained. “Moving my family while I traveled every week just wasn’t going to cut it.”

After earning his real estate license, David continued working his corporate job while learning the business. During a church sermon about asking God for guidance, he prayed for a sign that real estate was something he was supposed to do. “I said, ‘God, if I’m supposed to do this full-time, please give me a million-dollar deal,’” he recalled. David knew a million-dollar deal would be a clear sign because he understood that sales of that size don’t happen very often. Around 35 days later, he closed on a \$1.5 million house on Lake Macatawa. “God gave me so much more than I was asking for,” David said.

The experience gave David the confidence to leave the security of corporate America behind. Despite warnings from friends and colleagues who questioned his decision, he never looked back. “My wife was 100% in my corner,” he said. “If you have your spouse completely behind you, you can run through walls.”

For David, the leap of faith paid off. He sold 16 homes during his first year in business and nearly doubled that total the following year. Nowadays, after nearly a decade in the industry, he consistently closes around 45 transactions annually. Along the way, David served in leadership roles at his previous brokerages before finding his home at Five Star Real Estate. “This is my landing spot. I’m happy here,” he said.

While many agents focus on building large teams, David has intentionally taken a different path as an associate broker. “I like the connection with my clients. I don’t want to talk to you and then hand you off to somebody else,” he shared. “Most of the time, they become friends. You kind of miss them after the transaction is over.”

Recently, David welcomed fellow agent and associate broker Dave Bultman to his team in a partnership that grew out of years of friendship and mutual respect. Together, along with administrative and marketing support, they’ve built a business that allows David to continue providing personalized service while creating more balance for his family. “I realized it would be nice to have someone I trust who could help cover for me once in a while,” he said.

David credits much of his success to a referral-based business model built on relationships rather than purchased leads. “I believe in taking care of people,” he said. “If you do that well,

they’ll tell their friends and family.” His commitment to service even extends to something as simple as answering his phone. “If I’m not in a meeting, I pick up every single time,” he added. “You never know who’s calling.”

David spent nearly three decades serving his community as a firefighter and medical first responder, including years alongside his career in real estate. His service began on Pfizer’s fire brigade before continuing with local fire area departments, ultimately totaling 28 years. “Serving people has always been important to me,” he said.

David’s family is the foundation that guides everything he does. He and Lori have been married for 27 years and are proud parents to four daughters — Olivia, 26, Isabel, 24, Ali-Grace, 21, and Eliza, 16. Their oldest daughter, Olivia, requires ongoing care and support due to her genetic condition. “She needs 24/7 care, but she has her wonderful mother Lori, who is a stay-at-home mom and cares for her. She also attends day camp at an amazing place called Benjamin’s Hope in Holland, where she can spend time with friends and participate in activities,” David shared. Ali-Grace works as a camp counselor at Camp Geneva during the summers and will teach preschool during the school year. The Geurinks’ journey has also included adoption, with Isabel joining their family from Guatemala and Eliza from South Korea.

“IT HASN’T ALWAYS BEEN EASY, but I’m still here.”

Life at home revolves around making memories together, even if their adventures look different than most. “We’re a little limited because of Olivia’s health,” David explained. Whether it’s taking day trips, fishing with his daughters, snowmobiling in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, or a quiet annual getaway with Lori, he treasures their time together. “Sometimes it’s the simple things that mean the most,” David said.

The real estate market continues to evolve, but David believes consistency and professionalism never go out of style. He encourages new agents to embrace the work required to build a lasting career. “If you don’t want to work evenings and weekends, you probably shouldn’t be in real estate,” he admitted. “That’s when your clients need you.”

As he reflects on his career, David sees every chapter of his journey as part of a bigger purpose. “It hasn’t always been easy, but I’m still here,” he said. David’s business continues to demonstrate his commitment to faith, family, and service, with relationships at the center of every transaction and every connection he builds. ▀





2025

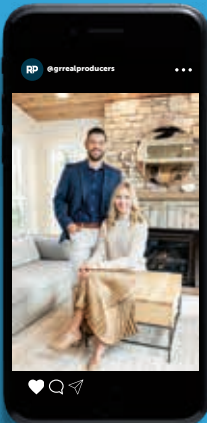
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