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VANESSA RITSEMA
Going Once, Going Twice:
Expanding the Vision

Partner Spotlight
ADAM HOOTEN WITH MERIDIANIAN TITLE
More Than A Closing

Kelly Dyksen

Putting Down Roots to Grow

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Account Manager
574.855.8980
ccotter@meridiantitle.com

Heather King
Account Manager
574.780.2442
hking@meridiantitle.com

Stephanie Whitaker
Senior Account Manager
574.855.8974
swhitaker@meridiantitle.com

Adam Hooten
Senior Account Manager
574.298.4695
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Owner/Publisher



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Videography



Megan Williamson
Photography



Erica McClellan
Photography



Jennifer Myers
Photography

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Long After the Keys Are Handed Over

November has a way of reminding us what really matters.

In our business, it's easy to measure a year in closings and volume. But every story in this issue makes the same point: the transaction is only the beginning. The relationship is what lasts.

Just ask this month's cover star, Kelly Dyksen. "Success in real estate is being remembered after the keys are handed over," she says. Most of her business now comes from repeat clients and referrals, and in February 2025 she and Jared Miller launched Rooted Realty, a brokerage built on trustworthy, drama-free people who treat others well. Her advice to all of us: "Be deeply 'Rooted' but never afraid to grow!"

Vanessa Ritsema learned the same lesson from her mom, watching her give her whole heart to her clients. As a second-generation Realtor, Vanessa believes success isn't reflected in sales volume or production trophies; it's reflected in human impact. Whether she's holding the hand of a grieving client facing an entire estate or standing behind the auctioneer microphone at a charity event, her goal is to leave every person, property, and situation better than she found it.

And our Partner Spotlight introduces us to Adam Hooten of Meridian Title. Twenty-two years in, Adam says it took him a while to realize he wasn't selling an object; he was selling a service and a relationship. His philosophy: "We want to earn the next transaction—not just close the one we're working on."

Relationships over transactions. That's the thread that ties this issue together.

It's also what made our Fall Barn Party on September 24 such a great night. Thank you to everyone who came out, and a special thank-you to the partners who helped make it happen.

And as always, thank you to our preferred partners. Your support makes this magazine possible and lets us keep telling the stories of the people who make Michiana real estate what it is.

As you gather around the table this Thanksgiving, take a moment to appreciate the people behind your business. As Adam puts it, "It is never just about one person."

Here's to the relationships that last long after the closing.

Jeff Bliler
Publisher
Michiana Real Producers



Kelly Dyksen

Putting Down Roots to Grow

BY JESS WELLAR
PHOTOS BY MEGAN WILLIAMSON PHOTOGRAPHY

“Success in real estate is being remembered after the keys are handed over,” Kelly Dyksen reflects. “It’s when a client calls you years later because they trust you, sends their kids to you when they are ready to buy their first home or gives your name to a friend without hesitation. Sales and numbers tell you how much business you did but those lasting relationships tell you how well you did.”

Those relationships have carried Kelly a long way since she took a chance on real estate eight years ago. Last year alone, she closed 25 transactions. But lately, she’s been channeling that same people-first mindset into something bigger.

In February 2025, Kelly and managing broker Jared Miller launched Rooted Realty, a remote Elkhart County brokerage that has already grown to eight agents. As co-owner and team leader, Kelly now gets to balance the business she loves with helping other independent agents find their footing — and she’s having plenty of fun doing both!

Finding Her Lane

Raised on the island of Alameda, California, Kelly came to Indiana to attend Bethel University, earning a degree in American Sign Language-English Interpreting and meeting her future husband, Tom, along the way. She spent four years interpreting in schools and the community before the unpredictability of being on call became difficult with young children.

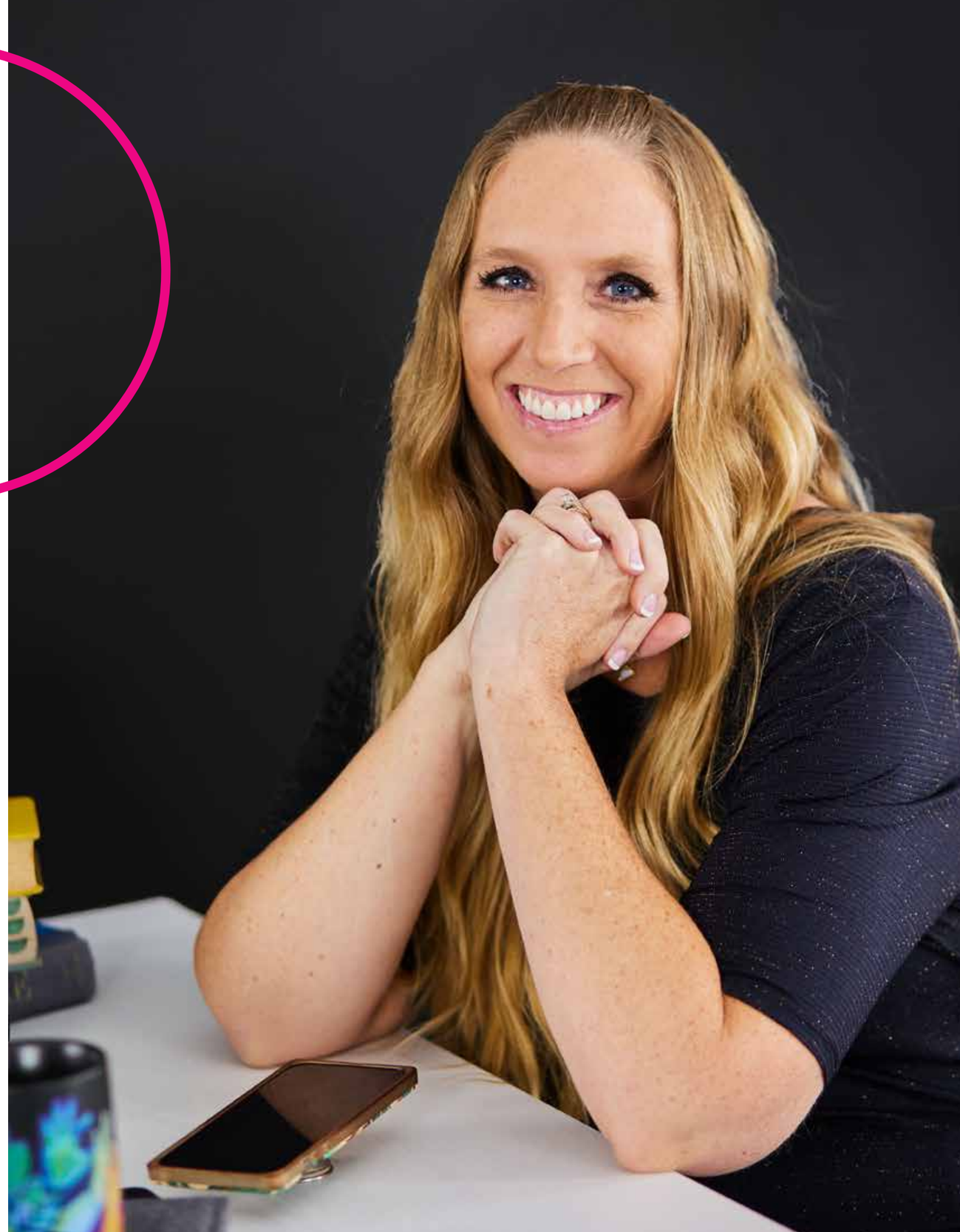


Next came entrepreneurship. Kelly ran a swim lesson business that taught roughly 160 children each summer, hiring high school and college swimmers to help with private and group lessons. She also coached several local swim teams, experiences that kept her doing what has always come naturally: working with people.

By 2018, Kelly was a stay-at-home mom who had spent years closely following the Elkhart County housing market simply because she enjoyed it. When selling her own home prompted her to pepper her agent with questions, she finally decided to give the profession a shot.

“It just took a few transactions to really understand how it all worked,” Kelly says of finding her footing. “It was a deep dive down and then it became more natural, but I have always loved working with people and talking on the phone!”

There was no easing into the new career. Kelly landed her first buyer within two weeks — a friend searching for an Airbnb — and took whatever business came her way as she worked to understand the industry firsthand.







That first transaction also led to an important relationship. Amy Troyer was the listing agent on the property and, after working with Kelly, invited her to join her company.

“Amy didn’t even realize I was new since sales and working with people came naturally” Kelly recalls. “We really connected and she took me under her wing and was an amazing trainer.”

No Loose Ends

After years of growing her own business, Kelly was ready to create a brokerage where agents could enjoy more control over theirs. She and Jared opened Rooted Realty with a deliberately lean model, allowing agents to keep more of what they earn.

“As much work as we do, we both felt agents should keep more money in their pocket and have more freedom to decide how to invest it,” Kelly elaborates.

However, independence hasn’t come at the expense of connection. Although Rooted doesn’t operate from a traditional office, its agents stay engaged through meetings, lunches, events and celebrations. Everyone runs an individual business, but questions, showings, marketing ideas and even client coverage during vacations are readily shared.

Growth remains welcome, provided prospective agents fit a culture Kelly and Jared are protective of: trustworthy, drama-free people who treat others well, regardless of whether they’re top producers.

Kelly believes that a supportive environment also strengthens the experience clients receive.

“It helps that our brokerage environment is so collectively friendly and fun too!” she adds with a smile.

Kelly brings that same combination of warmth and urgency to her personal production. She freely admits she hates a to-do list, which translates into quick follow-through, consistent





communication and a hands-on approach from beginning to end.

“Being able to work well with everybody has been my biggest differentiator,” she shares. “I click with people easily to build up that trust.”

“A majority of my business is now repeat clients and referral based, I don’t do a lot of advertising,” she continues. “That means the world to me, that people keep coming back after such a great experience while telling others.”

Home Is Here

More than 25 years after moving from California to Indiana, Kelly has fully embraced Elkhart County as home. She and Tom recently celebrated their 21st wedding anniversary; he’s also a master craftsman who creates custom furniture, including pieces found throughout Hotel Elkhart, and together they’re raising four children: Kaden (19), Kenton (15), Nolan (10), and Norah (9).

With a career that can easily spill into evenings and weekends, Kelly makes a conscious effort to protect time with her loved ones.

“It’s an intentional priority to truly be present in those moments and incredibly important to me,” she emphasizes.

Summers often mean swimming in the pool, heading to St. Joe for a beach day, visiting waterparks, or traveling back to California to see the children’s grandparents. Sundays are frequently reserved for extended family in Indiana, while basketball season finds Kelly enthusiastically cheering on her younger boys. She also enjoys supporting local spots such as favorites Afuri Ramen and Mainstreet Roasters, grabbing coffee, shopping with the kids, and spending time with friends, while a cruise remains high on her travel wish list.

Giving back is woven into her family life as well. The Dyksens are involved with Greene Road Church, where they help with children’s ministries; additionally, they pitch in with their school’s annual auction and fundraiser, while supporting She Found His Grace, CRU, and Ratio Christi.

Rooted, Not Settled

With Rooted Realty entering its second year, Kelly isn’t interested in growth simply for the sake of headcount. She wants to develop a strong group of independent agents who represent the brokerage well, truly enjoy working together, and have the freedom and support to create successful businesses of their own.

Meanwhile, Kelly has ambitions for her personal business, too, including meeting more people and becoming increasingly connected throughout the local community. Watching Rooted’s agents learn and succeed has added another dimension to a career she already loved, giving her someone else’s milestones to celebrate alongside her own.

“Be deeply ‘Rooted’ but never afraid to grow!” Kelly concludes. “To me, this is what the business is all about. Stay rooted in your community, build genuine connections with people and invest in the relationships around you while always being willing to learn and grow.”

“Being able to work well with everybody has been my biggest differentiator. I click with people easily to build up that trust.”





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MORE THAN A CLOSING

Adam Hooten
WITH MERIDIAN TITLE

PHOTOS BY MEGAN WILLIAMSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Adam Hooten's 22 Years of Relationships, Service & Doing Whatever It Takes

Twenty-two years ago, Adam Hooten walked into an interview at Meridian Title Corporation without really knowing what Meridian Title did.

He certainly didn't know it would become the place where he would build a career spanning more than two decades.

At the time, Adam was raising a family, finishing his college degree at IUSB and working in commercial construction. When construction slowed and he was laid off, an unexpected opportunity came through a mutual friend at Meridian Title. Adam's wife, Dana, happened to be arranging a playdate for their daughters with her when the possibility of an interview came up.

Adam went in prepared for all the standard interview questions.

They never came.

"I was ready for the 'Where do you see yourself in five years?' or 'What are your strengths and weaknesses?' questions," Adam remembers. "Instead, I was basically told what the job was, and I got a call later that day asking when I could start."

He did.

And 22 years later, Adam is still there.

Today, Adam serves as Senior Account Manager for Meridian Title Corporation, a full-service title insurance and real estate settlement company headquartered in South Bend. With 41 offices and 247 employees across Indiana, Michigan and Illinois, Meridian is licensed in 11 states and can facilitate transactions nationwide through its network.

But ask Adam what the company really provides, and his answer goes far beyond title searches, insurance, escrow and closings.

It's about relationships.

"It took me a while to really understand that I wasn't selling an object," Adam says. "I was selling a service and a relationship."

That realization has shaped the way he has approached his career ever since.

For Adam, Meridian isn't there simply to get another file across the finish line. The goal is to become the kind of partner real estate professionals know they can turn to when something gets complicated.

"Meridian Title is not just another title company," he says. "We are a business partner designed to make transactions easier. Communication matters to us, and we want to help solve problems, not just process paperwork."

His philosophy is simple: "We want to earn the next transaction—not just close the one we're working on."

Whatever It Takes

That mindset can be traced back long before Adam entered the title industry.

Born and raised in South Bend, Adam grew up watching his parents work hard for their family. His mother stayed home raising Adam and his siblings until they reached high school age, then returned to school and became a nurse. His father spent his career in construction and often worked side jobs at night to make ends meet and give his family





opportunities—including vacations and experiences together.

“They are my role models,” Adam says. “I watched them do whatever it took to get the job done.”

That example became the foundation for Adam’s own work ethic and his “whatever it takes” approach to serving others.

After attending Ball State, Adam graduated from IUSB with a double major in Marketing and Management. Yet some of the most important lessons of his career have come from the people around him—and the relationships he has built along the way.

“The longer I am in my role, the more I enjoy taking on the difficult questions or problems,” he says. “I love to help people.”

That might mean helping a real estate professional navigate an unexpected issue, supporting a client through a complicated transaction or simply standing in a Meridian lobby and watching someone experience one of life’s biggest milestones.

“I love talking with everyone in our lobby during a closing and seeing the excitement on faces when they are purchasing their first home.”

Adam is also quick to redirect the spotlight toward the people working beside him.

He credits Meridian’s Elkhart and Mishawaka teams—and particularly its escrow professionals—for much of what makes the company successful.

“The escrow staff truly are the backbone of our company,” he says. “I could not do what I do without all of them.”

> “I WAS SELLING A **SERVICE AND A RELATIONSHIP.**

Staying Ahead in a Changing Industry

After more than two decades in title, Adam has watched the industry evolve dramatically. Today, one of the biggest challenges he sees is the intersection of technology, artificial intelligence and increasingly sophisticated fraud.

As fraud tactics evolve, so must the safeguards designed to stop them.

“We have had to come up with additional safety measures to avoid and protect everyone, and each day it feels like it changes,” Adam says. “We have to make sure that, as a company and an industry, we can adapt and stay ahead of the ‘bad guys.’”

That ability to adapt—without losing the personal relationships at the center of the business—is part of what Adam believes will continue to matter moving forward.

His personal business philosophy is refreshingly uncomplicated:

“Just be who you are all the time. Honesty goes a long way.”

A Life Built Around People

Adam’s commitment to relationships doesn’t stop when the workday ends.

He serves as Education Chair for both the Elkhart County Board of REALTORS® and South Bend Area REALTORS® education committees. He is also deeply involved with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Elkhart County, serving on the Elkhart Club’s Board of Directors and spending the past two years as president.

For 11 years, Adam has also organized a community blood drive at Meridian Title’s Elkhart office benefiting the South Bend Medical Foundation.

His service has earned him recognition including the Above and Beyond Award from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Elkhart County, the Good Neighbor Award through the Elkhart County Board of REALTORS and Meridian Title’s Performance in Leadership award—an honor voted on by his sales peers.



Ask Adam to brag about those accomplishments, though, and his immediate response is: “I hate this part! It is never just about one person”

It’s perhaps fitting for someone whose story consistently comes back to other people.

And no people matter more to Adam than his family.

He and Dana have been married for nearly 28 years and have four daughters—Cabralin, Analiese, Skylar and Mia—along with two granddaughters. This December, the family is preparing for another milestone: welcoming its first boy.

“My family is my favorite thing ever,” Adam says.

Now empty nesters, Adam and Dana have made travel a priority and share a goal of visiting all 50 states. Earlier this year, they checked Alaska off the list. Whether traveling as a couple or gathering the whole family for dinners, birthdays and holidays, the Hootens prioritize experiences over possessions.

They’ve learned that the most valuable thing they can give one another isn’t something that comes in a box.

“Anyone can buy material things,” Adam says. “But time is something that you can’t purchase, and it is the most important to us.”

It’s a philosophy that fits the way Adam has built his career, too.

After 22 years, the transactions matter—but the people behind them matter more.

And whether he’s helping a Realtor solve a problem, celebrating with a first-time homebuyer, serving his community or traveling somewhere new with his family, Adam continues to live by the lesson he learned watching his parents all those years ago:

Show up. Work hard. Take care of people.

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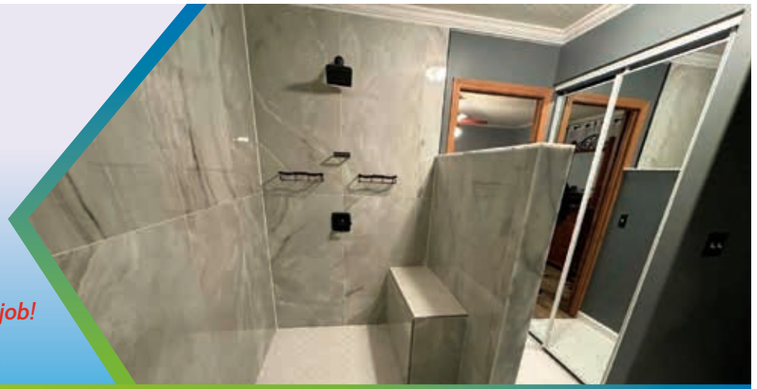


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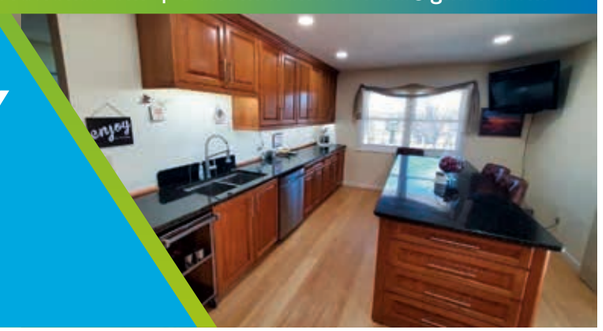
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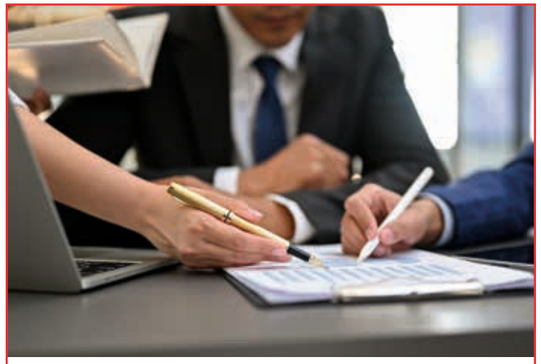


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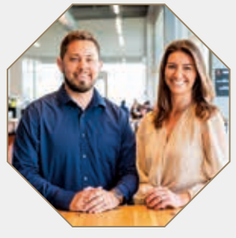
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Vanessa RITSEMA

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GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE: How Vanessa Ritsema Solves Problems & Embraces the Madness

If you take a seat at my table—a privilege I mostly reserve for my handful of "emotional support humans"—you'll quickly learn three things: I love hard, I laugh loud, and I operate at maximum capacity at all times. Raised right here in Michiana, my work ethic was instilled in me from a very young age as it is for many Hoosiers. Between time spent on my grandparents' farm in Edwardsburg and watching both of my parents work tirelessly for everything we had, I learned early on what it means to earn your way and appreciate what you have. Life wasn't always easy, but those early years shaped my core mindset: work hard, put family first, and show up for people when it counts. When I think back on my childhood, it's those lessons interspersed with simple memories like South Bend White Sox games and camping at Turkey Run that still guide me every day.

Managing the Chaos

If you had asked my younger self what my future held, I would have told you physical therapy or sports medicine. That dream died a quick, dramatic death the second I realized one fundamental truth about myself: I *cannot* handle blood. At all.

Instead, real estate found me. I started as a receptionist for a real estate firm during college, which sparked a passion for properties that led me through property management, managing multimillion-dollar portfolios, serving as a Business Manager at Notre Dame, and supporting dozens of agents behind the scenes.

What did all those years teach me? Mostly that my brain simply does not function unless there are ten different things on fire at the same time. I don't just tolerate chaos, I thrive in it. If there are ten moving pieces, three problems to solve, and a tight deadline, that's my sweet spot.

A Second-Generation Calling

My deep-seated drive for this business comes directly from my mom. As a second-generation Realtor, I spent years watching her give her whole heart to her clients. She showed me that real estate extends far beyond buying or selling houses; it's about guiding people through major life moments with genuine care and integrity.

That lesson stayed with me when I got my license in Florida back in 2008, right as the market crashed. As a newlywed working purely on commission, times were tough. Did I consider quitting? Briefly. But giving up is boring! I pushed through, worked property management alongside my regular business, and built resilience. Real estate doesn't necessarily get easier as time goes on. You simply grow stronger, sharper, and better





My goal is to leave every person, property, and situation better than I found it."

equipped to navigate the hurdles.

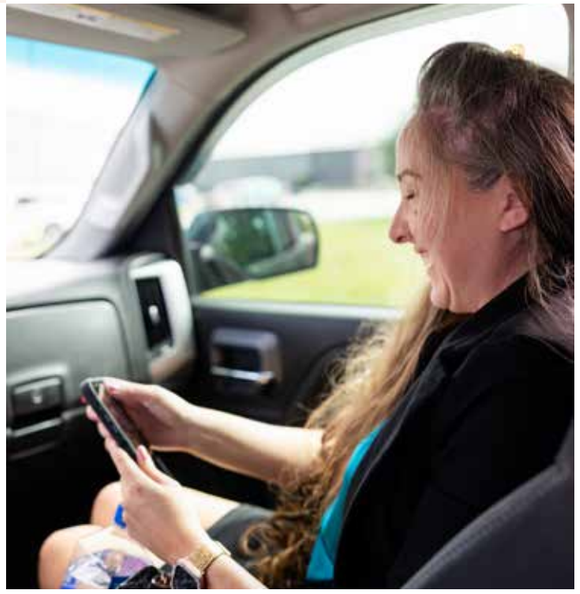
Going Once, Going Twice: Expanding the Vision

A few years ago, my business partner, Wayne Ryan, challenged me to step outside my comfort zone and earn my auctioneer license. Going through auction school was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I was breaking into a *heavily* male-dominated industry that made holding that license feel like a total victory.

Now, let's clear up the biggest myth right now: being an auctioneer is *not* just about talking ridiculously fast or selling distressed properties (though the fast-talking chant is pretty fun). It's a strategic powerhouse tool. Being dual-licensed as both a Realtor and an Auctioneer means I can look at a property or an entire estate and say, *"Here is the exact strategy that will get you the absolute best result."*

Wayne and I recently purchased a commercial warehouse in Mishawaka, and are in the process of transforming it into a full-service hub for live auctions, personal property management, and estate liquidations.





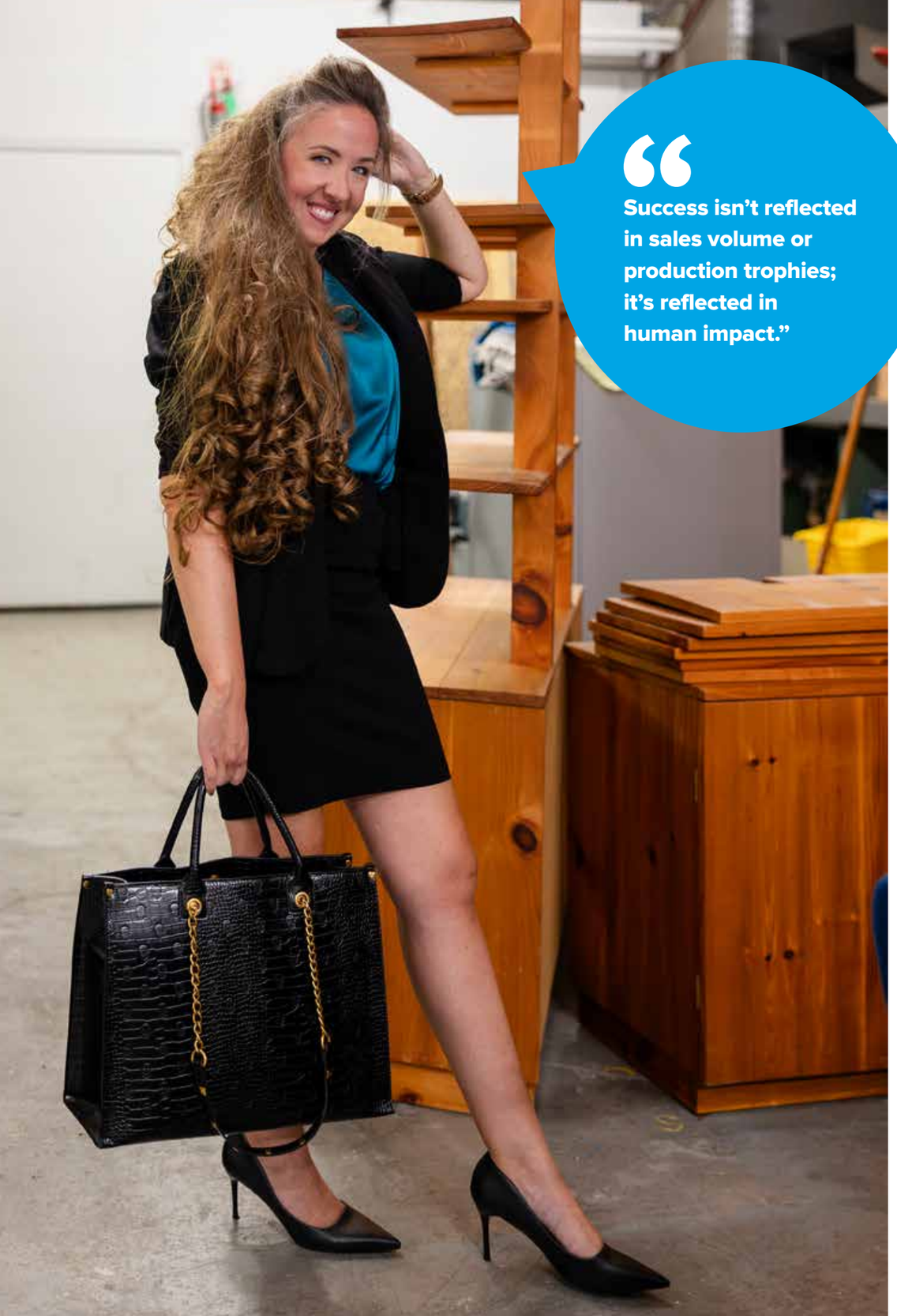












> **Success isn't reflected in sales volume or production trophies; it's reflected in human impact."**



> My goal is to leave every person, property, and situation better than I found it."

in comparison to coming home to them.

Measuring What Matters

Success isn't reflected in sales volume or production trophies; it's reflected in human impact.

- The Joy: Hearing a first-time homebuyer squeal with excitement over the phone when their offer is accepted.
- The Comfort: Holding the hand of a grieving client faced with an entire estate of personal property and saying, *"I'm here. We'll figure this out together."*
- The Service: Standing behind the auctioneer's microphone at a local charity event to raise crucial funds for our community.

My goal is to leave every person, property, and situation better than I found it. So, if you're looking for a dedicated agent who brings heart, strategy, and just the right amount of chaos to the table... Do I hear a bid? Going once, going twice—SOLD!

Perspective, Personality, and the "Why"

While I take my clients and my work very seriously, I refuse to take *myself* too seriously. Life is far too short not to laugh at the absurd moments.

Case in point: I was out in a field putting up real estate signs on agricultural land. The local farmer renting the land drove by on his tractor, looking less-than-thrilled that the ground was listed. Miraculously, moments after he passed, the field's irrigation system went from a gentle mist to a full-on, high-pressure sprinkler assault pointed directly at me! Was it intentional? Maybe. But instead of ruining my day, I was standing in the rain on a sunny day, completely soaked, laughing my head off. You've got to learn to enjoy the splash.

Off the clock, I love being outdoors in my garden, hunting for vintage treasures at estate sales, listening to true-crime podcasts, or spontaneously breaking into song and dance whenever a phrase reminds me of an R&B classic.

Above all else, my family is my anchor. My husband keeps me grounded and handles the background details when life gets chaotic. My son, who has grown up watching me negotiate and now uses those exact tactics on us at home, is my constant motivation. Every award or transaction pales



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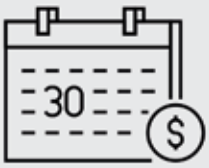
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