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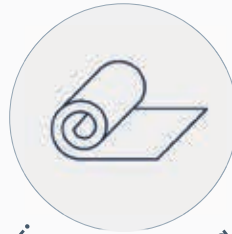
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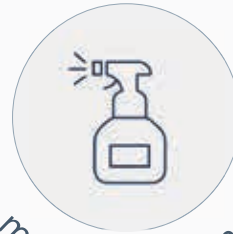
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Jarrod and
Wayne Carr **44** COVER STORY



Katie Wietbrock



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*Jeremy Britt, NMLS ID# 1037337 is authorized to act as an agent of REGIONAL federal credit union and is authorized to represent Member First Mortgage, LLC (MFM). For MLO Licensing Information, please visit MLO Consumer Access.

The Equal Housing Lender logo, featuring a stylized house icon with an equals sign inside, and the words "EQUAL OPPORTUNITY" and "LENDER" below it.

The logo for Regional Federal Credit Union, featuring a stylized blue "R" and "F" intertwined within a circular border.

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The advertisement is set against a background of dark grey roof shingles. At the top center is a logo of a Roman soldier's head in profile, wearing a grey helmet with a prominent orange crest. Below the logo, the text "ROMANS ROOFING" is written in a bold, orange, sans-serif font, with a thin orange horizontal line underneath. Underneath this, "NORTHWEST INDIANA'S REALTOR PARTNER" is written in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font. The main headline, "DON'T LET A ROOF KILL YOUR DEAL.", is in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below the headline is an orange rounded rectangle containing the text "FREE DIAGNOSTIC REPORTS" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. Underneath this, in smaller white text, it says "A true roof health rating with a repair-or-replace estimate - so the roof never blindsides your closing." Below the orange box, the text "ROOFING • SIDING • GUTTERS • WINDOWS • ALL EXTERIOR CONSTRUCTION" is written in a small, white, sans-serif font. The bottom section of the ad has a solid orange background. On the left, "REALTORS, UNLOCK EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS:" is written in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, in smaller white text, it says "Free roof reports for your listings, Priority scheduling, Referral Rewards." On the right side of the orange section is a black square containing a white QR code. Below the QR code, the text "SCAN ME" is written in white, sans-serif capital letters. At the very bottom, on a dark grey background, the phone number "(219) 838-9111" is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif font. Below the phone number, the website "romansroofing.net • Hobart, IN • Aurora, IL" is written in a smaller, orange, sans-serif font.

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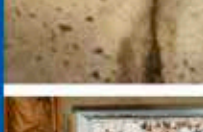
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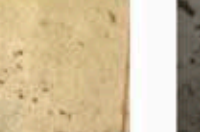
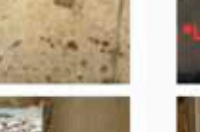


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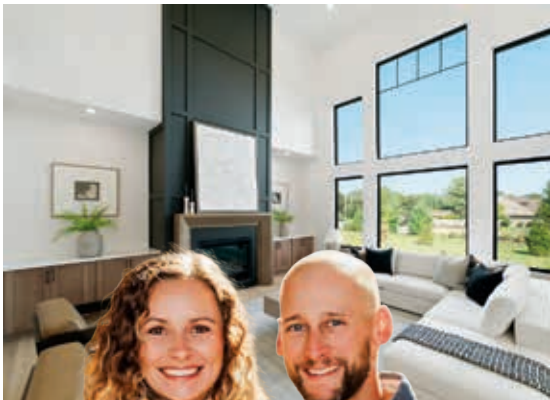
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Max Nicolazzi
OF TTS GRANITE

Max Nicolazzi

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MAX NICOLAZZI
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When most people think of granite, they picture countertops.

Max Nicolazzi and Jack Davis see something more.

They see raw pieces of stone that can become works of art. They see kitchens, monuments and memorials. And sometimes, they see the opportunity to create

something that will quite literally become a piece of history.

For the owner and production manager of TTS Granite, one of their most memorable projects came when the Diocese of Gary called upon them to create the crypt where Bishop Dale Melczek would eventually be laid to rest.

It was unlike anything most people will encounter during their careers, and they had just three days to complete it.

The work required drilling through the building and meticulously designing and constructing the crypts so each would be airtight and sealed from

the others. When the time came for Bishop Melczek's funeral, Max was there.

"I was there at his funeral, preparing the crypt, and had to seal the door!" Max recalled.

It's a moment that has stayed with him.

"It's a big thing to say you were part of history," Max said.

But perhaps history has always been woven into the story of TTS Granite.

A Family Business Evolves
The company's roots stretch back decades, beginning with Tom's Top Shop—or TTS—a business

BY ALI KUCHARZAK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA
NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY





originally focused strictly on laminate countertops.

Tom eventually sold the company to Max's father, Joe Nicolazzi. In 1988, Joe called upon his family to help run the growing operation.

As the industry changed, so did TTS.

What began with laminate evolved to include granite and other natural stones sourced

from around the world, including Brazil and other parts of South America. Max grew up alongside that evolution, learning the business as it transformed.

Eventually, the family business became his.

In 2023, Max officially took over TTS Granite. One of his first decisions was promoting someone he had trusted for far longer than he had been running a company:

his childhood best friend, Jack Davis, who had already been working within the business.

Jack became production manager.

The irony isn't lost on either of them.

"We always had goals and dreams for our future," Jack said. "But it was never, 'Let's open a business together.'" Life apparently had other plans.

Best Friends and Bosses

Running a company alongside your childhood best friend sounds like a pretty good arrangement. Most days, it is.

But both will readily admit it isn't always rainbows and butterflies.

"It's hard to be a buddy and a boss," Jack said.

There are stressful projects, disagreements, and days when the pressure of running a business follows them right up until closing time.

Their solution is surprisingly simple.

"You come back the next day and just brush it off," Max said.

And sometimes? "Sometimes you just need a beer!"

Whatever happens during the workday stays there.

"I wouldn't have it any other way," Jack said. "At the end of the day, we can still get together, hang out and nothing bothers us."

That sense of loyalty extends beyond the two friends. Many of TTS Granite's employees have been with the company for years, creating a team Max and Jack describe more like family than employees.



Jack Davis

It is a culture they hope to protect as they look toward the company's next chapter, including growing their commercial division and expanding relationships with builders.

More Than Countertop Guys

Some of the best examples of what their team can do are the projects that make people rethink what granite fabrication actually is.

"Some of these projects are pieces of art," Jack said.

One recent new-construction project included an enormous custom hood fabricated from granite—a one-of-a-kind undertaking requiring the kind of creativity, precision, and problem-solving that goes far beyond cutting a slab for a kitchen island.

It's why calling them "countertop guys" doesn't quite tell the story.

“

THERE'S SOMETHING INCREDIBLY REWARDING ABOUT WALKING THROUGH THE CITY AND BEING ABLE TO POINT OUT THE PLACES AND PROJECTS I'VE HAD A HAND IN BRINGING TO LIFE."



They are craftsmen. They are designers. And, in many ways, they are artists.

Their work has included 9/11 memorials and monuments, along with countless residential and commercial projects throughout the region.

For Max, there is something uniquely rewarding about driving through an area and seeing the physical evidence of years spent building.

"There's something incredibly rewarding about walking through the city and being able to point out the places and projects I've had a hand in bringing to life," Max said.

Those projects became markers along the way, not only of the company's growth, but of two friends who grew up together and somehow ended up building something together too.

Max inherited a company built by the people before him. Now,

alongside his best friend, he has the opportunity to decide what the next generation of TTS Granite will look like.

And perhaps that's what makes their story so fitting.

Their business is built around a material known for its permanence. Their work can live inside a family's home, become part of a city skyline or stand as a memorial honoring lives and moments that should never be forgotten.

Countertops may be what first comes to mind when people hear the word granite. But for Max and Jack, their work is about something bigger. It's about creating something worth pointing out years later and saying, "We were part of that!"

It's about family, friendship, craftsmanship, and a legacy carved in stone. ▀



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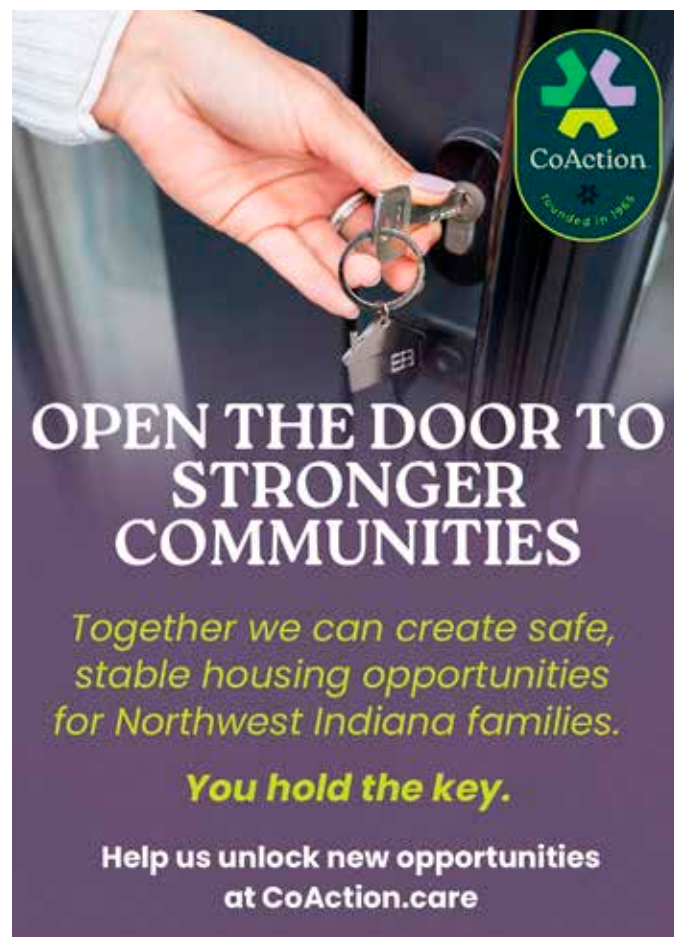
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Cynthia WILLIAMS

OF BETTER HOMES
AND GARDENS
REAL ESTATE

BY GIAVONNI DOWNING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Cynthia Williams shows up boldly. Heels, sparkle, and a laugh that fills the room. Behind the bold style is someone who has built her life around serving others. From her work with the American Heart Association and inner-city adolescents to her advocacy for veterans, Cynthia leads with a genuine desire to help people.

Her serving heart stems from her humble roots. In 1990, one week after her wedding, Cynthia started in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a clerk with no experience or training. She owned seven

shirts and three pairs of pants, rotating them until mentors began handing down their own clothes so she'd look professional. Now she loves to express herself with bold styles and elegant dresses and donates clothes

to others so they can feel beautiful, too. "Someone had to reach down to pull me up," she says. "So now I am on a mission to do the same for others everywhere I go."

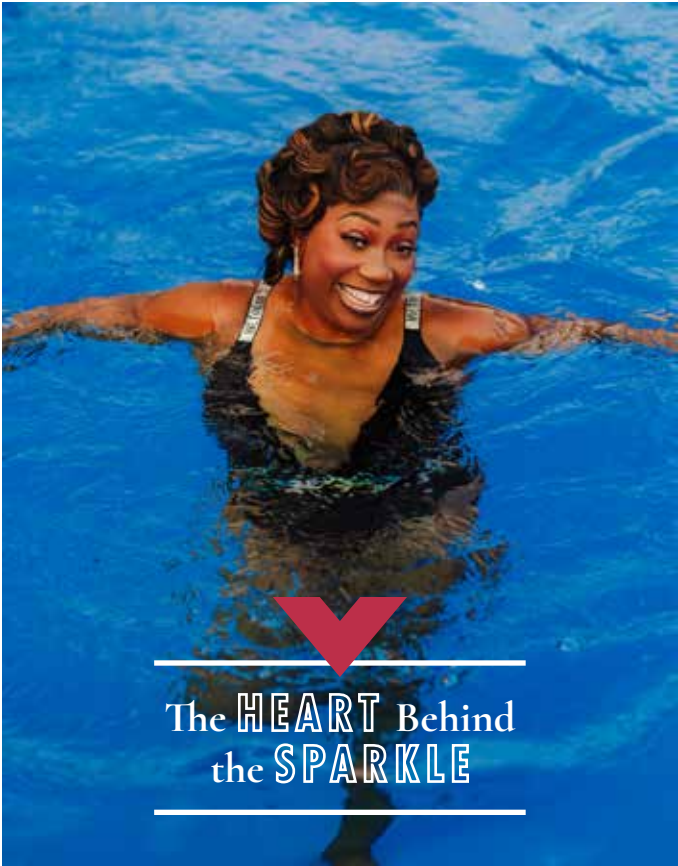
She grew up on Chicago's South Side, one of nine kids under one roof. Her father picked cotton before working for the post office, bringing home a gallon of milk and three loaves of bread most days. "We were poor," she says plainly. "But I just knew that was not going to be my story." At eighteen, she told herself she'd do real estate one day. Life had other plans first: marriage, four children (Nick, Christopher, Kendra, and Kennadie), and a 25-year climb at HUD that ended with her earning the Secretary's Award, the highest honor a federal employee can receive.

Before becoming licensed, Cynthia received poor service while searching for a home of her own. Rather than complain, she decided to become the remedy. The pivot arrived in a car. Her

son, struggling to pass his real estate exam in Missouri, turned a study session into a question for his mother: "Mom, why aren't you doing real estate?" She drove the six hours home with no music. As a woman of faith, she prayed, "God, speak to me." And she remembers, "God spoke." She enrolled in real estate classes that week.

It wasn't an easy journey. When Cynthia started in real estate, she faced closed doors because of the color of her skin. She didn't see agents who looked like her on the Top Producer boards, so she decided to change that. Her goal was to build a presence and show other African Americans what was possible in real estate. In 2016, she recalls there were roughly 20 African American agents in the region's MLS, "But you would never know it. They were hidden."

Cynthia's background in fair housing at HUD strengthened her commitment to making sure every client receives excellent service. Her work with veterans is where her advocacy shines brightest. Cynthia was first introduced to helping veterans when a colleague gave her an account he didn't want, warning her she'd never make real money serving veterans. "But I've never been driven by money. I've always followed the truth in my spirit rather than the paycheck, and success has





thing is to create a space for Veterans to talk at the closing table because, she says, “A lot of veterans don’t get to tell their story.” She honors every client, empowers them with information, and listens for what they need. She remembers one older client who had never owned a new house. He stood at a kitchen backsplash and touched it, quiet, until she asked what was wrong. “I’ve never touched anything new,” he

spiritual roots. Her mother was a pastor, and Cynthia and her husband co-pastored a church for 13 years before she entered real estate. She now attends Family Christian Center, where Pastor Steve Munsey encourages her to stay grounded. Her life verse is Psalm 139:14: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Cynthia considers two events in her life to be miracles.

told she might not survive. She recovered and went on to become a spokesperson for the American Heart Association, raising \$100,000 for the organization last year alone.

Her service extends beyond the American Heart Association. She was also honored with the Theo Bowman Award for her community service to inner-city adolescents. Her love of life has taken her all over the world, from a vacation in Bali to a mission trip to South Africa, where she helped build homes for women who survived domestic violence.

“I just have a passion,” Cynthia said. “Wherever I go, my goal is to make things great.” She lives by a Mark Twain quote: “Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” That same kindness shows up in the way she serves her clients, standing up for them when something isn’t right and working to give them the best experience possible. ▀

followed regardless. The reward is simply what comes from being authentic and being a great human.”

Her passion for serving Veterans runs deep. Her father was an Army Vietnam Veteran. Her husband Kenneth served in the Marine Corps, and her son, Christopher Williams is currently in the Army Corps of Engineers. Now as a preferred agent with Veterans United since 2017, she closes 25 to 30 veteran families a year, ranking her in the top 1% of agents nationwide. Her favorite

“
KINDNESS is the language which
the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”
-MARK TWAIN

replied. At closing, he wore all his Purple Hearts, his wife and Cynthia wore purple in his honor, and there wasn’t a dry eye in the room.

Cynthia’s dedication to advocacy traces back to her

Her daughter was born after a tubal ligation, in a pregnancy that later set legal precedent in the Illinois Supreme Court. After her daughter’s birth, Cynthia was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and

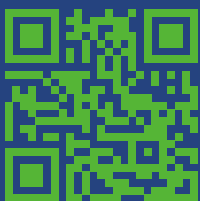
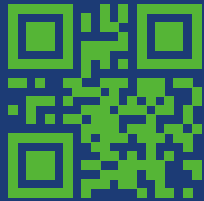


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- Q: Who receives this magazine?**

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- 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?**

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Katie Wietbrock

MANAGING BROKER MCCOLLY REAL ESTATE

THE FEELING OF HOME BY GIAVONNI DOWNING
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Katie Wietbrock has a line she uses with clients who've walked through fifteen houses and can't explain why none of them feel right: "You're going to get the feeling," she tells them, and they usually look at her like she's a little crazy. Then it happens: someone runs up a staircase shouting that they've found it, and Katie isn't surprised at all. "Home isn't just a roof over someone's head," she says. "It's a feeling." It's a strange thing for her to know so well. In a 20-year career built on moving people, Katie has moved only three times, she admits. The woman who built her business on recognizing the feeling of home has spent most of her life just trying to hold on to it.

These days, that certainty makes her the one other agents call. She oversees 50 to 60 agents across two offices, including veteran agents.

Katie was the student and has now become the teacher, and she still sounds a little surprised when she reflects on her growth. "I never thought I was going to be half of what I am today." She wasn't always the one with the answers.

Katie got licensed in 2007 at twenty-three years old, walking straight into a housing market that was actively collapsing. Agents were leaving in droves. "How are they going to take advice from a twenty-three-year-old when everybody's going bankrupt?" she remembers thinking. So, she made herself impossible to dismiss. "I used to follow home inspectors around like a lost puppy," she says. "If I knew more than the client about the house, I could



Katie is celebrating 20 years in real estate this year





“
WE BECOME A **part**
of their family.
WE KNOW EVERYTHING
ABOUT THEM. WE’RE
EMBEDDED IN THEM.”



still help them make a good decision.” She taught herself construction, then contract law, reading purchase agreements over and over until she understood not just where to sign, but why the words were there. She didn’t have a mentor to teach her any of it, which is part of why she takes mentoring so seriously today, walking new agents through the same fine print, line by line, until they actually understand it rather than just filling in the blanks.

Today, she has built a reputable business, gained knowledge, and earned the trust that has led to countless clients and referrals. “Eighty-five to ninety percent of my business is repeat clients and referrals,” she says. “I’ve never bought a lead in my life.”

Her hunger for knowledge and success started long before real estate. By seventeen, Katie had already launched

her own cleaning company, scrubbing thirteen homes a week. “I went from cleaning houses to selling houses,” she laughed. “The Cinderella with the glass shoe, I call it.”

Even earlier than that, she was selling sweet corn at eleven, pulling full days at a truck stop by fifteen, earning money and opportunities for freedom. Growing up, the family didn’t have cash for vacations, so Katie found a way to explore. “I would be the tag-along in other people’s families,” she says. “I’d say, ‘If I have the money, can I just come with your family on vacation?’” She was becoming part of other families’ stories long before she ever sold one of them a house, and the pattern never really left. “We become a part of their family,” she says of her clients today. “We know everything about them. We’re embedded in them.” The girl who worked for a seat in the backseat grew into the woman who gets to hand the keys to somebody’s next chapter.

Underneath all of that drive was something heavier. Katie spent her teenage years as her mother’s caregiver, watching Huntington’s disease take her mother’s job, her license, and her independence, piece by piece. “I had to live a lot of my life in fight or flight,” she says. She got in trouble. She got suspended. Nobody, including Katie, called it grief then. “I don’t think I really processed it until after my mom passed away,” she admits now. “I didn’t know how to navigate it as a kid. I was hurting, and I didn’t know how to handle the stress.” Katie has a philosophy for life’s hardest moments, and it isn’t really about real estate. “When there’s something you can’t change, you either adapt, or you stay angry about it,” she says. The same choice she made the year her mother died. She’s making it again now, on her own terms.

For years, success meant volume: how many houses, how many closings, how many zeroes. She missed birthdays and

family events “to help other families,” and being needed became the whole job description. Twenty years in, Katie is turning that same hard-won adaptability toward a bigger question, not how to build a career, but how to build a life to

match it. The woman who taught herself to recognize the feeling of home in other people’s houses is finally building one entirely her own, and helping the next generation of agents she mentors learn to recognize it too. ❧



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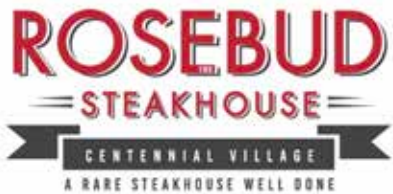
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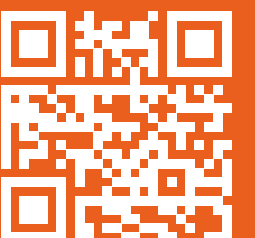
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ROOTS, REAL ESTATE, & RESULTS

BY GIAVONNI DOWNING • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELINDA NICOLE PHOTOGRAPHY

Jarrod Carr can leave for a family vacation without a single open question in his head. No client left waiting, no showing unattended, no deal quietly stalling while he's away. "It's a different trust factor, leaving your clients in someone else's hands," he says. "But I have no questions going on vacation, because I know my dad is here to take over. It's been a perfect kind of partnership." That sentence describes a father and son who built something beautiful together.

They arrived at that partnership from opposite directions, in the same year, almost by accident. Wayne Carr retired on January 1, 2018, after 38 years in a corporate career that moved his family from city to city. He gave retirement three months. "I was itching to do something else," he says. Across town, his son was closing a different chapter: Jarrod had spent his senior year at the University of Arizona pitching a business to a room of angel investors in what he calls "a mini Shark Tank," then spent seven years building that company for real, only to sell it right as his dad turned in his badge. "We'd always been interested in real estate," Jarrod says. "We talked about playing off each other's strengths and jumped in together."

Neither came to it untested. Wayne's corporate years meant relocating his own family more than once, learning the process from the client's side long before he sold a house. Jarrod spent his company years hunting new business and negotiating deals from scratch. "The corporate side is more what's my bottom line, how am I cutting costs?" he says. "Real estate is more personal. You build actual relationships." Both men, by their own description, "enjoy helping people."

Coming home to Valparaiso wasn't Jarrod's decision to make alone, either. His wife grew up there; they'd stayed together since high school, and by the time they were ready to raise kids of their own, nearly everyone in the family was already back in Northwest Indiana. "It just made sense to move back and be close to grandparents and cousins," he says. "Family was a big factor."

What makes the partnership work day to day is that father and son are built

differently. “Jarrod’s so quick, especially with technology,” Wayne says. “He can do from his cell phone what would take me sitting down with a laptop.” If Wayne has a question, Jarrod usually already has the answer; if Jarrod’s out of town, Wayne covers his clients instead. “Our clients get the best of two agents for the price of one,” Wayne says about how they have serviced clients the past eight years.

Ask either of them to define success, and neither reaches for a production number. “Clients that refer you to somebody else, that’s the ultimate sign of success,” Jarrod says. “It means you’ve done right by them.” Wayne says it in a different key: “Success is getting to the closing table and seeing people smiling and happy. That smile, that thank-you, that picture. It means a lot.”

The business has grown every year they’ve run it. This year alone, around \$14 million in the pipeline with time still on the clock, but Jarrod is quicker to mention what growth hasn’t cost him: “I don’t feel like I’ve had to sacrifice family time to keep building this.”

Family, for the Carrs, isn’t an evening-and-weekend afterthought to the business; it’s the reason the business exists. Sundays mean big dinners, two sisters and their families, Jarrod’s two boys, six kids running from age five to ten, with business talk lasting exactly as long as it takes before someone needs chasing down for a skinned knee.

This summer, one of those boys found a puddle holding roughly forty-five tadpoles and asked to keep them. What Jarrod figured would be a one- or two-week project turned into sixteen weeks in a hastily assembled fish tank, a few escapees turning up in the house before the operation moved outside for good.

Wayne and his wife built their own version of that instinct on a larger scale: just under fourteen acres they call Dream Acres, where grandkids drive tractors under supervision, feed chickens, and occasionally lose one to a fox.

Wayne still owns the 1955 Chevy he bought at sixteen, and last year Jarrod

finally tracked down his own vintage car, a ‘67 Convertible Mustang. Between the two vintage cars and a last name that makes the joke write itself, the Carr Team’s motto is exactly what it sounds like: always driving you home.

That pull toward what came before shows up more quietly in Wayne, too. In 1976, a college anthropology assignment sent him to a cemetery with a pencil and a blank family tree. Decades later, pension records proved a family member had fought in the American Revolution. Wayne joined the Sons of the American Revolution this year, timed to the country’s 250th anniversary. Asked what he’s proudest of, he doesn’t lead with sales figures. He lists it in four parts: 46 years of marriage this fall, four grown children and nine grandchildren, the family history he’s spent decades tracing backward.

Jarrod and Wayne Carr are two men who walked away from entirely different careers to build this one together. Eight years later, they are growing, with more referrals, helping more families, and delivering quality results synonymous with the name Carr in Northwest Indiana. ▀



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