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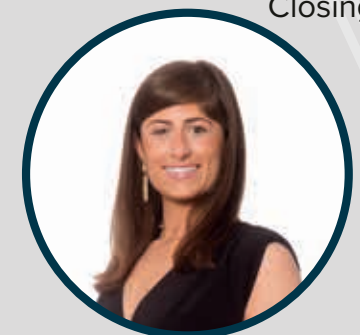


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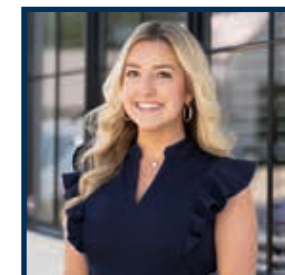


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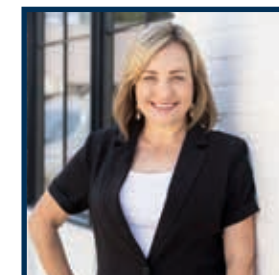
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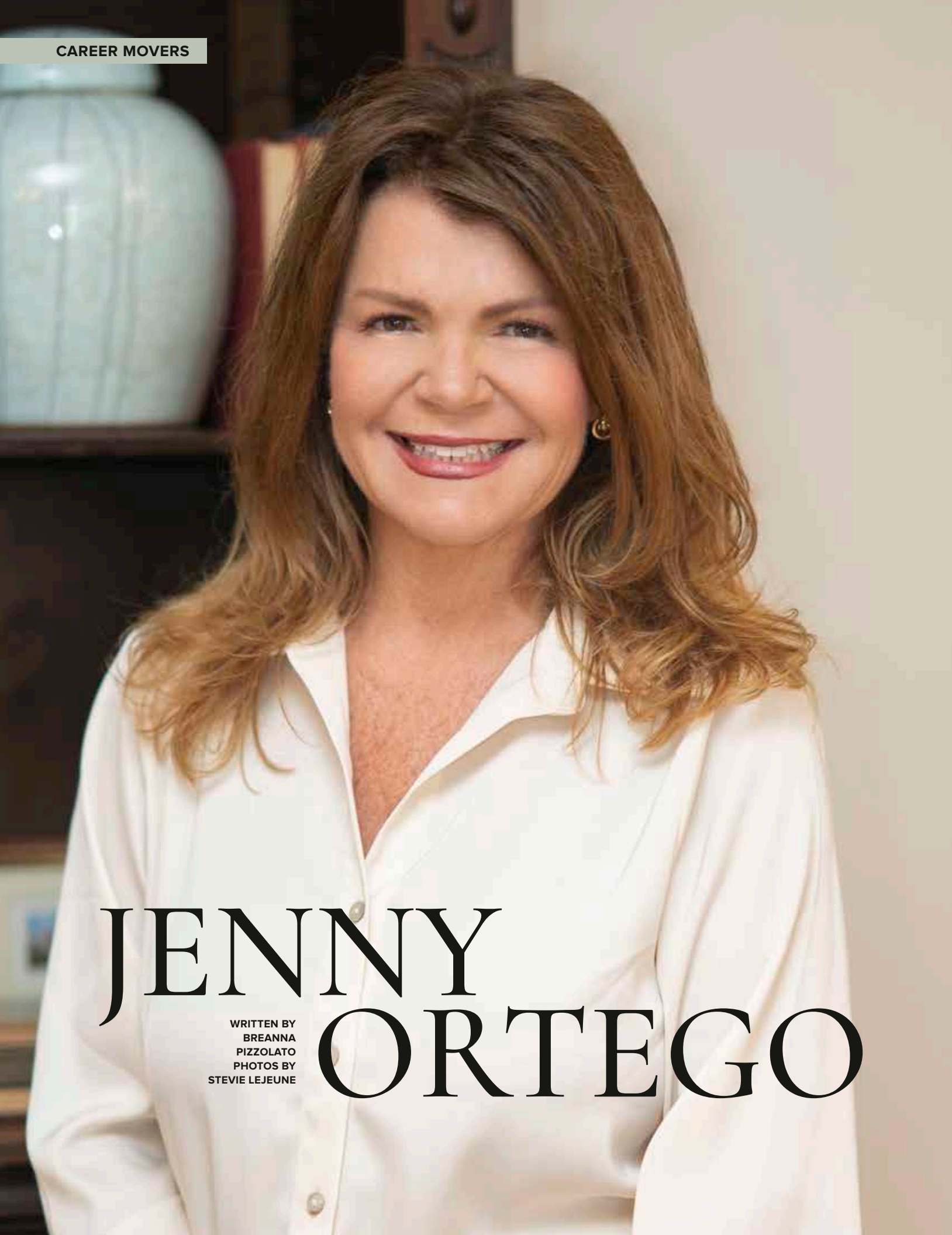
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JENNY ORTEGO

WRITTEN BY
BREANNA
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Right on Time: How family, faith and a second act shaped her life

For Jenny Ortego, life has always been guided by a single priority: being there for the people she loves and cares for most. For many fulfilling years, she poured that devotion into shaping young minds as an elementary educator in the Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge. While she cherished her time in the classroom, a quiet pull toward a new chapter led her to real estate.

At 49, when many people are thinking about staying the course or kicking back a bit, Jenny chose a different path. “Looking back, I’m incredibly proud that I was willing to do something that felt a little scary and start over at that stage of my life,” she says.

At the heart of that decision was her ongoing commitment to her family. Now 55, Jenny continues to build her life around showing up for her loved ones alongside Shane, her husband of

33 years. Together, they raised three daughters, Savannah, Olivia and Ella, and are now stepping into a joyful new season as grandparents to their first grandchild, Blake Joseph.

Where the Heart Is

For Jenny, building a thriving second career was never just about personal achievement. It was proof that success can be achieved in any season through focus and dedication, all while keeping her family right where they belong—at the center of it all.

“I hope my story shows other women that you’re never too old to reinvent yourself, pursue something new, or find success in an entirely different chapter of life,” she adds.

Her daughters have watched their mom step into a new industry, build a business and still insist that family remain at the center. “My family has always been my top priority,” she says. “So I knew that whatever I pursued had to

allow me to continue being the wife and mother I wanted to be.”

That conviction shapes how she structures her days: weekends by the pool, LSU football games, trips to visit one daughter in Houston, nursery prep with another who lives just 10 minutes away, and helping her youngest get settled into LSU’s nursing program. The calendar is full, but it’s full of the right things.

“At this stage of my life, I feel incredibly grateful,” Jenny reflects. “I took a chance on a second career, discovered something I truly enjoy, and proved to myself that a new chapter can sometimes become one of the best chapters.”

Over time, her perspective on achievement has deeply shifted. Earlier in life, she admits, success looked like constant motion. She was always saying yes and striving to do more. “I’ve learned that real success is building a



“

Looking back, I'm incredibly proud that I was willing to do something that felt a little scary and start over at that stage of my life.”



career you love without losing sight of the people and moments you're doing it all for. My family, my faith, and the relationships in my life keep me grounded.”

That perspective informs the way she moves through the world, not just her work. She's drawn to ideas and voices that reinforce that focus, like Mel Robbins' "Let Them Theory," which she says arrived at exactly the right time. "It's been a great reminder to stop worrying so much about things I can't control, let people make their own choices, and put my energy into the things that really matter—my family, my career, my relationships, and how I choose to show up each day.”

Today, Jenny measures success through courage, consistency and connection. The courage to leap into a new career at 49, the consistency built over decades

of family life, and the genuine connections she fosters with everyone who crosses her path.

“If there's anything I want others to know,” Jenny says, “it's that it's never too late to take a chance and try something new. Through hard work, determination, and faith, I feel I've become the person I was meant to be. I hope I'm setting an example for my three beautiful daughters that they can achieve anything they set their minds to, and that reinvention is always possible.”

For those who know her, whether as an agent, a colleague, a neighbor, or client, that might be the most inspiring part of her story: not just that she helps people find a place to live, but that she's living proof that you can redesign your own life, without losing sight of what matters most. 🏡

What's In Your Bag?

Meet **Courtney Wambsgans** with **PINO & Associates Real Estate Firm**.

Her days are full of keeping real estate deals on track, school drop-offs for her daughters, Body Sculpt Barre, creating content and a little shopping when time allows.

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Keys mixed in with unicorn bracelets, a sparkly scrunchie, a sucker and whatever else my girls decide belongs in Mom's purse that day.



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LIZ Laurent

WRITTEN BY BREANNA PIZZOLATO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DALE ALFORD

Before she began helping clients find their home in the community, Liz Laurent was actively helping make it a better place to live, work and play. Guided by a lifelong devotion to service and a deep love for family, where music-filled weekends with her husband, sons and faith keep her grounded, Liz approaches her career as a connector first, believing that real success lies in the trust you build and the lives you touch.

Service Above Self

Liz served as vice president of the Ascension Chamber of Commerce for 10 years, overseeing events, marketing and connecting small businesses and industry to foster economic growth. Coupled with her 13 years of dedication to Rotary, her commitment to civic engagement is deeply rooted. But her love for service didn't come from a conference or a slogan. It came from home. Both her grandmothers and mother served as role models of successful, working women.

"I've just always had a love of service and giving back, it makes me feel good," she says. "I watched my family serve others, and always knew it would be a part of my journey."

That instinct found a home in the Chamber's Leadership Ascension Program, a nine-month community leadership initiative that became one of the great loves of her professional life. She describes it through the tangible projects that changed lives: emergency response vehicles, youth advocacy

campaigns, a community house for families displaced by fires, and a custom baseball field built for special needs children and adults.

"Each year the program gives so much back to the community," she explains. "Just seeing those projects come to life...It was incredible to be part of every year."

The more she worked with local entrepreneurs, the more inspiration stirred. Around year eight, she felt the pull to go into business for herself, inspired by the small business owners she called colleagues, friends and neighbors. And in 2017, she pursued her long-standing interest in real estate, design, and architecture, earning her license that fall.

As Liz prepared to transition into real estate, the Chamber president announced their retirement and the board asked her to stay through the transition. A few months stretched into years as she helped steady the new CEO, planned Leadership Ascension's 20th cohort, and helped businesses navigate pandemic shutdowns. "Real estate was calling me, but the Chamber and Leadership Ascension were a promise I had to keep to my community before I could step into my next chapter," she says.

Ties that Bind

In 2020, when Liz stepped into real estate full-time, she expected a slow ramp. Instead, the community she had poured into came straight to her.

"I assumed it would take me several years to build up a clientele," she admits. "But I had built these relationships over the years, and people started reaching out right away. I'm like, 'Why are you reaching out to me? I'm a brand new agent. Why are you trusting me?'"

The same answer came back, over and over: "You helped me build my business. You connected me with new customers. You promote my work. I trust you to take care of me the same way in this new venture."

For Liz, lead generation was never an external hustle. It was the organic byproduct of a decade of showing up for others. That same spirit runs through her home life. Liz and her husband, Dave—an engineer who "never picked up an instrument in his life" until recently—are raising two sons, Max and Maven, in a household where work, service and creativity are fully intertwined.

Real estate staging, for instance, evolved into a family project. She launched Bungaleaux Properties after successfully staging a lingering listing with her own living room furniture. "Dave came home one day and asked, 'Where's all of our stuff?' I said, 'Oh, I staged the house with it,'" she recalls with a laugh. The first buyer who walked in made an offer—and asked to keep some of the furniture. From there, she built out a full inventory, staging homes first for her investor clients, then for other agents. And thanks to her teenage sons and their friends, it has become a family

**I'VE JUST ALWAYS
HAD A LOVE OF
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*feel good.***

business. “That’s how they earn money, and now their friends help out, too,” Liz says. “When I need extra help with moving, I’ve got lots of teenage boys to choose from.”

In the Groove

Ask Liz what her family does for fun, and the answer is as intentional as her work. “We are foodies. We love to try new restaurants,” she says. “And we love playing music together. We set up, and we all play.” A couple of years ago, Dave decided to learn bass so he could play with the boys. Now, jam sessions are a staple: Max on percussion, Maven on guitar or piano, Liz singing, friends gathered around, brisket on the table. They play a lively mix that mirrors their personalities—everything from classic pop like “I’m a Believer” (the Smash Mouth version) to a gentle, ukulele-style “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” her son learned so that they could sing it together.

It’s easy to see how that carries into her work with clients: she’s attuned to the emotional resonance of home. She talks about a client who lived in her house for over four decades—a widow, deeply attached to every room—and how sending a DocuSign link would never be enough.

“This business can be so personal and so emotional,” Liz says. “Homes have memories. Some are really good, some are really bad. Every story is different.” That passion for highlighting local community landmarks, which also led her to serve on the Ascension Tourism Commission board, is how her signature “Wine and Signs” and “Brews and Reviews” at local eateries, coffee shops and iconic destinations like Houmas House Estate and Gardens came to be. Because sometimes it’s a celebration, and other times a commemoration. But either way, Liz is ready with a glass of wine, a reassuring presence and a shoulder to lean on.

In a profession often focused on volume and velocity, Liz measures



impact by clients who feel supported through major transitions. Today with Craft Realty, she lives out the motto of service above self. On paper, Liz Laurent is a real estate agent and staging expert; in practice, she’s what happens when a decade of community-building and a family-centered life converge in one of the most personal businesses there is. ▀

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AMY DUPLESSIS

WRITTEN BY JESS WELLAR • PHOTOS BY WESLEY SUN CHEE FORE

**HEART IN
THE RIGHT
PLACE**

“I’m an extremely self-motivated person; so when I do something, I tend to go all out,” Amy Duplessis explains. “But I really don’t get hung up on recognition, it’s just the result of taking excellent care of my clients with a servant’s heart.”

For Amy, real estate has always been about guiding people like family, a mindset that has carried her to remarkable heights during her decade in the business.

As a solo agent with eXp Realty serving Greater Baton Rouge, Amy earned Rookie of the Year honors, has collected the prestigious ICON Award every year since 2019, and consistently ranks among the brokerage’s top 250 solo agents worldwide. Yet, if you ask what she’s most proud of, the conversation quickly shifts toward helping others build lasting wealth.

Second Act Success
Born and raised in Gonzales, Amy attended East Ascension High School before studying marketing at Southeastern Louisiana University and LSU. Long before launching her real estate career, she spent more than 15 years as

a licensed esthetician and successful entrepreneur. She opened four Merle Norman cosmetic stores and ladies boutiques, beginning with her first location in Prairieville.

Eventually, Amy sold her businesses with plans to enjoy semi-retirement. With a longtime fascination for real estate and a steady diet of HGTV, she thought she’d spend her days flipping a few houses for fun and enjoying a slower pace of life. But it didn’t take long to discover she simply wasn’t wired to stay home.

“I realized I was talking to the dogs and they weren’t talking back!” she chuckles. “I obviously missed the people and connections I had formed during my time in retail.”

After renovating several homes and building an investment portfolio, Amy

also realized what truly filled her cup wasn’t flipping properties; it was helping people make wise financial decisions that could benefit their families for years to come. Real estate proved to be a natural pivot.

“My previous experience in retail helped me with the understanding of costs, resale, value and perceived value.” She continued, “And being a former business owner helped with building relationships, as some of my first clients in real estate were from my Merle Norman stores and they continue to stay in touch and refer me.”

Although the professional pivot tested her patience, Amy never considered easing into her new career.

“The first six months were slow, but I went all in,” she grins. “That’s why it’s important to find a mentor



to learn from and work with because the business certainly has its highs and lows and you won't always be busy."

Thankfully, longtime friend and fellow agent Jeff Gautreau helped guide Amy through her first transaction and remains a trusted sounding board and confidant to this day.

Never Halfway

Going all in has certainly paid off. Last year alone, Amy closed 55 transactions totaling more than \$17 million in sales. Still, she insists achievement can't be measured by production numbers alone.

"Success is earning my clients' trust, building lifelong relationships and knowing that my clients are confident recommending me to their friends," she emphasizes.

That ethos is reflected in every transaction. Amy remains personally involved from the initial consultation through closing, believing every client deserves the same level of care she'd give her own children.

Clients frequently tell Amy she's the best REALTOR® they've ever worked with, and more than half of her business now comes from repeat clients and referrals rather than purchased leads. She also enjoys mentoring newer agents, grateful for the guidance she received early in her own career.



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Strength Through Faith

As rewarding as Amy's career has become, life recently presented an unexpected challenge that put everything into perspective. Just weeks before completing this interview, she received a diagnosis of invasive ductal carcinoma.

With no family history of breast cancer, the news came as a complete shock. By the time this issue reaches readers, she will have undergone surgery and begun treatment.

Rather than allowing fear to define the days ahead though, Amy is leaning on the faith that has always guided both her life and her business. She and her husband, Jason, have been active members of St. John Catholic Church in Prairieville for years, and she hopes sharing her story during Breast Cancer Awareness Month encourages other women to prioritize regular screenings and early detection.



“We’re a very faith-forward family; I think everything that we have is a blessing from God,” she shares. “I’m not sure which path my journey will lead me, but I know that I’m not alone.”

Richest Blessings

Beyond serving clients, Amy's close-knit brood remains at the center of her life. She and Jason recently celebrated 35 years of marriage and are proud parents of three children — Jas (33), twin daughters (30) Aja and Ali — and proud grandparents to Palmer, Emmie Blake, and Rosie. Amy delights in working alongside her daughter Ali,

who entered real estate in 2020, creating a unique partnership where both support one another while maintaining their own independent businesses.

Whether they're relaxing at home, swimming, spending weekends boating at their camp on Diversion Canal, or loading everyone up for another Disney adventure, Amy treasures every opportunity to make memories together. The family recently returned from a Disney cruise with the grandchildren, and she and Jason are looking forward to an Alaskan cruise before treatments begin.

Closer to home, Amy stays active with the Ascension Council of REALTORS®, participating in community events and holiday fundraisers that provide Christmas gifts for children in need. While the months ahead may bring unexpected challenges, her passion for serving others remains unchanged.

“My personality is not to slow down even when I should — it's hard for me because I have such a passion for what I do,” she concludes with a wink. ▀



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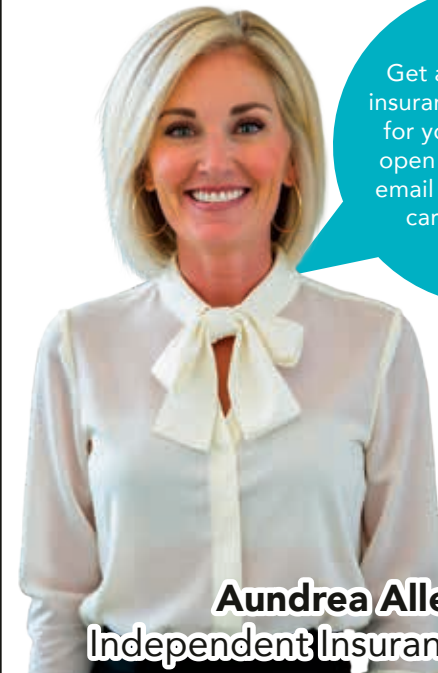
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