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Partner Spotlight
KAREN CORNWELL
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Location: Julie Ford's
listing at 529 Stone
Vista Lane 37934

FINDING
WHERE
SHE
BELONGS

Long before Brianne Miller found real estate, she knew one thing about herself: she needed to be around people. Her career reflected that. She started out waiting tables before moving into restaurant management, marketing and catering. From there, she spent nearly a decade in cell phone sales, eventually becoming a store manager and working as a district and area training manager.

Then she decided to try something completely different and took a desk job. She lasted six months. “I’m not designed to sit behind a desk,” she remembers telling her husband. When he asked what she would do if she could choose anything, Brianne finally said something she had thought about for years. She wanted to get her real estate license. Her husband encouraged her to go for it, and in December 2019, she became a Realtor®.

The timing was interesting, to say the least. Brianne had only a few months to learn the basics before 2020 changed the way nearly everyone did business. Fortunately, she had joined a team where she could tag along on showings, help with open houses and learn from the agents around her. Leslie McLeroy became an especially important mentor. “She literally taught me everything,” Brianne says.

When in-person business came to a halt, Brianne had to figure out how

to keep building relationships. She stayed active on social media, worked leads and checked in with people. Eventually, a friendship led to a strong referral partnership and an opportunity in the short-term rental market.

At one point, she estimates 80 to 90 percent of her business was being done through video. When buyers couldn’t walk through a home themselves, Brianne had to be their eyes. She couldn’t just show the best parts of a property. She had to point out concerns and give them enough information to make a decision from miles away. For someone who naturally likes to find the positive, it was an important lesson in being direct. “People really appreciate it when you’re able to be honest and upfront with them,” she says.

Seven years later, that honesty has become a big part of how Brianne approaches real estate. She’s learned that uncomfortable conversations are better to have sooner than later. She’s

learned not to celebrate a transaction too early. And she’s learned that being a good agent isn’t about telling clients what they want to hear. It’s about giving them the information they need and helping them work through it.

She’s also stopped measuring her career against everyone else’s. Brianne admits she used to scroll through social media, see closing after closing and wonder whether she was doing enough. Experience has given her a different perspective. Someone else’s business doesn’t need to look like hers.

Now with Epique Realty for the past two years, she’s much more focused on the relationships in front of her. That was the part of real estate that appealed to her from the beginning. She liked the idea of helping someone move into a new chapter, whether that meant buying a first home, selling one filled with memories or making an investment for the future.



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“People really appreciate it when you’re able to be honest and upfront with them.”
— BRIANNE MILLER

“I feel like once I got my real estate license, the chips just started falling into place, almost like I had found where I was supposed to be going,” she says.

Outside of real estate, Brianne and her husband have a blended family of five children, ranging from 11 to nearly 22. She is especially proud of the people they’re becoming and the way they show up for their friends and community.

Brianne also proudly calls herself a “fish aquarium nerd.” Their home has 10 tanks, including two with axolotls, plus three dogs. She volunteers with Young-Williams Animal Center, where she takes shelter dogs on “doggy day dates” for some much-needed time outside the shelter.

When Brianne first considered real estate, she thought being her own boss might give her more control over her schedule. Seven years later, she can laugh about that assumption. What she did find was a career built around the thing that had been there all along: people. And for Brianne, that turned out to be the right fit. ▀



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Karen Cornwell

AR HOMES – THE ERNST GROUP LLC

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Long before **Karen Cornwell** found her place in real estate and new construction, homes were already part of her world. Her father earned his general contractor's license in Florida and built spec homes on the side. Karen grew up around construction sites and later studied architecture, interior design and graphic design in college. She loved homes and design, although it would take some time before they became her career.

By 2010, Karen was raising three young children and looking for work that offered flexibility. Real estate kept coming up in her research, and given her background, it made sense. She entered the industry at the bottom of the market and was happy to take the leads and listings no one else wanted. That quickly led her into short sales and foreclosures, where she discovered she had an unexpected appreciation for the complicated side of real estate. The contracts, language and mountains of extra paperwork didn't intimidate her. She actually enjoyed them.

Real estate also became a family affair. Her children occasionally came along to inspections, final walkthroughs and closings, and many of the vendors Karen worked with knew them by name. "They were troopers," she says. "It ended up being really good for us as a family."

In 2016, Karen's career shifted toward the part of the industry that had interested her from the beginning. When AR Homes came to Knoxville

looking for a sales consultant, Karen's broker knew about her love of architecture, design and new construction and immediately thought of her. After a three-month interview process, Karen got the call.

AR Homes gives local builders access to an established collection of home plans, technology, systems and purchasing resources, combining the infrastructure of a larger organization with the experience of working with a local builder. For Karen, it brought her real estate experience and interest in design together.

The years that followed brought plenty of change. Her first builder eventually discontinued building in the region. Another experienced AR Homes builder stepped in, followed by the challenges of 2020 and rapidly rising construction costs.

Eventually, The Ernst Group LLC, with decades of building experience and an established history with AR Homes



Location: AR Homes' model home in WindRiver



“I just want people to make memories there, feel comfortable there and have it be their haven.”
— KAREN CORNWELL

in Nashville, took over the Knoxville territory. Karen worked with the company for a couple of years before briefly returning to residential real estate. Then Steve Ernst reached out with an opportunity to come back in an expanded role that included both sales and operations. Previously, Karen guided clients through the early stages and floor-plan process before handing the project to the production team. Now, she stays involved from the first conversation through construction, closing, the warranty period and beyond.

For someone who values relationships, that matters. She is especially passionate about getting the floor plan right. She believes the work done before construction begins can completely change how someone experiences a home once they're living in it. She wants to know how her clients

live, what matters to them and how each space needs to function.

“Let's get it right on the front end,” she says. “If you're going to go through the process of building, let's put the time in up front and really make it fit your lifestyle.” That philosophy is personal for Karen, who has always thought of home as a haven. Her three children are grown now, and she wants them to feel that the moment they walk through her door. Home is where they can laugh, relax and get away from everything happening outside.

It's what she wants for her clients, too. “I just want people to make memories there, feel comfortable there and have it be their haven,” she says.

Karen takes the responsibility behind her work seriously, but she doesn't necessarily take herself too seriously.

While clients initially meet a polished professional, those who know her well eventually discover what she jokingly calls “a giant ham and a goofball.”

“Life's hard enough,” she says. “Why not try to bring some laughter and positivity to people?”

More than 15 years after entering real estate, Karen has experienced difficult markets, career changes and plenty of uncertainty. Today, she has a role that allows her to combine the parts of the industry she loves while staying with clients throughout the process.

For someone who grew up around construction, studied design and ultimately built a career around homes, it feels a lot like everything coming together. 🐦



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“Let’s get it right on the front end. If you’re going to go through the process of building, let’s put the time in up front and really make it fit your lifestyle.”

— KAREN CORNWELL



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Miriam ADAMS

Slyman Real Estate

Working Through Plenty Of Change While Learning To Read People

When Miriam Adams' youngest child was getting ready to start kindergarten, she found herself thinking about what might come next. She had been a stay-at-home mom, was active in her children's schools and PTA, and had built a close circle of friends in Knoxville. She also loved looking at houses, especially as real estate listings were becoming easier to browse online. One of the moms she knew was a real estate agent whose business was growing and needed an assistant. She asked Miriam if she'd be interested. It seemed worth a try.

Miriam started as her assistant, got her real estate license and eventually became a buyer's agent. Before long, her own

business had grown enough that another assistant was hired to take those original responsibilities off her plate. She spent several years learning the business before reaching a point where she was ready to go out on her own. Nearly 10 years ago, she made the move to Slyman Real Estate. "I don't regret it for a minute," she says.

Now 14 years into real estate, Miriam has worked through plenty of changes in the market. One thing experience has taught her is that there really isn't a "typical" market anymore. Interest rates change. Inventory changes. Buyers get anxious. Sellers hesitate to give up favorable rates. Rather than trying to predict what's coming next, Miriam focuses on figuring out what makes sense for each

individual client. "Nobody's going to handle the stress of selling or buying a house the same way," she says.

Learning to read people and adjust accordingly has become one of Miriam's greatest strengths. Interestingly, it started long before she had a real estate license. Her years volunteering at her children's schools and with the PTA put her in rooms with all kinds of personalities. She learned that people communicate differently, react differently and have very different expectations. "The world takes all kinds of people to make it go round," she says.

That understanding has served her well in a career where emotions can run high, and every

Location: Julie Ford's listing
529 Stone Vista Lane 37934

BY PHYLICIA BOVA
AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY TRUST THA BEARD



transaction comes with its own personalities and circumstances. Relationships have also become the foundation of Miriam's business. She doesn't do much traditional advertising. Most of her clients come through referrals, something she considers one of the greatest measures of whether she's doing her job well.

"If they've referred me to somebody else, that means that they've trusted me enough to do so," she says. "That means I've been a success with somebody." Miriam knows that trust often extends beyond real estate. Over the years, she has experienced divorce, raised children, lost her mother at a young age, and, more recently, entered the empty-nest stage of life. Those experiences have given her common ground with clients going through their own transitions. "Every situation I've been through personally, whether it be a good one or a challenging one, allows

"IF THEY'VE REFERRED
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— **Miriam
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me to be authentic with people who have been or are going through the same thing,” she says.

Professionally, Miriam credits Laura Slyman as one of the people who has influenced her most. She admires Laura’s ability to remain genuine and gracious, even when a transaction gets complicated, and the respect she has earned throughout Knoxville’s real estate community.

After 14 years, Miriam has learned that real estate doesn’t necessarily get easier. You simply get better at understanding what each situation requires. Success for her isn’t measured only by a closing. She wants buyers to love where they live and sellers to feel good about the job she’s done. When they trust her

enough to recommend her to someone else, she knows she’s done something right.

Outside of work, Miriam and her husband of three years are freshly empty nesters. They enjoy traveling, including a recent trip to Scotland, while Miriam also loves quieter time with a book or walking her dog at Lakeshore.

As for where she sees herself five years from now, Miriam doesn’t expect much to change. She loves what she does. There may still be transactions that have her awake at midnight or thinking through a problem at 3 a.m., but once they’re over, she’s ready to do it all again. Fourteen years in, that’s probably the best indication she chose the right career. ▼

“EVERY SITUATION I’VE BEEN THROUGH PERSONALLY, WHETHER IT BE A GOOD ONE OR A CHALLENGING ONE, ALLOWS ME TO BE AUTHENTIC WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN OR ARE GOING THROUGH THE SAME THING.”

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- FREE** expedited foundation repair, waterproofing and concrete inspections.
- Pre-Listing Inspections
- FREE** Estimates - No upselling, just factual results and realistic solutions.
- Flexible Project Scheduling
- Pay at Closing from Escrow Option
- 100% Interest Free Financing Available
- No cost, no hassle warranty transfers.
- Get to the closing table fast!





BUILDING MORE
THAN HOMES.
BUILDING LEGACIES.

Custom homes.
Timeless design.
Enduring relationships.

PROUD TO BE KNOXVILLE'S TRUSTED
CUSTOM HOME BUILDER

*Let's build something
exceptional—together.*

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