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OCTOBER 2026

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A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black sleeveless top and black trousers with a thin brown belt, is sitting on a light-colored wooden bench. She has a tattoo on her right arm and is smiling at the camera. A black HP laptop is on a shelf behind her.

Paige Corbalis

Brick By Brick



Featured Agent
CARLOS AVELAR
Building Dreams Through
Hard Work and Heart

Partner Spotlight
JULIE MILLER
with Metropolitan Title
Building More Than Closings

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Contents

PROFILES



12 Carlos Avelar



26 Julie Miller with Metropolitan Title

IN THIS ISSUE

- 6 Preferred Partners**
- 8 Meet The Team**
- 10 Publisher's Note:** People. Purpose. Relationships. Growth.
- 12 Featured Agent:** Carlos Avelar
- 18 Cover Story:** Paige Corbalis
- 26 Partner Spotlight:** Julie Miller with Metropolitan Title



18
COVER STORY

Paige
Corbalis

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People. Purpose. Relationships. Growth.



There’s something special about the people who make up the Michiana real estate community.

They’re not simply building businesses. They’re building relationships, creating opportunities, serving their communities, and constantly asking themselves one important question: **What’s next?**

That question is at the heart of this month’s cover story featuring Paige Corbalis. From becoming a young mother and first-time homeowner to building Brick Built Real Estate alongside her husband, Paige’s story is one of consistency, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to growth. What struck me most is her belief that if you take care of the people and the foundation, the growth takes care of itself. That’s a philosophy that extends far beyond real estate.

We also get to know Carlos Avelar, whose journey from El Salvador to the United States, through construction and ultimately into real estate, is a powerful reminder that our past experiences often prepare us for opportunities we never could have anticipated. Carlos has built his career around hard work, integrity, education, and helping families achieve the dream of homeownership.

And our Partner Spotlight introduces us to the people behind Metropolitan Title who understand that real estate is ultimately a people business. Julie Miller, Laura Robbins, Lannette Bickel, and Deric Torres each bring their own story, personality,

and approach to serving the professionals and communities around them. Their stories have a common thread: relationships matter.

That’s really what this issue is about.

People. Purpose. Relationships. Growth.

Every month, we have the privilege of highlighting the incredible professionals who make Michiana real estate what it is. Behind every transaction is a story. Behind every business is a person. And behind every successful career are countless relationships, challenges, lessons, and moments that rarely make it onto a sales report.

I hope as you read this issue, you’ll not only celebrate the accomplishments of the people featured, but also be inspired by their stories.

And maybe, just maybe, you’ll start thinking about your own answer to the question Paige asks so well:

What’s next?

Here’s to continuing to build, grow, connect, and make a difference together.

Jeff Bilier
Publisher
Michiana Real Producers

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10 • October 2026

Michiana Real Producers • 11

CARLOS AVELAR

**BUILDING DREAMS
THROUGH HARD
WORK AND HEART**



PHOTOS BY VELVET & STONE MEDIA

Success is often built long before anyone notices it. For Carlos Avelar, that foundation wasn't laid in a real estate office. It was poured into concrete, framed with lumber, and strengthened by years of hard work, determination, and an unwavering belief that every challenge is an opportunity to grow.

Carlos's story began in El Salvador, where he was raised in a hardworking family that valued education, perseverance, and integrity. Those lessons would shape every step of his journey.

"I grew up watching my parents work incredibly hard," Carlos says. "They taught me that nothing worthwhile comes easy and that learning never stops."

His father became one of his greatest role models, earning a university degree in Business Administration while working full-time and raising a family. His mother, a public school teacher, spent her evenings helping Carlos with homework after teaching all day.

"Their example taught me that no matter where you start, you can always create a better future."

That future brought Carlos to the United States in 2002. Like many immigrants, he arrived with hope, determination, and very little English. Just weeks after arriving, he began working for Devon Yoder Construction, an experience that would unknowingly prepare him for his future career.

Over the years, Carlos learned every phase of home construction, from clearing a lot to handing the keys to new homeowners. Later, he expanded his knowledge by working on commercial construction projects, gaining an understanding of buildings that few real estate professionals ever experience firsthand.

"I loved construction," he recalls. "There is something rewarding about creating something that lasts. But after many



“The accomplishments I’m most proud of are building a successful business, serving my community, and helping families achieve homeownership.”

years, I started asking myself what the next chapter would look like.”

The answer came through conversations with trusted mentors and friends.

“I realized I didn’t have to leave construction behind,” he says. “Real estate allowed me to use everything I had learned while helping people through one of the biggest decisions of their lives.”

That decision proved to be life changing.

Today, Carlos is the owner of Fenix Realty, a brokerage he and his wife proudly opened in 2018 after more than a decade building his career with other companies. Looking back, he admits there is only one thing he would change.

“If I could start over,” he says with a smile, “I would have opened my own brokerage sooner. I was more prepared than I realized.”

While entrepreneurship brought new challenges, it also gave Carlos the opportunity to build a company centered around honesty, transparency, and genuine care for every client.

Those values have earned him something more meaningful than awards.

“I’ve never focused on collecting trophies,” Carlos says. “The accomplishments I’m most proud of are building a successful business, serving my community, and helping families achieve homeownership.”

One experience in particular reminds him why he loves what he does.

A first-time homebuyer had found the perfect home, but unexpected obstacles threatened to derail the transaction. Instead of accepting defeat, Carlos stayed in constant communication with lenders, negotiated solutions, and remained committed to finding a path forward.

“There were moments when it looked like everything might fall apart,” he remembers. “But giving up was never an option.”

The day finally arrived when he placed the keys into his clients’ hands.

“Seeing the excitement and relief on their faces reminded me that this business isn’t about contracts. It’s about changing lives.”

That perspective is what sets Carlos apart.

His years in construction allow him to evaluate homes beyond surface

appearances. He helps buyers understand quality, craftsmanship, potential concerns, and long-term value, giving clients confidence that extends well beyond a showing.

“I want people to feel informed,” he says. “My goal is to educate clients so they can make decisions with confidence.”

Whether helping first-time buyers, growing families, or seasoned investors, Carlos approaches every transaction with the same level of care.

For him, success isn’t measured by sales volume alone.

“It’s measured by the trust people place in me and the relationships we build.”

Outside the office, family remains at the center of Carlos’s life.

He and his wife, originally from Venezuela, have been married for ten years and continue to build both their life and business together. Although much of their family lives across multiple countries, they remain closely connected through regular conversations, shared traditions, travel, and treasured time together whenever possible.

“My wife is my best friend and biggest supporter,” Carlos says. “Family is my greatest blessing.”

His faith also serves as a steady source of guidance.

While Carlos describes his relationship with God as deeply personal, he credits his faith with helping him stay grounded, grateful, and focused on serving others.

“I believe that when it is the right property, you will feel it, and God will align everything to make it happen.”

Looking ahead, Carlos has no intention of slowing down.

His vision includes expanding Fenix Realty, mentoring future agents, strengthening his property management business, and creating additional services that better serve clients throughout every stage of real estate ownership.

“I want my legacy to be about more than the number of homes I’ve sold,” he says. “I want to help develop the next generation of professionals and show that long-term success is built on integrity, hard work, and truly caring for people.”

For someone who once spent long days on construction sites before attending English classes at night, the journey has been remarkable. Yet Carlos views every obstacle as another brick in the foundation he continues to build.

His story is proof that determination, humility, faith, and a willingness to keep learning can transform opportunity into purpose.

And for every family Carlos serves, that purpose begins the moment they find a place to call home. 🏡





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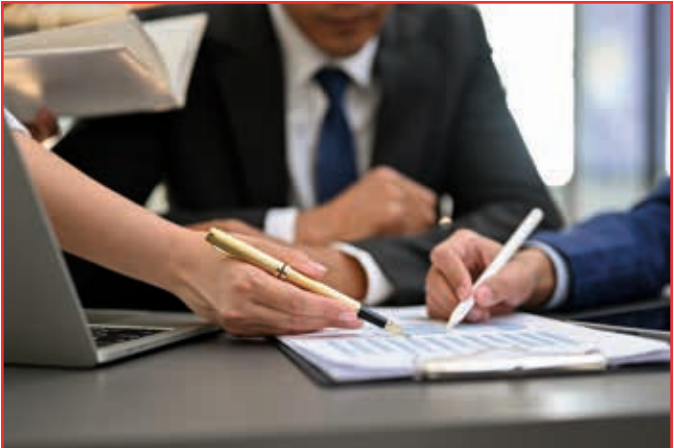
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Brick Built
Real Estate

PAIGE CORBALIS

BY JESS WELLAR
PHOTOS BY MEGAN WILLIAMSON PHOTOGRAPHY

BRICK BY BRICK

“I want to be a resource and a cup filler,” Paige Corbalis begins. “If someone can learn something from me and walk away feeling a little more confident and capable because of it, I love that; I’ve had people throughout my career who taught me, believed in me, answered my questions and helped me grow, and now I genuinely love being able to do that for others.”

If there’s one thing Paige doesn’t do well, it’s sit still. Whether she’s launching a brokerage with her husband, Brandon, mentoring other agents, hosting a podcast, or dreaming up her next entrepreneurial venture, Paige is constantly looking ahead. It’s that relentless drive to innovate and invest in people that has fueled the rapid growth of Brick Built Real Estate since opening its doors in 2021.

Lighting The Fire

Born and raised in Elkhart, Indiana, Paige learned early what it meant to grow up quickly in a split home. She became a mom as a teenager, entered the workforce full-time at 18, and purchased her first home at just 19 while raising a two-year-old son.

Paige began working in property management before joining Meridian Title as a receptionist, becoming increasingly immersed in the housing industry along the way. In 2015, she stepped away from the workforce to become a stay-at-home mom, but real estate was never far from her mind.

By then, Paige had already experienced homeownership firsthand at an age when many people were just beginning to think about their futures. She eventually bought and sold several more homes as life evolved, working through each transaction with the same REALTOR®, Lisa Arendt, who repeatedly encouraged Paige to consider entering the profession herself. Eventually, the idea stuck.

After welcoming her youngest child in 2017, Paige enrolled in real estate classes with a practical goal in mind: contribute financially to her family, help eliminate debt, and build a career that would still allow her to avoid daycare expenses while raising three young children. Even getting started required some persistence. Paige failed her licensing exam on her first attempt, waited three months before trying again, and earned her license in January 2018.

Looking back, Paige says her early experiences as both a homeowner and housing

professional prepared her more than she realized.

What began as a practical way to help her family quickly became much bigger than she imagined. Paige credits Lisa for teaching her the importance of polished, accurate contracts before later joining another brokerage, where mentor Beau Dunfee helped “skyrocket” her business. Last year alone, Paige closed 40 transactions for over \$10 million in sales volume.

The numbers tell one part of the story, but Paige’s drive goes back much further. Becoming a young mom, taking on adult responsibilities early, and learning to keep moving even when things didn’t go according to plan all helped shape the way she approaches business today.

“I felt like life kept throwing bricks at me and I realized I could either let them bury me or use them to build something. I also think consistency and commitment





have gotten me a lot farther than motivation ever has,” she emphasizes. “People are trusting me with really important things, and that responsibility doesn’t go away just because I’m having an off day.”

Opening New Doors

In December 2021, Paige and Brandon took another big leap, launching Brick Built Real Estate to transform what had once been The Corbalis Team into a full-service brokerage. For Paige, however, the name represented considerably more than a rebrand.

It grew from a philosophy she had developed through years of navigating challenges, taking on responsibility early, and steadily creating something better for herself and her family. Rather than allowing difficult circumstances to define where she could go, Paige learned to treat them as pieces she could build with, one decision and one brick at a time.

Today, Brick Built spans multiple offices from Central Indiana to Southwest Michigan, but Paige still describes the brokerage as one big team. Collaboration remains at the center of everything they do and is a top priority when meeting with prospective agents.

“I’m not actively recruiting, but if an agent comes to me interested

in being full-time with a collaborative attitude, I will sit down and chat with them about what their goals look like,” Paige states.

A Creative, Curious Mind

Paige has never been one to follow the crowd. Early in her career, she embraced social media with gusto, posting videos consistently and using bright, bold colors to stand out. She laughs now at how relentless she was, but the strategy clearly worked.

She’s always looking for new ways to stay connected with past clients as well. Brick Built hosts annual client tailgates, while Paige personally drops by each month with client gifts. Last March, she and fellow Brick Built agent Erika Ortiz launched the Agents After Hours podcast after discovering they could talk nonstop about real estate for four straight hours during a road trip between offices.

“We discuss the parts of the industry that agents don’t want to say out loud,” Paige explains. “Since most agents suffer in silence, we talk about the practical and the real and we don’t really filter things.”

That same authenticity carries over into every client relationship. Today, Paige’s business is now fueled entirely by repeat clients and referrals, an impressive milestone that she’s worked hard to achieve.

“Clients tell me I make them feel like their family or a friend while having real estate knowledge,” she smiles. “People tend to open up to me easily and trust me. That’s a privilege.”

“

People tend to open up to me easily and trust me.
THAT’S A PRIVILEGE.”





Past President. She also supports Angels in the Attic while leading Brick Built's annual community giveback initiatives, including a Back-to-School drive that has grown from helping 25 children to nearly 2,000, along with a Christmas gift program that now serves 500 children each year.

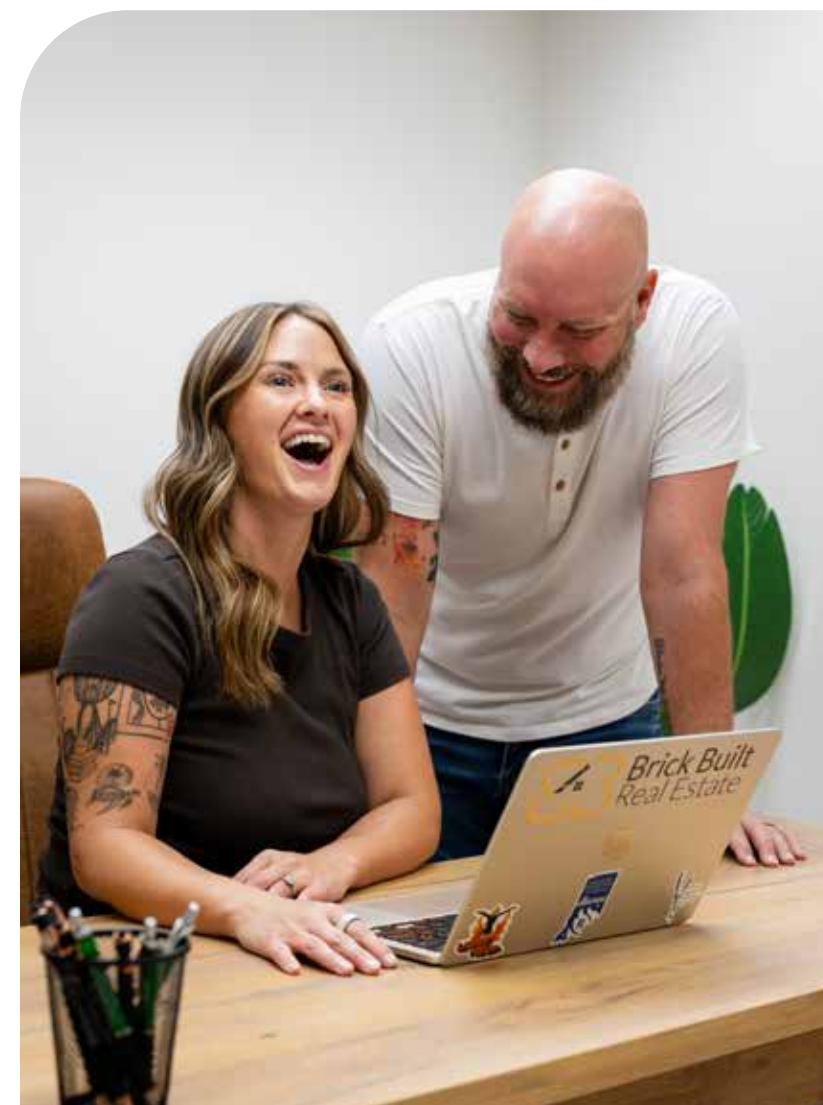
Even with a growing brokerage and a full plate, Paige admits her entrepreneurial mind is never completely quiet.

"For the longest time, my husband has joked that I don't have to open a new business every year," Paige laughs. "It's

been over a year since I've started something new, so technically ... I'm due."

Rather than rushing into another venture though, Paige is thinking long-term while quietly mapping out a five-year plan for whatever comes next.

"My focus right now is on strengthening what we've already built," she concludes. "I'm looking at our systems, processes, and ways to better support our agents. I truly believe that if you take care of the people and the foundation, the growth takes care of itself." ❖



The Next Big Idea

On the homefront, Paige and Brandon will celebrate 11 years of marriage this October and are raising three wonderful children — Ryley (17), Dayton (13), and Haisley (9) — while making time to travel, attend concerts and comedy shows, and discover great restaurants along the way. (Their current favorite is Corn Dance for a nice juicy steak!) Through it all, Paige remains grateful.

"So much of my story has been about building a life for and with my family. Real estate started because I wanted to contribute financially while still being able to be a mom," she reflects. "And then Brandon

and I built our brokerage together."

Every Corbalis trip also comes with a unique tradition.

"When Brandon and I travel to a new state, we get tattoos there that add to our travel sleeve," Paige shares. "We're currently up to a dozen states, with two new tattoos to be added this year when we visit Alabama's Gulf Shores this month, and New Orleans in November for a National Realtors Convention."

Closer to home, Paige serves as Secretary/Treasurer for the South Bend Area REALTORS® and is the MLS

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Julie Miller

with Metropolitan Title

Building More Than Closings: Julie Miller's Passion for People, Purpose, and Partnership

PHOTOS BY MEGAN WILLIAMSON PHOTOGRAPHY

For Julie Miller, real estate has never simply been about transactions. It's about people, relationships, and the opportunity to make an impact.

Every closing represents something bigger—a new beginning, a lifelong dream, a business opportunity, or one of the biggest financial decisions someone will ever make. After more than two decades in the real estate industry, Julie has learned that while properties change hands every day, the relationships built along the way are what truly last.

Today, as Director of Sales & Marketing for Metropolitan Title, Julie helps lead business development, sales strategy, marketing, and relationship growth across the company's footprint. She has spent the past 12 years with Metropolitan Title, a locally owned independent title insurance company with 18 offices across Northern Indiana and Southwest Michigan.

But ask Julie what Metropolitan Title really sells, and her answer goes far beyond title insurance.

"Title insurance may be our product, but what we really provide is confidence, expertise, partnership, and an experience that reflects well on the professionals who trust us with their clients."

That philosophy has shaped Julie's career and the way she approaches leadership, sales, and customer relationships.

Julie didn't originally set out to build a career in title insurance. She entered the real estate world in the late 1990s as a Realtor before spending the next decade in mortgage lending. After a three-year chapter in group health and life insurance, an opportunity with Metropolitan Title brought her back to the industry she had always loved.



"Real estate has always felt like home to me," she says. "I understand the people, the challenges, the opportunities and the entrepreneurial spirit of this industry. More importantly, I realized this was a place where I could make a meaningful impact."

And for Julie, impact means much more than getting a transaction to the closing table.

Having sat on multiple sides of the real estate transaction herself, she understands how much trust is involved

when an agent or lender recommends a title company. They aren't simply choosing a service provider—they're placing a piece of their own reputation in someone else's hands.

"Our customers work incredibly hard to build trust with their clients," Julie explains. "When they refer that client to us, we become an extension of their business and their brand. How we communicate, how we solve problems, and how we make people feel matters."



**“We can listen,
respond, adapt,
and continually
ask ourselves how
we can do better.”**

That responsibility is something Julie and the Metropolitan Title team take seriously.

The goal isn’t simply a successful closing. It’s creating an experience where buyers, sellers, agents, and lenders feel informed, valued, and confident throughout the process.

That philosophy has helped Metropolitan Title grow into one of the region’s largest independent title companies while maintaining strong local roots. Since 1857, the company has remained locally owned, with owners and team members who live, work, raise families, and invest in the communities they serve.

For Julie, being local means something.

“There is a different level of ownership when the people making decisions are connected to the communities and customers those decisions affect,” she says. “We can listen, respond, adapt, and

continually ask ourselves how we can do better.”

That willingness to evolve has become increasingly important as technology transforms the real estate industry.

Julie has witnessed dramatic changes throughout her career. Buyers and sellers expect faster communication, greater convenience, and more transparency throughout a transaction. Metropolitan Title continues investing in technology and processes designed to make the closing experience easier and more efficient.

But Julie is equally passionate about making sure technology never replaces the human element.

“Technology should make relationships better, not eliminate them,” she says. “The companies that will thrive are the ones that embrace innovation while still making people feel seen, heard, and valued.”

That belief in people extends well beyond Julie’s work at Metropolitan Title.

At her core, Julie is a builder—of relationships, businesses, confidence, ideas, and people.

Whether she’s mentoring a new Realtor, coaching a member of her sales team, brainstorming a marketing strategy with an experienced agent, connecting two people who should know one another, or encouraging someone to take the next step toward a goal, Julie lights up when she sees people grow.

“One of the things that fulfills me most is helping someone recognize potential in themselves or their business that maybe they couldn’t see before,” she says. “Sometimes people don’t need someone to give them the answer. They need someone to ask the right questions, challenge their thinking, believe in the possibilities, and help them turn that vision into action.”

That passion for growth has become something of a trademark throughout the local real estate community.

For the past decade, Julie has hosted an annual Vision Board Party where Realtors gather not simply to cut pictures from magazines, but to intentionally think about what they want their businesses and lives to become.

“I’m a huge believer that clarity creates momentum,” she says. “When you get clear about where you’re going and why it matters to you, you start making different decisions about how you’re going to get there.”

Her passion for coaching and leadership extends well beyond those events. Julie is a certified Everything DiSC® Practitioner, Five Behaviors® Practitioner, Master Entrepreneurship Coach, and Master Life Coach. She regularly develops and facilitates programs centered on leadership, branding, mindset, sales, business growth, personal development, and helping professionals become more intentional about how they show up in the marketplace.

She also believes strongly that the best sales professionals aren’t simply salespeople.

They are educators, connectors, community partners, business builders, and trusted advisors.

It’s a philosophy Julie works to instill in her own sales team and one she has tried to embody throughout her career.

“I don’t believe great sales is about convincing people to buy something,” she says. “It’s about understanding people—what they’re trying to accomplish, what challenges they’re facing, and how you can genuinely bring value. When you lead with curiosity, service, and confidence, the business becomes a natural result of the relationship.”

That approach has earned Julie recognition within the real estate community. In 2023, she was named Affiliate of the Year by the South Bend Area REALTORS®, an honor she

considers one of the most meaningful of her career.

“Receiving that recognition from the people and the industry I’ve had the privilege of serving for so many years meant the world to me,” she says.

Still, Julie is quick to point out that awards aren’t what drive her.

“I’m proud of the business I’ve built, but I’m even more proud of the relationships behind it,” she says. “If I’ve helped someone grow their business, become more confident, make an important connection, or believe a little bigger about what is possible for them—that means something to me.”

Community is another important part of that philosophy.

Julie believes Metropolitan Title’s role should extend beyond the closing table. Whether through industry education, community partnerships, charitable initiatives, or simply connecting people and organizations that can help one another, she believes businesses have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to strengthen the communities they serve.

“I want us to be known for showing up,” she says. “Not just when there is a transaction involved, but because we’re part of these communities too.”

Outside the office, family remains at the center of Julie’s life.

She and her husband, Tom, a local musician who performs throughout Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, enjoy traveling and exploring together whenever possible. Their adventures have taken them to some of their favorite places in the country, including Yosemite, Zion, Olympic National Park and its rainforests, Lake Tahoe, and the Great Smoky Mountains.

They also make frequent trips to New York City, where two of Julie’s three sons, Ethan and Caleb, have pursued acting careers through The American Academy of Dramatic Arts.....and Indianapolis where her oldest son, Christian, and his fiancée, Kayla, are planting their roots.





And despite Julie’s tendency to always have another idea, project, event, or goal in motion, some of her favorite moments are the simplest ones—camping with Tom, relaxing by the pool while their three dogs, Blue, Oliver, and Jack, swim until the sun goes down, or ending the day with another episode of Dateline.

Those moments keep life grounded and remind her what all the hard work is ultimately for.

Looking ahead, Julie sees tremendous opportunity—not only for Metropolitan Title, but for the real estate professionals and communities the company serves.

Her vision is to continue building a company culture where sales is about service, relationships lead to opportunity, innovation improves the customer experience, and Metropolitan Title is viewed as much more than the place where a transaction closes.

“I want our customers to feel like they have someone in their corner,” Julie says. “Someone who wants to understand their business, help them solve problems, connect them with opportunities, and ultimately help them become more successful. If our customers grow, we grow. That’s partnership.”

For Julie Miller, success has never been measured solely by the number of transactions closed or the size of a sales report.

It’s measured in people impacted, businesses grown, relationships strengthened, communities supported, and opportunities created.

Because at the end of the day, Metropolitan Title may insure properties and close transactions—but Julie believes the real opportunity is much bigger: To build relationships that move people, businesses, and communities forward.

LAURA ROBBINS
Relationships First, Always

For Laura Robbins, success has never been measured by numbers alone. After nearly three decades in sales, she’s built her career on something much more meaningful: relationships, trust, and genuinely caring about the people she serves.

Today, Laura serves as an Account Executive for Metropolitan Title, supporting real estate professionals throughout LaPorte and the surrounding market. Although she’s entering only her second year in the title industry, she brings nearly 30 years of sales experience—and a lifetime of experience connecting with people, earning trust, and showing up when it matters.

Interestingly, real estate wasn’t part of Laura’s original career plan.

She earned degrees in Medical Administration, Health Science, and Medical Billing & Coding, fully

expecting to spend her professional life in healthcare. But after working in the medical field, she discovered that what energized her most wasn’t sitting behind a desk or charting records. It was connecting with people.

“I realized pretty quickly that building relationships was what energized me,” Laura says. “I love getting to know people and being someone they can count on.”

Life eventually led her to Metropolitan Title in an unexpected way. Before joining the company, Laura was actually one of Metropolitan Title’s vendors, selling office equipment. Over time, the relationships she built with the team opened the door to a completely new opportunity.

“Funny enough, Metropolitan Title was already part of my life before I ever worked here,” she says. “Sometimes life has a way of bringing everything full circle.”

That people-first mindset defines the way Laura approaches her role today. She enjoys helping REALTORS®, lenders, buyers, and sellers navigate the closing process while continuing to learn the many layers of an industry that is still relatively new to her.

And while Laura may be newer to title, she’s certainly not new to LaPorte—or to building relationships.

After decades of working and living in the community, Laura seems to know someone almost everywhere she goes. What might look like an impressive network is really the result of years spent talking with people, remembering their stories, staying connected, and genuinely taking an interest in their lives.

“If you ask around town,” she laughs, “most people will tell you I know everyone...and probably their mother and their neighbor, too.”

For Laura, those connections aren’t just contacts in a database. They’re people—and that distinction matters.

“I want people to know they have someone in their corner,” she says. “Someone they can call, someone who will listen, and someone who will do everything she can to help.”

That philosophy took on an even deeper meaning for Laura after a life-changing breast cancer diagnosis in 2024.

Facing cancer required a different kind of strength than anything her career had ever asked of her. The experience challenged her, changed her perspective, and taught her just how resilient she could be.

Today, Laura proudly carries the title of breast cancer survivor—and with it, a deeper understanding of what it means to be a warrior.

“You learn a lot about yourself when you’re faced with something you never expected,” Laura says. “I learned that I’m stronger than I realized. You keep moving forward, you lean on the people who love you, and you fight.”

That experience reinforced something Laura had believed for years: relationships matter most when life gets hard. The people who show up, check in, offer encouragement, and stand beside you can make all the difference.

It’s a lesson she carries with her into the way she approaches people today—with gratitude, empathy, and a greater appreciation for the opportunity to make someone’s day a little better.

And no one brings Laura more joy than her family.

When she’s away from work, her favorite role is one that has nothing to do with real estate:

“Mimi.”

Her granddaughter, Charlette Kay, is the center of her world, and with another grandchild on the way, Laura couldn’t be more excited about the next chapter for her family.



“The companies that will thrive are the ones that embrace innovation while still making people feel seen, heard, and valued.”

Family gatherings, celebrating milestones, and simply spending quality time together are what matter most.

She’s also known among friends, family, and clients for another trademark quality—gift giving. Laura’s love language is often expressed through a thoughtful surprise, a small gesture, or, quite frequently, a great pair of earrings.

“I just love making people smile,” she says.

It’s a small detail that says quite a bit about who Laura is. She pays attention to people. She remembers what they like. And when she sees something that reminds her of someone, she’s likely to let them know.

Outside of work, Laura is also invested in the community she calls home through volunteering and supporting local organizations whenever she can. As a licensed Title Insurance Producer in both Indiana and Michigan, she’s continuing



to grow her industry knowledge with a goal of becoming much more than simply another vendor to the real estate professionals she serves.

She wants to become a resource, a connector, and someone her customers know they can trust.

“I want to be a trusted resource and a genuine partner,” she says. “I want people to know that when they work

with me, I care about their business and their clients.”

It’s a philosophy that fits naturally with the relationship-focused culture at Metropolitan Title—and with the career Laura has spent nearly three decades building.

Her professional path may not have unfolded exactly as she imagined when she first entered the workforce, but

Laura has learned that some of life’s unexpected turns can lead exactly where you’re supposed to be.

From healthcare to sales, from vendor to Account Executive, and from a frightening diagnosis to cancer survivor, every chapter has added something to the person she is today.

Resilient. Connected. Compassionate. A relationship builder.

And, most proudly of all, Mimi.

Because after nearly 30 years in sales, Laura knows that careers may be built on results—but a meaningful life is built on the people you love and the relationships you create along the way.

LANNETTE BICKEL
The Best “Temporary” Job Ever
Sometimes the best careers begin completely by accident. Just ask Lannette Bickel.

“I walked into the title industry just to help a friend answer phones,” she says with a laugh. “Somehow I’m still here. It’s the longest temporary job in recorded history.”

It’s also, she’ll tell you, the best accidental career decision she’s ever made.

Today, Lannette serves as an Account Executive for Metropolitan Title in Kosciusko and Wells Counties, where her humor, authenticity, and genuine love for people have made her a trusted resource throughout the local real estate community.

One of the first lessons she learned surprised her and she learned it the hard way, sitting through her own closings.

“Most people have no idea we’re not part of the real estate company, the bank, or the attorney’s office,” she says. “We’re the quiet independent in the middle. Basically the Switzerland of the closing table.”

That shaped how she approaches every transaction since.

“No matter how chaotic the file gets, our job is to stay neutral and make our client look good.”

And every file, she points out, is somebody’s life. A first home. A growing family. A downsize after a hard season. A fresh start somewhere new.

“We get a front-row seat to some of the biggest chapters in people’s lives. And when they sit down at that table, the only familiar faces are usually their realtor, their lender... and us,” she says. “That’s not paperwork. That’s a person. I want them to leave feeling like somebody actually listened.”

Three Kinds of Relationships
Lannette has a theory she’s not shy about sharing.

“There are three types of business relationships, and you have to ask yourself which one you are,” she says. “There’s the one-and-done - nice knowing you, best of luck. There’s dating you make up, break up, make up again. And then there’s marriage.”

She’s building marriages.

“That means I’m still here when it’s not convenient. I’m still here when there’s nothing in it for me. That’s the whole difference.”

About That Printer
Of course, some days test the theory.

“Picture a busy Friday afternoon. The client walked in and needed to be gone two minutes after they showed up. There are a hundred forms to sign, we’re waiting on funding approval and the printer picks that exact moment to stage a full revolt,” she says. “And we are crying on the inside, because we know exactly how long this is taking and there is absolutely nothing we can do about it.”

She’s laughing, but the point underneath is serious.

“We’re all human, so sometimes things go sideways. And we will get it wrong at some point — everybody does. What

counts is what we do next. It’s not what you do when you get it right that shows your character. It’s what you do when you get it wrong.”

When that happens, she digs in until it’s fixed.

“That’s the part I care about most,” she says. “It’s also the part that keeps me from becoming a full-time beach resident just yet.”

Wired for Giving Back
Ask what she does outside of work and the list gets long fast. Three boards. Three charity events she chairs each year. Plus HOA president in her own neighborhood a role she promises is every bit as glamorous as it sounds.

But she’ll tell you it doesn’t have to be that official to count.

“Giving back is really just showing up,” she says. “Sometimes that’s a board seat or a charity event. Sometimes it’s helping a friend paint a house, or baking something for somebody having a rough week. It all counts.”

She also volunteers at the Humane Shelter, which may be the piece closest to her heart.

“It’s about being a voice for the ones who can’t speak,” she says. “Or sometimes it’s just sitting quietly with a

scared dog who’s lost their way, so they can feel safe again. We’ve all been that dog at some point.”

She mentors students through Junior Achievement, too. For Lannette, none of it is optional.

“Showing up for others is non-negotiable.”

That same curiosity carries into how she spends her free time. She loves going new places and seeing new things especially the small, odd wonders most people drive right past.

“Some of the coolest things I’ve ever found were practically in my own back yard,” she says. “You just have to actually look.”

And then there’s the water. Soft ocean breezes, toes in the sand, and a snorkel mask.

“There’s an entire other world down there. People forget that.”

Two dogs keep her moving. “They need their exercise,” she says, “which very conveniently means I get mine.”

She’s also deliberate about where she spends her money, local shops, local artists, local makers.

“I love supporting people who are working hard to build something in



their own community. That matters to me.”

She’s just as intentional about who she keeps around her. “I surround myself with people who want more, have more, and keep moving forward. Breathing a little extra life into others makes me genuinely happy and I never leave those conversations without learning something myself.”

Looking Ahead

“People do business with people they like and trust not a company name on a building,” she says. “I don’t want to be a place you do business. I want to be a person you do business with.”

And if it turns into more than a transaction? Even better.

“I may not end up being your title girl,” she says with a smile. “But I might just turn out to be a really good friend.” Then, with perfect timing: “And sometimes that friend happens to know a thing or two about a solid deal.”

There’s one more thing she wants to say... this one to the people already in her corner.

“I never expected this industry to hand me some of the best friendships of my life. If you’re one of them reading this, thank you for being the great human you are.”

Knowing Lannette, there’s a good chance she’ll become both the title girl and the friend.

DERIC TORRES
Serving People with Purpose

Deric Torres has never met a stranger...just people whose story he hasn’t heard yet.

He’s always loved hearing people’s stories, learning what motivates them, and finding ways to help them succeed. Those qualities have served him well as an Account Executive for Metropolitan Title, where he supports real estate professionals throughout Elkhart and Marshall Counties.

“I’ve always been a people person,” Deric says. “Helping others and building meaningful relationships is what energizes me.”

Born and raised in Elkhart, Deric’s roots run deep throughout the community. Some of his earliest memories were made inside his grandparents’ family Italian restaurant D’Antini in Elkhart.

As a kid, he spent countless hours playing hide-and-seek between the booths with cousins before eventually graduating to bus tables for his Mom and Aunt and help peel potatoes in the kitchen.

“Looking back, that’s where I first learned what hospitality really meant,” he says. “Everyone who walked through those doors left feeling like family.”

His career path has been anything but conventional.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in Telecommunications from Ball State University, Deric moved with his lovely



“I want to be a trusted resource and a genuine partner.”



wife to Nashville, TN where he worked behind the scenes in the music industry. From concert stages and recording studios to Broadway honky-tonks, he worked as an audiovisual technician running sound, lighting, and massive video displays for some of the industry’s biggest names.

Later, he continued working in live events in Indianapolis before pivoting into carpentry and many other creative opportunities during the pandemic, all while doing his best to be a superstar Dad of 3 young boys!

Each experience taught him valuable lessons about problem solving, adaptability, and serving people well under pressure.

Today, those skills translate naturally into the title industry.

“I love helping agents solve problems and get to the closing table as smoothly as possible,” he says.

For Deric, however, business is about much more than transactions.

His faith in Jesus is the foundation for how he approaches both work and life.

“I believe I can love others because He first loved me,” he says. “I hope every person I meet walks away knowing they’re seen, valued, and loved.”

That mindset shapes every relationship he builds with agents, lenders, buyers, and sellers.

Whether he’s answering questions, solving challenges, or simply offering encouragement during a stressful transaction, Deric strives to bring calm, confidence, and positivity to every interaction. “Among many other things in life, having three amazing (but energetic) young boys has definitely taught me a lot about patience and staying calm under pressure.”

He’s also quick to laugh at himself.

“My other talents include starting songs I’ll never finish,” he jokes, “and somehow always finding food at every gathering.”

Those who know him would probably agree.

Approachable, authentic, and always ready with a smile, Deric brings both professionalism and personality to his role.

As he continues serving Elkhart and Marshall Counties, he’s excited to keep building relationships that extend far beyond the closing table.

“Every transaction is really about people,” he says. “If I can make someone’s day a little easier or help them feel encouraged, then I’ve done my job.”

For Deric, that’s what service has always been about making people feel at home, one conversation at a time. 🏡



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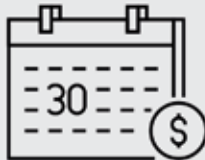
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