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Spotlight
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HANDYMAN**

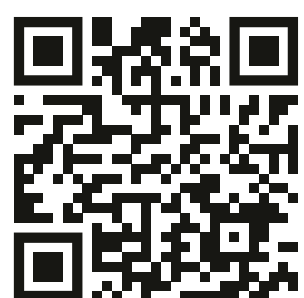
Leigh Cound

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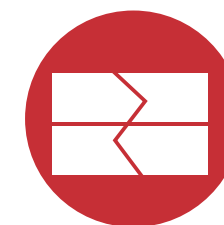
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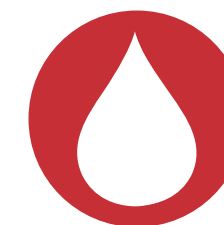
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Birmingham Real Producers Top 300 Agents



CONGRATULATIONS ON MAKING THE LIST!

Congratulations on making the *Birmingham Real Producers* 2026 Top 300 Agent list! The list is based on 2025 sales according to the MLS, and as part of this exclusive community of the top real estate agents in Birmingham, the top 300 agents will receive the magazine each month and be able to attend our exclusive events for agents and RP preferred partners in the city.

As part of the top 300 agents in Birmingham, you will also have your own badge to use however you'd like to

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Here's What Agents Sold in 2025

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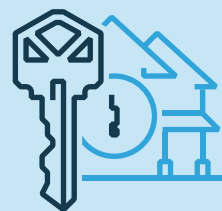


TOTAL LISTINGS SOLD



TOTAL SALES VOLUME

\$6,638,984,399



AVERAGE DAYS ON THE MARKET

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SAVE TIME WITH **ACE** HANDYMAN SERVICES & CROSS OFF THOSE PUNCH LIST ITEMS

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH MCCABE • PHOTOS BY BRENDON PINOLA PHOTOGRAPHY

When your to-do list keeps growing and the weekend never seems long enough, ACE Handyman Services is here to help you cross off those home projects—efficiently, professionally, and with a smile. It doesn't get any easier than that.

At the heart of the Birmingham Metro area operation is Steve Hartman, a hands-on franchise owner with a background in national account sales and decades of leadership experience. When the pandemic shifted career paths for many, Steve saw it as a chance to pivot—and bring a nationally trusted name to a locally needed service. “There was a real demand in the community for dependable handyman work,” Steve shares. “And ACE was the brand that stood out. It felt like the right fit.”

Since opening in June 2021, ACE Handyman Services of Birmingham has quickly made a name for itself with over 260 Google reviews and a 4.9-star rating—a direct reflection of the high standards Steve holds for his team. “We hire multi-skilled craftsmen who take pride in their work,” he says. “They’re background-checked, drug-tested, and most importantly, they operate with integrity and care for the customer.”

From “Honey-Do” to “Done”

Whether it’s fixing doors, repairing drywall, installing and repairing fences and decks, painting, or general carpentry, ACE Handyman Services tackles over 1100 smaller residential jobs that often get pushed to the bottom of the list. “Our services are ideal for the real estate community, too,” Steve adds. “We regularly help agents and homeowners handle punch lists from home inspections, whether it’s prepping for a sale or taking care of fixes after closing.”

Jobs are scheduled in clear, manageable time blocks—2, 4, or 8 hours—with firm appointment windows, courtesy confirmation calls, and real-time notifications when your craftsman is on the way. Plus, customers are only charged for the actual time worked, not the scheduled block, which keeps billing transparent and fair. And best of all? All work is guaranteed for one full year.

Built on People, Powered by Purpose

Steve’s love for what he does is simple: people. “I’ve always loved the people side of business—leading teams, growing organizations, and helping customers,” he shares. With years of experience managing franchises, national restaurant accounts, and working in sales and operations, Steve understands the power of structure, communication, and follow-through.

His team works Monday through Friday, 8 to 5, creating a consistent, healthy work environment—a rarity in the handyman world. “I want to build a company where craftsmen feel valued and customers feel respected.” He and his team believe in being punctual, upfront, and helpful.





Steve is also deeply involved in the community, participating in the National Homebuilder Association, several area Chambers of Commerce, and BNI networking groups. “Being part of the community isn’t just good business—it’s the right thing to do.”

A Trusted Brand, A Local Touch

ACE Handyman Services is one of the fastest-growing franchises in the U.S., now with over 365 locations nationwide. The business began 26 years ago as Handyman Matters, and in 2019, it was acquired by ACE Hardware. Founders Andy and Collette Bell still lead the organization today, with Andy as CEO and Collette as VP of Franchise Sales.

Though part of a national franchise, Steve’s office is independently owned and firmly grounded in faith, family, and local values. Married for 24 years, Steve is a proud husband, father of three, and grandfather of two. When he’s not running the business, you’ll find him golfing, spending time with loved ones, and giving back to the community he calls home.

So, the next time you have a project you keep putting off—or a punch list that just won’t punch itself—save yourself the stress. Call ACE Handyman Services and let Steve and his team bring helpful to your home, business, or listing. 📍

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SAVING FOR RETIREMENT: ARE YOU GUESSING OR PLANNING?

SUBMITTED BY RICHARD SELF, EDWARD JONES ADVISOR

Let's say you dream of spending your retirement mornings on a warm beach, coffee in hand, waves rolling in. To get there, you had a simple plan: save \$1 million and buy the beach house you always wanted.

But when retirement arrives, reality hits. After accounting for keeping your current home, everyday expenses and health care, \$1 million doesn't stretch as far as you thought, and the beach house remains a dream. The problem wasn't your discipline – it was that your number was never really your number. It was arbitrary, not anchored to what your ideal retirement would actually cost.

How can you make sure your retirement number is right for you?

A solid savings goal starts with a clear picture of the retirement you want. Think through where you plan to live, whether you'll keep your current home or downsize, how much you plan to travel, if you'll help children and grandchildren financially and what health care might cost you later in life. Build a realistic monthly budget, then multiply by 12 months to find your annual need. Adjust this amount for inflation until the first year of retirement.

Then, multiply that figure by 25 to get a sense of how much may be needed to save. It's a formula based on the idea of withdrawing 4% annually from your savings, assuming you retire in your mid-60s. If you need \$60,000 a year, your target is around \$1.5 million. You may need more or less depending on your lifestyle, health, unexpected expenses, Social Security benefits and other income. No single rate or strategy will work for everyone. A financial advisor can help you determine your number and strategy.

Once you know your target, the path forward becomes clearer. Here are a few tips for next steps:

- **Start early.** The sooner you begin saving, the more time compound interest has to work in your favor. Small amounts set aside automatically each paycheck have the opportunity to grow significantly over decades.
- **Live below your means.** Spending less than you earn is one of the most powerful wealth-building habits. When your income rises, save and invest the difference instead of upgrading your lifestyle.
- **Keep your debt under control.** Since credit cards and other high-interest debt can slow your progress, pay off balances monthly when possible.
- **Invest consistently.** If your employer offers a 401(k), aim to contribute at least 10%-15% of your salary, and increase your contributions after every raise. If you max out your 401(k), a traditional IRA or Roth IRA may offer additional tax-advantaged growth (eligibility and contribution limits apply).

- **Boost your income when you can.** Develop new skills, ask for a raise or explore a side income. Every extra dollar saved moves you closer to your goal.



The difference between a retirement you love and one full of compromises often comes down to the planning you do today. Know your real number, build a solid plan and get the right help along the way.

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When an Inspection Turns Up Mold, Every Day Counts

BY BRANDON FENNELL, SERVPRO TEAM WILSON

A single notation on an inspection report can change the course of a closing. Here is what agents should know to protect the timeline and the sale.

TIMELINE

It Can Stall Your Closing: A mold notation often triggers buyer hesitation, renegotiation, or a delayed closing date. Fast, documented remediation keeps the transaction moving instead of sitting in limbo.

RISK

DIY Fixes Rarely Hold Up: Bleach and a fresh coat of paint might pass a walkthrough, but a re-inspection or the buyer’s specialist usually catches it. Improperly treated mold tends to return, often mid-escrow.

UNDERWRITING

Documentation Is What Moves the File: Lenders and buyers’ agents want proof, not promises. A certified report with before-and-after documentation gives everyone at the table a reason to keep moving forward.

DAYS ON MARKET

Speed Protects the Listing: Every day a property sits with an open mold issue is a day it isn’t closing. A same-day assessment and rapid turnaround is often the difference between a delay and an on-time close.

The most common reason a mold issue derails a closing isn’t the mold itself. It’s how long the file sits before someone qualified addresses it.



Brandon Fennell is a commercial account manager with more than 25 years of combined experience in property management, disaster restoration, and remediation. After spending 18 years in property management, Brandon transitioned into the restoration industry with SERVPRO Team Wilson for the past seven years. Throughout his career, Brandon has supported clients across a wide range of properties and industries, from large commercial facilities, including hospitals and warehouses, to residential properties in partnership with insurance agents and real estate professionals. His extensive experience gives him a well rounded understanding of the unique challenges property owners and professionals face before, during, and after unexpected property damage. To reach Brandon, call 205-542-7013 or email bfennell@servproteamwilson.com.





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Braving the Crash

WRITTEN BY
ELIZABETH MCCABE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRENDON
PINOLA PHOTOGRAPHY

**HOW LEIGH COUND
BUILT A 96%
REFERRAL BUSINESS**

When Leigh Cound hung her real estate license in 2010, the market wasn't rolling out the red carpet. The country was reeling from the historic housing crash, and 30% of agents were actively exiting the business. Entering real estate took courage.

But if you ask Leigh today about the secret sauce to build a thriving business, she'll break the news to you gently: there isn't one.

"There is no real secret sauce in this industry outside of relationships," Leigh says. "For me, when I meet you and we become friends, I don't ever want to lose touch with you."

Her fiercely loyal approach has transformed her career into a masterclass in community building. Having spent her 53 years of life rooted right here in Birmingham, except for 4 years away at Auburn University, 96% of her business is fueled by her personal relationships, including past clients and referrals.

Finding Her Passion

Prior to launching into real estate, Leigh graduated from Auburn with a degree in corporate journalism and marketing. "I worked for what used to be SouthTrust Bank for 7 years in the early '90s," she says.

However, life shifted when she got married. The conversation naturally turned toward starting a family. Seeking greater flexibility and earning potential, Leigh worked in pharmaceutical sales for two years. But when her first baby arrived, she chose to step away from the corporate track to stay home. During those years, Leigh spent countless hours selling items on eBay to earn extra income.

"I loved being home with my babies, but eventually, I reached a point where I was ready to get back out there and interact with people during the day," Leigh shares. "That's when I landed here."

The catalyst for her leap into real estate belongs to Mary Jo and Seymour West. Years prior, Leigh and her husband, Doug, had attempted a two-year stint trying to sell their Riverchase home "For Sale By Owner." Mary Jo and Seymour stepped in, expertly navigated the process, and sold the home. In the process, the Wests encouraged Leigh and Doug to pursue real estate.

“When they first brought it up, I had a newborn, so it didn’t even enter my reality,” Leigh recalls. “But they never stopped encouraging me. Years later, I took the leap, and I am so profoundly grateful that I did.”

Leigh has been with Keller Williams since the day she earned her real estate license in 2010. “It has certainly helped catapult my business,” she says. Through Keller Williams’ leadership and training, she learned how to run her business as a business.

The Heart of a Counselor

Because Leigh views real estate as a relational calling, she frequently acts as an advisor, a steady sounding board, and a trusted counselor.

“You walk through a gamut of emotions with people,” Leigh explains. From first-time homebuyers to those selling their parents’ home after loss, Leigh helps clients of all walks of life.

To keep herself grounded, Leigh regularly leans on a classic piece of wisdom passed down from her mother.

“My mom’s favorite saying was always, ‘This too shall pass.’ It used to drive me absolutely crazy as a kid,” Leigh chuckles. “But it is so incredibly true. In this business, it’s remarkably easy to get wrapped up in the immediate panic. Now, I step back and say, ‘This is a today problem. This too shall pass.’ We can face it, find a solution, and start fresh tomorrow.”

A Family Affair

In 2021, Leigh’s business evolved into a true family affair when her husband, Doug, earned his real estate license and joined her. Doug had spent 25 dedicated years as an educator and counselor, retiring from his career just before the global pandemic.

While Doug prefers to stay in the background, Leigh is quick to give him the credit he deserves.

“I literally could not do what I do without him,” Leigh says. “He is an



“In this business, it’s remarkably easy to get wrapped up in the immediate panic. Now, I step back and say, ‘This is a today problem. This too shall pass.’ We can face it, find a solution, and start fresh tomorrow.”



Photo provided by Leigh Cound

incredibly wise and calming presence for our clients.”

The couple is blessed with two children. Their 23-year-old daughter is entering the professional world this September as a CPA, while their son is a junior at Auburn University studying accounting.

As Leigh and Doug embrace the empty nest, they continue to focus their business along the Highway 280 corridor. Today, they reside in Griffin Park near Eagle Point.

When Sunday rolls around, you can reliably find Leigh and Doug at their

church in Mt. Laurel, where they lead a small group and Leigh serves on the worship team. And during the autumn months, the family roots for Auburn, hosting a game-day tailgate for clients and friends.

Leigh gives God the glory for her business.

“God provides the exact right people in my path every single day when I wake up,” Leigh says. “I just want to honor Him in everything I do. My favorite Scripture reminds me that His mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness, and I just want to point others to that same faithfulness each day.”



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