

SHARE THIS: When your sellers  
want to limit MLS exposure p. 27

There's something funny  
about these deals p. 16

Do you know what Texas  
buyers want? p. 24

# TEXAS REALTOR®

SUCCEED IN TEXAS REAL ESTATE

MAY/JUNE 2025



## Activate Your AI SUPERPOWERS

How to use new tech tools for images, videos, podcasts, marketing,  
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### Well, THAT Was Unexpected

Texas REALTOR® magazine asked you to share your amusing, odd, or surprising stories. Enjoy these out-of-the-ordinary experiences!

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# CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

**IN THE '90S** while working for Travis County, I became the first female deputized park ranger for the Travis County Sheriff's Department. That experience was life changing.

Even after launching my real estate career, I still felt drawn to volunteer in law enforcement, but I didn't know where. Then I heard about a remarkable man in League City named Tim Miller. In 1984, Tim found himself in the last place he wanted to be, the father of a missing 16-year-old daughter. For months, he searched for her but experienced a great deal of frustration with law enforcement efforts. The tragic story of Laura Miller's abduction and murder—and Tim's pursuit of justice—led him to found Texas EquuSearch, a group that helps families and law enforcement mobilize well-trained volunteers to find missing persons and bring justice to victims.

Texas EquuSearch has been successful in hundreds of searches and has found valuable evidence for criminal prosecution—and I'm a proud volunteer. I'm able to blend my knowledge of my local area with my knowledge of evidentiary procedure to serve others in need. It's not necessarily a happy role, but it is critical, and I am a firm believer in finding justice for those affected by crime in our communities.

I'm equally proud of the

way so many Texas REALTORS®

step up as volunteers to make

our communities better places.

Volunteering is part of our

profession's culture. I see this

dedication from members across

the state—giving your time,

talents, and contributions to

causes important to you.

I'm asking you to also apply

your passion for service to our

association itself. The strength

of Texas REALTORS® comes

from members who serve on

the committees that create our

positions and actions. No matter

your experience, we need you. And

take it from me—the more you put

into this organization, the more you

get out of it. Visit [texasrealestate.com/](https://texasrealestate.com/)

countmein to apply, and together

we will continue to shape the

future of Texas!

*Christy Gessler*

CHRISTY GESSLER  
2025 Chairman



## ONE MORE THING...

I played competitive tennis starting at the age of 6. After matches, my dad (aka Coach) would ask, "Christy, did you leave it all on the court today? Or was there something else you could have done for a different outcome?"



Maybe that's a little heavy for a child, but I knew exactly what he meant. He got me to reflect on my performance without regard to the result or how my opponent had played.

That lesson has stayed with me. It keeps me focused on what I can control: my own performance. For all of us in business—just like in sports—we can ask ourselves after each event or meeting, *Did I bring my best this time?* And if you fall short—if you leave something on the court—get back in the game and give it your best!

# BIG PICTURE

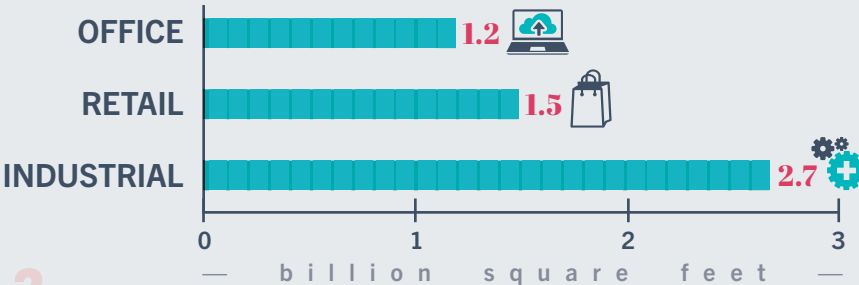
Find research and statistics at [texasrealestate.com/research](https://texasrealestate.com/research)

**18%**  
OF TEXAS HOMES  
ARE UNINSURED



11<sup>th</sup> highest rate in the U.S.,  
representing over 1 million homes

## TEXAS LEASABLE COMMERCIAL SPACE IN 2024



## OFFICE-EXCLUSIVE LISTINGS TOOK 2 WEEKS LONGER TO SELL

and didn't sell for a higher price than homes that started in the MLS

according to a six-month study of 100,000 listings in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.



**GARBAGE**  
tops the list of  
neighbor disputes,  
followed by noise,  
landscaping, pets,  
and maintenance

## TOP SELLER CONCERNS REPORTED BY MEMBERS OF TEXAS REALTORS®



— Respondents could choose multiple answers —

Texas led the  
U.S. with **15%**  
of all new  
home  
permits  
in 2024



Median square  
footage of new  
Texas homes  
dropped **5.3%** in  
the last five years

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SOURCES: (1) LendingTree; (2) Texas Real Estate Research Center; (3) Bright MLS; (4) Home Gnome; (5) Texas REALTORS®; (6) realtor.com; (7) realtor.com

# INSIGHTS

## Staging for Curb Appeal

Add outdoor touches to help buyers feel at home before they step inside.

**Buyers make up their minds quickly** about whether a home feels right. So, thoughtfully staging the exterior to make it inviting can help buyers visualize themselves coming home from the first time they walk up to the front door. Even if you don't offer home staging services, you can share tips with clients on how to make the entrance to their home more appealing.

### DECLUTTER THE LAWN

Give the front yard a deep clean by removing any debris or neglected lawn ornaments. Store toys and lawn care items out of sight. It's easy for homeowners to stop noticing things like old sprinklers or empty pots, but they can detract from the clear, uncluttered picture you want to present.

### MOW AND MAINTAIN

Keep the lawn mowed and the landscaping neat. You may want to reseed bare patches of grass.

### WASH EVERYTHING

If it can be washed, wash it! Rent a power washer for the sidewalk and driveway. Be more cautious with the front of the home: a garden hose might work well, or even a scrub brush on an extension pole. Wash the windows and clean every hard surface.

### PAINT THE DOOR

A new coat of paint can freshen up the front door. If the trim matches the door color, consider repainting that, too.

### REPLACE HARDWARE AND HOUSE NUMBERS

New door hardware and house numbers are inexpensive improvements that can help pull together an updated look.

### ADD FLOWERS

Blooming annuals can give an instant infusion of color and interest to flower beds, planters, window boxes, and hanging baskets. Consider adding flowers anywhere you can, especially near the front door, to draw the eye.

### UPDATE LIGHT FIXTURES

Take a close look at porch lights, path lights, and lights near the garage. If any of them seem outdated or worn, replacing them could be worthwhile.

### CHECK THE MAILBOX

At a minimum, the mailbox probably needs to be cleaned. If it isn't helping the home's look, give it a fresh coat of paint, add a



decorative element, or replace it entirely. And don't forget that the area around a mailbox often presents landscaping opportunities.

### TAKE A SEAT OR TWO

There's something so inviting about a place to sit. Whether it's a porch swing, rocker, bench, hammock, or Adirondack chair, setting up a place to rest sends a signal of welcome.

### TELL A STORY WITH COLOR

Would you like potential buyers to see this home as cheerful, elegant, peaceful, or bold? The color palette you choose for your staging can enhance that impression. Choose neutral shades with an accent color or two and weave them throughout. You might try including your colors in a tasteful wreath for the door, an outdoor rug, cushions, or a decorative planter.

### DON'T FORGET TO PUT OUT THE WELCOME MAT

Once you've led your visitors to the door, be sure to say welcome with a clean and attractive mat that matches your décor.

## Member Discount on NEO Makes Finding New Construction Easy

**Did you know** that many new-construction homes are not listed in the MLS?

NEO (New Estate Only) is the go-to platform for new construction communities in Texas with access to 1,800+ unique new communities and 21,500+ floor plans, representing hundreds of thousands of homes. NEO not only provides data missing from the MLS but adds comprehensive details about these communities.

NEO allows you to seamlessly integrate new-construction communities directly onto your website and/or through a landing page included with your subscription.

Enjoy real-time updates, a multilingual and user-friendly interface, and effortless property sharing with just one click. Plus, NEO allows you to keep your own leads, gives you branding control, and provides data security.

Get 20% off with your exclusive Texas REALTORS® member promo code.

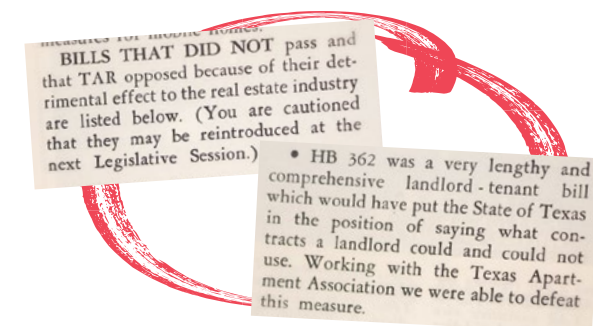
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## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### JUNE 1971

Texas REALTORS® defeated a proposal during the 62<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature intended to restrict the rights of landlords and property managers to choose what contracts they could use. Another bill the association defeated that year attempted to add a transfer tax to real estate transactions. Sound familiar? That's because for decades Texas REALTORS® has fended off taxes that would've made real estate transactions more costly to your clients.



## DEFINE THIS

### like-kind property

Properties of the same nature or character, even if they differ in grade or quality.

Like-kind exchanges of investment or business property are typically exempt from federal taxes on gains under Internal Revenue Code 1031. The IRS gives the example that an apartment building would generally be like-kind to another apartment building.



## David Jones Rises to a New Role at Texas REALTORS® as VP/COO

**New Texas REALTORS® Vice President of Operations/Chief Operating Officer** David Jones has been involved in real estate his whole career. He grew up in a family of REALTORS® in Los Angeles, where he graduated from UCLA and Loyola Law School before taking over the family-owned real estate management business. After moving to Texas, Jones joined the Legal Department at Texas REALTORS® in 2016 and most recently served as Deputy General Counsel and Director of Professional Standards. He also represents Texas REALTORS® on the national level on NAR's Professional Standards Committee and its Interpretations and Procedures Advisory Board.

Jones says his new role is all about ensuring that everybody has what they need to do their job. He looks forward to making sure "the staff has all the resources necessary to serve our members

and that our members have the resources, in turn, to be able to serve their clients and their communities."

Mike Barnett, who held the post before becoming CEO, said, "David brings a powerful combination of strategic thinking, business acumen, and a genuine passion for the REALTOR® community. His members-first mindset, deep understanding of our industry, and real-world business experience make him exceptionally well-suited for this role. Most importantly, David truly values the mission of Texas REALTORS® and the culture we've built—a team of passionate professionals working alongside dedicated volunteer leaders to drive our organization forward in service of members. I look forward to David's leadership and the positive impact he will continue to make as we shape the future of Texas REALTORS® together."

# Create Your Own Walkthrough Videos

Elevate your marketing without breaking the bank.



**Walkthrough videos can help** more potential buyers connect with your listing. While you could pay a professional to create them for you, it's not beyond your reach to tackle on your own and achieve pleasing results. Here are some tips for taking the DIY approach.

**Get equipped**  
Your phone camera is all you need to get started, but you may want to use an app that lets you adjust the automatic settings. Use the highest frame rate you can and set the shutter speed to at least twice the frame rate, so the image won't flicker. If you're willing to make a small investment, get a tripod with a slider for smooth pans across a room and/or a gimbal for steadier shots as you move through the home.

**Set the stage**  
If there is any last-minute decluttering to do, tackle that first. Is there a pile of mail on a counter or shoes by the door? Hide anything you don't want to show, including your own gear. Close closet doors and toilet seats.

**Light it right**  
Turn on lights and open curtains. If you can choose your timing, a partly cloudy day gives the best natural light.

**Chart your course**  
Walk through the home as if you were touring it yourself and notice what you find most appealing about it. Make a list of the shots you want for your video, in the order you will show them. Plan to take at least two 5-10 second clips in each area and edit your best shots together later. Especially in important parts of the home, like the kitchen and living room, take more video than you think you will need, so you'll have plenty to work with if something is flawed.

**Get to the point**  
Start with an inviting scene of the exterior of the home and then quickly go inside. Your audience will decide almost instantly whether the video interests them, so don't delay the action with a long intro, large logo, or lots of text.

**Go with the flow**  
Follow a logical progression through the house, so viewers get a sense of how the spaces relate to each other. If there is a back yard or other outdoor space, be sure to walk out into that area from the home. You can speed up or cut out boring transitions like long hallways, but be careful not to confuse the audience about where they are and how they got there.

**Keep your focus**  
When you move from one room to another, the light levels may change and your camera may lose the focus you want. You can work around this by taking separate shots in each room.

**Remember the audience**  
It's easy to get caught up in the fun of making movies and forget that the goal is to let viewers see through you and imagine themselves in the home. A cinematic closeup of an art object may look great, but the art likely won't convey with the home, and viewers want to be able to see the whole room. Have confidence in the home to keep the audience's interest and don't distract them from what they came to see.

**Put it all together**  
Edit your video to include the strongest scenes in the most direct and pleasing order. If you add music, be sure you have the rights to use it across all platforms where you'll post. Keep any text minimal and try not to cover too much of the screen. The simpler you can make your presentation, the easier it will be for viewers to feel that they are walking through the home right by your side.

# MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON A TEXAS REALTORS® COMMITTEE

Shape Your Profession *and* Boost Your Career.

**When you serve on a Texas REALTORS® committee**, you're playing a vital role in charting the association's future. But there's something in it for you, too. You'll work with colleagues from across the state, exchanging ideas and networking with some of the profession's best and brightest.

No matter your interests or expertise, there's a place for you among the association's 24 committees. Assignments are made in September, and committee meetings begin in December.

Apply by June 30 at [texasrealestate.com/countmein](https://texasrealestate.com/countmein).



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# CHECKING IN WITH TREC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Chelsea Buchholtz

*Buchholtz has been the executive director of the Texas Real Estate Commission since 2020. Under her leadership, the executive division implements the decisions of TREC and the Texas Appraiser Licensing and Certification Board. She leads daily operations, manages major initiatives, and coordinates with stakeholders among her many responsibilities.*

**Say goodbye to paper applications**  
This fall, TREC plans to launch a new system that will allow you to submit payments, renew licenses, and other tasks through our website. I'm excited to have a modern system that gives license holders more self-service options and eliminates a lot of paper.


**Avoid calling around lunch if you can**  
The best time to call is any time other than 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The times with the lowest call volume are 7 to 10 in the morning or 3 to 6 in the afternoon. Our average hold time is about a minute. And you can always email us at [information@trec.texas.gov](mailto:information@trec.texas.gov).

**Accountability in our industry comes from you**  
Everyone can help raise the bar for professionalism. You can help peers and colleagues in a kind way to make a correction. You can report bad actors to their brokers. And, if need be, you can make a formal complaint with TREC. If we expect excellence among real estate license holders, it's important to correct wrongdoing to protect the consumer.

**TREC is here to help**  
We don't have to be scary. TREC does have an enforcement function, but that's not all that we do. Folks may not know that only 1% of license holders ever get a complaint against them. There's this idea that TREC is ominous, but to 99% of license holders, no action is taken against them or investigation made. We also have a lot of educational elements. We prefer dealing with things beforehand and helping you answer questions if you are not sure how to do something.

**Every day is different**  
On a typical day, I meet with staff in our divisions to learn what's happening. I provide leadership and coaching when necessary. I have a lot of internal meetings. I'm working with our elected representatives during the legislative session. My favorite days are the ones in which I can interact with license holders. I try to say yes to any invitations to meet with local REALTOR® boards.

**Check us out online**  
You can watch our meetings live or later on our website. We also have recap articles that are very helpful if you want to find out what's going on. You can also interact with us on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

**We're not making changes for the fun of it**  
I think there are some misconceptions that we like to surprise license holders with constant changes. All rule changes are made through a process and include a 30-day comment period. Comments are considered and changes are made because of those comments. We rely on your feedback. It can feel like we're always changing contracts. In fact, it only happens once every two years. There's the lead up, the slow work of updating, the conversation, then the implementation. But when you're working in real estate, it can feel constant. 



# LEGAL

## You Play a Key Role in Code of Ethics Enforcement

The Code of Ethics distinguishes REALTORS® from licensed agents and brokers who do not join the association. All REALTORS® pledge to uphold the principles contained in this foundational document. It's important to address situations when a member's behavior falls short of these principles to maintain the high ideals that the REALTOR® name represents.

Code of Ethics enforcement is complaint-driven. Texas REALTORS® relies on people with first-hand knowledge of objectionable conduct to file complaints and participate in the process. In other words, if you see something, say something!

### Before You File a Complaint, Speak with the Broker

As a first step, you may try contacting the person's broker to discuss what happened. Many disputes result from misunderstandings or a lack of communication. Making a reasonable effort to communicate with the real estate professional and that person's broker could lead to a quick resolution.

### If That Doesn't Work, Contact Texas REALTORS®

When speaking with the broker doesn't resolve the problem, you can call the Texas REALTORS® Professional Standards Department. Texas REALTORS® processes ethics complaints throughout the state. Staff will discuss the available services such as the Ombudsman Program and formal ethics complaints.

### Give the Ombudsman Program a Try

When the complainant agrees to use the Ombudsman Program, a volunteer from the Texas REALTORS® Professional Standards Committee will contact the parties involved. That ombudsman will listen to concerns, explain possible resolutions, and answer questions. Ombudsmen are experienced and knowledgeable real estate professionals and have an excellent track record of resolving disputes efficiently to the satisfaction of all parties.

### File an Ethics Complaint

Some allegations of ethics violations are best handled through the formal complaint process. The dedicated staff at Texas REALTORS® will explain how to file a complaint and provide you with information on what to expect.



**FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF CODE OF ETHICS VIOLATIONS, YOU CAN SUBMIT AN ANONYMOUS COMPLAINT. You must identify yourself to Texas REALTORS®, but the association will keep your identity confidential.**

**To request the ombudsman service or file a formal ethics complaint, call Texas REALTORS® at 512-480-8200.**

**Find additional information about the professional standards process at [texasrealestate.com/ethics](https://texasrealestate.com/ethics).**

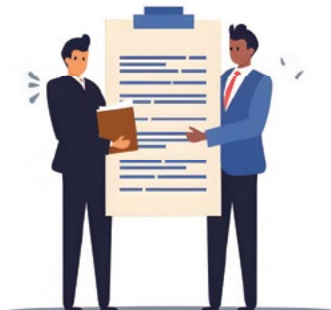
**Scan this code to view an infographic of the steps and timing of the formal ethics complaint process.**



## YOUR FORMS

Brokers may use the **Independent Contractor Agreement for Sales Associate** (TXR 2301) to contract with sponsored sales agents who are not employees. The agreement defines the relationship between the independent contractor sales agent and the brokerage, the duration of the agreement, and both parties' responsibilities, which include soliciting listings and prospects and providing brokerage services. It also requires the independent contractor sales agent to maintain a real estate license and membership in the local, state, and national REALTOR® associations. The agreement spells out how the independent contractor sales agent will be paid. Additionally, the *Independent Contractor Agreement for Sales Associate* can provide documentation supporting independent contractor status for IRS purposes. It is one of more than 140 forms available to members of Texas REALTORS®.

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## Fees in the Farm and Ranch Contract



**NOTE:** The Texas Real Estate Commission recently made changes to several sales contracts, including the Farm and Ranch Contract (TXR 1701, TREC 25-16), to address the practice changes required by the NAR settlement. Accordingly, Texas REALTORS® has updated this previously published article to reflect how the Farm and Ranch Contract can be used after updates to Paragraph 12 of the contract.

The **Farm and Ranch Contract** has two sections on Page 10 related to fees: a Ratification of Fee and an Agreement for Payment of Brokers' Fees.

A listing broker who has already agreed to pay a commission to a cooperating broker—in the *Compensation Agreement Between Brokers* (TXR 2402), for example—should fill out the Ratification of Fee box. This authorizes the escrow agent to pay the cooperating broker from the listing broker's fee at closing.

The seller and buyer should not sign the Agreement for Payment of Brokers' Fees if the listing broker has already agreed to pay the cooperating broker's commission elsewhere, like in the *Compensation Agreement Between Brokers*. This could bind the seller or buyer to unintentionally pay additional amounts to the listing broker or the cooperating broker.

However, a seller and buyer could sign the Agreement for Payment of Brokers' Fees if the listing broker hasn't offered to pay a commission. Note that the agreement states either the seller or the buyer will pay the brokers.

Alternatively, if the seller wants to pay for buyer's brokerage fees agreed upon in a buyer representation agreement, such as the *Residential Buyer/Tenant Representation Agreement* (TXR 1501-long form/TXR 1507-short form), the seller may include the amount to be paid in Paragraph 12A(1)(b) of the contract and does not have to sign the Agreement for Payment of Brokers' Fees, because the seller's signature on the *Farm and Ranch Contract* binds the seller to pay such fees.

***I'm helping my client prepare an offer for a vacant residential lot using the Unimproved Property Contract. A checkbox in the form asks whether the property is located in a Texas agricultural development district. What does this mean?***

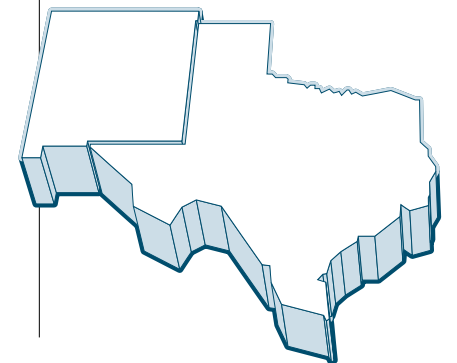
The process for creating agricultural development districts was enacted in 2001 by the Texas Legislature under Chapter 60 of the Texas Agriculture Code to promote the development of agricultural facilities that result in employment and economic activity. To date, no such districts have been created under that chapter of the Texas Agriculture Code, according to the Texas Department of Agriculture. However, the Southeast Texas Agricultural Development District in Chambers County was created outside the context of Chapter 60 by the Legislature.

The provision you described is in the *Unimproved Property Contract* (TXR 1607, TREC 9-17) and the *Farm and Ranch Contract* (TXR 1701, TREC 25-16). In the event a seller is located in such a district, the seller is required to give written notice to prospective buyers prior to the execution of a binding contract to purchase the property. This notice can be given separately or within the terms of the contract itself. The seller and buyer of property in an agricultural development district must also sign a separate notice at closing that is recorded in the deed records.

## FACT OR FICTION?

**My real estate license from New Mexico allows me to negotiate on behalf of my clients looking to buy, sell, and lease real estate in Texas.**

**FICTION.** Texas does not have reciprocity with any state. Only Texas license holders may negotiate transactions for real estate located in Texas. To secure a sales agent's or broker's license from the Texas Real Estate Commission, you must satisfy all current Texas licensing requirements.





# REALTOR® DAY AT THE TEXAS CAPITOL

**More than 3,000 REALTORS®** from across the state gathered at the Texas Capitol on March 26 for an incredible advocacy day. The atmosphere buzzed with energy as members met with elected officials to discuss key issues affecting real estate, businesses, and property owners.


The day began with a rally, where Texas REALTORS® turned the south steps of the Capitol into a sea of purple—a color that signifies the organization's nonpartisan approach to government. Association Chairman Christy Gessler delivered a message that the future of real property ownership relies on the strength of Texas REALTORS®, who are the advocates for their clients and communities.

Members participated in meetings with all 181 state legislators and their staffs, speaking with them about housing affordability, property tax relief, transparency in real estate representation agreements, and other topics regarding real estate.

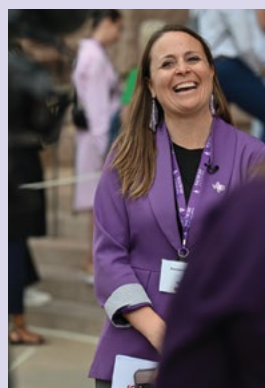
Association leaders also met with Gov. Greg Abbott to discuss important issues, including two of the governor's emergency items this session—reducing property taxes and investment in water infrastructure—that are also priorities for Texas REALTORS®. Texas REALTORS® leadership also met with Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Speaker of the House Dustin Burrows the previous day.

Resolutions in both chambers declared March 26 REALTOR® Day at the Texas Capitol, with Rep. Daniel Alders, a Texas REALTOR®, reading the House resolution, and Sen. Tan Parker reading the resolution in the Senate.

Members also enjoyed a barbecue lunch at the Texas REALTORS® building across the street from the Capitol. An open house featured information, activities, and giveaways related to the association's programs, services, and member benefits.

"It was truly inspiring to see so many dedicated professionals come together, demonstrating the strong commitment of our members to shape policies that benefit communities and the real estate industry statewide," said Chairman Christy Gessler. "Texas REALTORS® gives lawmakers the insights they need to foster our thriving real estate market, a crucial sector responsible for 17.8% of the Texas economy." 

SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE PHOTOS FROM REALTOR® DAY.



## REALTOR® DAY BY THE NUMBERS

- 3,000+** members advocating at the Capitol
- 58** local associations represented
- 1** Grassroots Rally—the largest in Texas
- 181** meetings with legislators
- 3** meetings with the top statewide officeholders
- 1,800** plates of barbecue eaten
- 605** lunch invitations for legislators and their staff
- 2,500** cookies devoured
- 7** stations hosted by 80 association staff at the Texas REALTORS® Open House



# Activate Your AI SUPERPOWERS

How to use new tech tools for images, videos, podcasts, marketing, tenant screening, note taking, customer service, and more!

*Plus, tips to help you avoid problems.*

BY PATEE FRANKS

By now you've heard that AI can assist in writing listing descriptions, emails, and social media posts. But generating text-based content isn't the only way to leverage AI for your real estate business. There are many powerful ways to use AI to do things faster and easier while getting better results than you could achieve without an assist from technology.

## PUMP UP YOUR MARKETING

Showcasing your professionalism and expertise is how you establish trust. Treat AI like your own marketing agency to take your promotions, advertising, and branding to the next level.

### Headshots

Sure, you could go to a professional studio and have your business photo taken. Or you can upload a selfie or existing photo to an AI headshot generator like Insta Headshots, Canva, or Aragon to get similar results—saving time and money. The generator can

enhance your appearance, update your outfit, improve lighting, and change the backdrop.

### Branding

ChatGPT, Gemini, or Perplexity can assist you in brainstorming. Want to refresh your company branding? Ask AI to update or create a style guide of colors, fonts, and visual elements. The more specific you are about your business identity, the better the output. Fine-tune your prompts to include your desired tone, target audience, niche, and business goals.

### Design

Graphic tools like Canva, Adobe Express, and Midjourney make

image creation easy. Copy your new branding specs into the prompt to create a business logo or upload an existing image to develop marketing materials like brochures, flyers, slide presentations, and social media assets.

### Videos

Not comfortable in front of the camera? No problem. Tools like Runway and Adobe Firefly make videos from text prompts, scripts, or images. With

## WATCH OUT!

You must comply with TREC Rule 535.155 and Texas Occupations Code Section 1101.652(b)(23), state and federal fair housing laws, and the NAR Code of Ethics in relation to all advertising and fair housing laws. You also need to verify that you are in compliance with brokerage policies and procedures, as use of these tools could subject your brokerage to potential liability.

Synthesia, human-like avatars speak the script you provide. You can choose from different voices, languages, images, backgrounds, and themes.

### Podcasts

Want a great way to establish your real estate expertise and increase your online visibility? Text-to-speech tools like NotebookLM, ElevenLabs, and Speechify will turn your blog or other existing content into a podcast—complete with realistic-sounding voices.



## TREAD CAREFULLY

Keep in mind that AI sometimes hallucinates, producing inaccurate or misleading results. Always examine your AI-created content for factual errors, fabricated content, and images that look off or don't match reality. AI may also provide you with content that has been previously copyrighted or created by another person, so it's wise to verify that the work product does not belong to someone else. Using copyrighted material for AI training can lead to legal disputes as well. Content created by AI is not able to be copyrighted, so if you are looking to copyright materials, you will need to create the work on your own.

In addition, be mindful of what you share when using AI tools because there is no way to protect that data. For instance, if you are sharing confidential information in an AI tool, that information can be utilized by someone else later through the same AI tool. Disclosing that information could subject you to potential liability.



FEELING  
OVERWHELMED  
BY THE MANY WAYS  
TO INTEGRATE  
AI INTO YOUR  
BUSINESS?

Start small, experiment, and regularly evaluate the performance. Here are five questions to ask yourself to identify where to focus first:

1. What is your top problem you are trying to solve (for example, better outreach, customer experience, efficiency)?
2. What tasks take up the most time and resources?
3. Which part of your business could benefit from automation?
4. How much training will you and/or your employees need to utilize the AI tool?
5. While some AI tools are free, others have pricing plans based on the features offered. What is your budget for AI tools?

TRANSFORM YOUR OPERATIONAL DUTIES

A large part of your business success comes from networking, referrals, and closing sales. However, you have plenty of other stuff to do. Are you being as efficient as you can be? Hand over your routine tasks to AI and free up valuable time.

Note Taking

Automatically transcribe your virtual meetings. Otter, Fellow, and Fireflies.ai will record, summarize, add comments, highlight key points, and assign action items. Make it easier to follow up with your client or team member by integrating the tool with your calendar, task manager, or CRM tool.

Document Analysis

Need an extra set of eyes? Claude, ChatGPT, and Grok can scan documents and contracts for errors, like missing signatures or blank fields. You can also use these tools to pull out key details and quickly summarize data to improve decision-making.

Tenant Screening

Help your clients rent out a listing fast—and safely. As a member of Texas REALTORS®, you have access to discounts on the AI-based tenant screening service Smartmove. Assess tenant reliability by evaluating rental history, credit scores, background checks, and more.

Training

Optimize your onboarding process. Add your training manuals, HR documents, FAQs, and other resources into a chatbot tool such as Chatling or BaristaGPT to help answer any questions new agents have. For auditory learners, use NotebookLM to turn your company's resources into a podcast-like audio file.

WATCH OUT!

It's in your best interest to verify that these tools are accurate in their performance. If something is missed or an error made, you will be responsible for it. You need to check with your errors and omissions insurance to verify that you would be covered in the event you are using these tools and an error is made. In addition, your client is trusting you to verify information for tenant screening and ensuring contracts and other documents are completed properly, so it's always a good idea to verify that the AI tools are finding everything that you are expected to handle.

ENHANCE CUSTOMER  
EXPERIENCE

AI doesn't sleep. That means it's available 24 hours a day to respond to a lead. AI tools can also translate most languages, ensuring that no matter where a prospective client is from, they can receive immediate, personalized assistance.

Customer  
Service

Get assistance in qualifying a lead. Use chatbots to engage with website visitors. Tools like Tidio, Collect.chat, and Askavenue can schedule appointments and answer questions about your property listings.

WATCH OUT!

When utilizing these tools, be sure that you are complying with TREC Rules, the Texas Occupations Code, and the NAR Code of Ethics regarding communications and advertising.

Appointment Scheduling

You have likely scheduled a property showing via text and then manually added it to your calendar. But have you ever forgotten to add an appointment to your calendar? Calendly, Clara Labs, and Google Assistant will automatically sync an appointment from text, email, or a chat program into your calendar.

Follow Up

Nurturing your leads and keeping in touch with clients is a great way to strengthen your relationship. But it takes time. Many CRM tools, such as Wise Agent, Realvolve, and HubSpot offer AI features to automate personalized emails.

PATEE FRANKS is Digital Marketing Specialist for Texas REALTORS®.

SCAN THE CODE  
FOR A PAGE  
WITH THE LIST  
OF AI TOOLS  
AND LINKS TO  
THE WEBSITES  
IN THIS ARTICLE.



[COUNT ME IN !]

We're stronger when we work together. Bring your voice and expertise to help shape the future of Texas real estate.

Apply for a Texas REALTORS® committee today at [texasrealestate.com/committees](https://texasrealestate.com/committees)

Deadline: June 30



# Well, **THAT** was UNEXPECTED

**Real estate transactions can sometimes lead to amusing, odd, or surprising situations. Texas REALTOR® magazine asked members to share a memorable moment they experienced.**

Answers have been edited for space and clarity.

## Help From Polly

During one of my open houses, a woman showed up with a parrot on her shoulder. She introduced herself as a serious buyer, and the parrot repeated, “Buy it! Buy it!” every few minutes. As we toured the home, the parrot continued to make comments like “Nice kitchen!” and “Great view!” It was hilarious and surprisingly effective. The woman ended up making an offer on the spot. The parrot even negotiated by squawking “Lower price!” We haven’t closed the deal yet, but I’ll never forget my feathered co-agent.



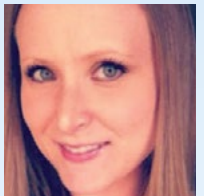
—Felix Etugbo, Houston

## A Lesson in Being Prepared

My mother and I were staging a home we managed, which had previously been used as a rental property and was now being marketed for sale. We both went into the backyard to see how it would look in the photos. As we closed the sliding glass door to keep the cool air inside, the rental-compliant safety bar fell and trapped us both outside. Unfortunately, our phones, car keys, and house keys were inside. Thankfully, a downstairs bedroom window was unlocked. I used a trash bin to climb



through the window and carefully entered the home. We ended up taping the bar on the sliding door upright so that the same thing would not happen to buyers and their agents during a showing. Because of that experience, whenever I visit a home, I wear a hip bag to keep my phone, car keys, and the house keys with me—just in case!



—Sarena Smith, Saginaw

## A Doobi-ous First Impression

I was showing a house to buyers who were interested in it as an investment property. The tenants had been notified that we were coming, but they either forgot or didn’t care. We walked in, and in the living room, the tenants were sitting on the couch puffing away at their ... let’s just say it wasn’t a cigarette.

My buyers and I exchanged some wide-eyed looks, and we made a quick exit out of that room. It wasn’t exactly the first impression I hoped to make, but we laughed it off afterward. In the end, the buyers still bought the property.

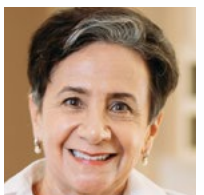


—Rachel Cahill, McKinney

## From Concrete to Chaos

I drove to a listing of mine late Friday afternoon to check on it and noticed a large pickup truck in front. As I got closer, I saw a small front loader in the driveway and that the entire concrete driveway was busted up and in a pile. My sellers were not living there but had a car in the garage, and I knew they had not arranged to have any work done, especially on the driveway. The construction workers insisted they had been hired via email, and then they called the police.

I had a sick feeling when I called my sellers to explain what I’d found. Thankfully, the sellers jumped right in, took care of the situation, and left me out of the ensuing argument. The driveway was replaced quickly, and the house was sold. My sellers never told me what happened with that construction crew, but the police were involved.



—Lazan Pargaman, Austin

## Beware of First Impressions

A buyer couple and I were out looking at houses. One of the homes looked great from the front, with great curb appeal in a desirable neighborhood. The buyers

were excited about the prospect of this home, although through experience, I have learned that first impressions don't give the whole story.

When I tried to gain access, the lockbox's key did not open the front door, as the top deadbolt was locked from inside. I called the listing agent, who advised that the key should work for the back door. However, the only gate to access the backyard was also locked. My client had to scale the 8-foot fence to open it.

In the backyard, we heard the goats next door calling out to us. They continued to bleat at us the entire time. We also noticed that the pool was nearly empty because of a giant crack in the pool and across the pool decking. While cautioning my clients to walk around or over the crack—if someone fell in the pool, they would fall up to their thigh—I noticed that toads and tadpoles were climbing up the pool walls.

The key still didn't work at that back door, although we did find an unlocked sliding door to access the home. The house inside was unremarkable, and in the end, I found a more suitable home for the buyers.



—Brenda Thompson, Plano

**Luck of the Draw**

Last year, a seller called asking about listing her home. I asked pertinent questions, and she agreed to a listing appointment. During the appointment, we toured the house and discussed the listing process in detail. Once we listed the property, we received a great offer and successfully closed the deal. She followed up with raving feedback and even referred another listing. The entire process was a success, but the unexpected aspect was how she discovered me. She had compiled a list of agents from a local Google search and then chose me from a tarot card.



—Roland Garcia, Dickinson

**A Creative Christmas Surprise**

My clients loved a luxury home sitting up high with panoramic golf course views and wanted to make an offer. The listing agent initially notified me it was sold. Then, the listing agent called and said the buyers had changed their mind. When I called the husband, he said not to tell his wife so that it could be a Christmas surprise. I executed the contract and inspection with the husband only.

For the surprise, I wrapped up a big box with clues for his wife and their three sons. The card read, "Pull this string. Soon, you'll know the box's secrets."

The first gift was a bottle of sunscreen and a note



that said, "Start packing. It's gonna be fun. We will enjoy poolside soaking up the sun."

The second gift included a small box of golf balls. The note said, "Play some golf, or watch it too, but we will definitely enjoy the view."

The third gift said, "No matter the weather, we are prepared," and included two 3-packs of Chapstick.

The last gift was a bottle of red wine with a customized label: "Welcome to our new home!" including a photo and the address of the home.

They were all fooled, shocked, and elated. The family is still in that home today.



—Debbie Murray, Dallas/Highland Park

**No Detail Is Too Small**

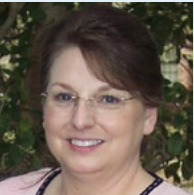
Back in the '80s, I began working in residential property management. One of my first tasks was to look at a home where the tenants would be moving to see how it showed and determine what was needed to lease it again. I made an appointment to go. The tenants were not home, and the key did not work to open the front door. In those days, duplicate keys often didn't work. I tried the door from the garage into the house, and my key worked. The condition of the house was not ready to show—there were dirty dishes and stuff

everywhere. I left a note on my card to clean up the place.

The next day, I contacted the tenants and told them to clean the place so it could be marketed. They were apologetic and assured me they would take care of it. One week later, I had an appointment to show the house. I had to access the house from the garage again. I noticed the house had not been cleaned one bit.

After waiting for the prospects, I realized they were not coming, which was good since we could hardly walk through the house. I locked up, and on the way to my car, the prospects drove up and asked my name. They informed me that they were waiting for me at a house on the next block and that I had given them the wrong address. I was horrified. I gave them the correct address, but I was a block off. I regained my composure and then we went to the right house. It was spotless! I could hardly hold in my hysterical laughter because of my error. I had been to the wrong house two times ... and left them a note to clean it up.

I often wonder what the correct house looked like before I asked the tenants to clean it up.



—Karen Dunn, Hughes Springs

**HAVE A REAL ESTATE STORY TO SHARE?**

Texas REALTOR® magazine wants to hear from you. Scan the QR code or visit [texasrealestate.com/magazinesubmission](https://texasrealestate.com/magazinesubmission) to fill out one of the forms on the latest topics.

*Note: Not all submissions are guaranteed to be published*



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# MEET THE 2024 REALTORS® to Watch

Texas REALTORS® named eight members under 40 as 2024 REALTORS® to Watch. These exceptional leaders have exhibited excellence on the job, in the industry, and in their communities.

“This year’s REALTORS® to Watch are something special,” says 2025 Chairman Christy Gessler. “They aren’t just out there serving their clients every day; they’re raising the bar for all of us. I’m so proud of them and can’t wait to see what the future holds for them.”



**PRESTON DAVIS**  
Sherman

Some of the best advice Preston Davis ever heard was that the path to success is to show up every single day. The Paragon, REALTORS® sales associate took that to heart and has been there for his residential and land clients since getting licensed in 2020.

“I try to bring people together in difficult times to make them feel as though they have been heard, and

I find solutions that are amicable to all parties,” he says. “I have done this during transactions, while leading REALTOR® committee meetings, and while serving on civic boards.”

Davis is a big believer in getting involved with the REALTOR® association. He serves as Treasurer of the Greater Texoma Association of REALTORS® and completed the Texas REALTORS® Leadership Program with Collin County Area REALTORS®. He has participated in the state YPN and Member Benefits Committees, and NAR’s Federal Taxation Committee.

“When I first expressed interest in the treasurer position, I had no idea what it actually entailed,” he says. “I

**I try to bring people together in difficult times to make them feel as though they have been heard.**

have a much greater appreciation for the work that goes on behind the scenes at all levels of the association.”

Davis is also active in the community, serving on the boards of Goodwill Northeast Texas, the Sherman Museum, and the City of Sherman Main Street Program. He’s a former Fairview Elementary PTA board president and Denison Chamber of Commerce Ambassador of the Year.

“The greatest challenge I have faced is the ups and downs of the market and how to adapt to it,” he says. His solution? Showing up to serve every day.



**NAQUAY DUNBAR**  
Houston

Naquay Dunbar remembers riding in the backseat while her grandmother, a broker, drove to property showings. “I wanted to follow in her footsteps someday,” she recalls.

The KW Memorial agent has made that dream a reality, as she has been helping her residential and commercial clients achieve their goals since 2019.

“I strive to bridge the gap between market challenges and client expectations, delivering results that reflect creativity, expertise, and a deep understanding of real estate dynamics,” she says.

Dunbar initially struggled to build her client base in a highly competitive market. She found that she could stand out through her exceptional customer service and innovative marketing strategies. She credits her success to continuous professional development. Dunbar has earned eight real estate designations and is especially proud to be a Texas REALTORS® Leadership Program graduate. She also attends industry events and conferences to stay current and connected.

The Texas REALTORS® director is highly involved with the Houston Association of REALTORS®, co-chairing its TREPAC Committee

and serving on the Governmental Affairs, Political Affairs, and Young Professionals Network advisory groups. She volunteers at polling stations during elections and educates community members on civic engagement. “I’ve made it my mission to lead with purpose, advocate for those whose voices often go unheard, and share knowledge to empower others,” she says. She frequently mentors new REALTORS® and volunteers with charities.

Though her grandmother didn’t live to see Dunbar get licensed, Dunbar promised her she would be the best real estate agent she could be. “I am determined to honor her memory by embodying the same passion and commitment she showed in her career.”

**I’ve made it my mission to lead with purpose, advocate for those whose voices often go unheard, and share knowledge to empower others.**



**RANDI HOUSTON**  
Katy

During her healthcare career, Randi Houston saw the challenges older adults face. “So many of them have to sell their homes to afford that next chapter, and that truly moved me,” she says. “I realized that my extensive knowledge combined with my desire to help seniors could create a powerful impact.” That realization drove her to get her real estate license in 2019.

The Century 21 Exclusive Properties agent aims to

make the real estate transaction as smooth as possible for her clients. “Many clients have faced challenges navigating the market, especially buyers hesitant to take the next step. I’ve been able to guide them by highlighting the tangible benefits of homeownership compared to renting. I also help them make confident, informed decisions.”

Client education is a top priority for her. The market may be different than what buyers and sellers heard or experienced in the past. “I focus on providing clear, region-specific data that’s easy for my clients to understand,” she says.

The TRLP graduate says she is always searching for new real estate knowledge, whether through classes, her brokerage, or industry experts and mentors. “One of my guiding principles is that if you’re not learning, you’re not growing. This mindset drives me to seek out new insights and skills at every opportunity.”

Houston is active with the Women’s Council of REALTORS® and her local association’s YPN advisory group. She volunteers extensively with Kids’ Meals, Make-A-Wish Foundation, and Habitat for Humanity.

“As a young professional, I take immense pride in serving others, making a positive impact, and contributing to the growth and success of my community,” she says.

**One of my guiding principles is that if you’re not learning, you’re not growing.**



**KATHERINE NEBEL**  
Spring

“The most important thing I’ve learned in this industry is that we have to help each other succeed, uplift each other, and get involved in our local, state, and national organizations,” says Katherine Nebel. “This is just as important as knowing the contracts and keeping up with our CE, in my opinion.”

The Co-Owner and Broker Associate of AK Real Estate Group leads a five-member team specializing in residential real estate. The TRLP graduate holds weekly meetings so the team can learn from and encourage each other.

She had originally worked in the oil and gas industry. She knew she wanted to work with people and help them achieve their goals. “I decided to pursue my passion in real estate in 2016, was licensed in 2017, and have not

looked back since.”

Nebel brings that same supportive approach to each client. “I not only want to establish a working relationship with clients but also genuinely want to be their friend during their home hunt,” she says. “I aim to be their biggest supporter when things are great and the shoulder they lean on when things don’t go as planned.”

Nebel’s volunteering includes the Montgomery County Political Affairs Advisory Leadership, the Montgomery County Animal Shelter, and neighborhood events. “Having a voice in my community and for homeowners in general has been so rewarding,” she says.

Maintaining a work/life balance has been challenging. “Some days have been tough, but I wake up every day excited to help families find their new home. I also love to hear about the memories they’ve made in their current home. I am truly blessed.”



**JOSE NIETO**  
Houston

Jose Nieto is happy to see other agents succeed. “My colleagues are not competitors but a source of inspiration, motivating me to continually improve and do my best,” says the J. Nieto Team Lead. “Growing up, I watched my parents work tirelessly—often holding down three jobs at once. From them, I learned the values of hard

work, humility, and the importance of helping others in our community. These principles have guided my path and shaped the way I do business.”

Nieto spent seven years in retail management, and while he loved the customers, he disliked the inflexibility and demanding hours. He wanted to become an entrepreneur and was fascinated by the real estate agents he saw on TV. Today, Nieto specializes in leasing, new construction, and helping first-time homebuyers—especially those who have been told they’ll never own a home. “Even after the deal is done, I make it a priority to check in, ensuring that our rela-

**I aim to be their biggest supporter when things are great and the shoulder they lean on when things don’t go as planned.**

**Even after the deal is done, I make it a priority to check in, ensuring that our relationship grows beyond just a transaction.**

tionship grows beyond just a transaction.”

Nieto serves on advisory groups for the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals and HAR’s Young Professionals Network. He also volunteers with Kids’ Meals Houston, Be a Resource for CPS Kids, and Toys for Tots.

“I’ve had the privilege of motivating and inspiring my Hispanic community,” he says. “They have witnessed how a person with immigrant parents was able to live the American Dream and become a successful entrepreneur. My involvement has focused on educating and empowering my community, consistently reminding them that anything is possible with hard work and dedication.”



**RICK RAMIREZ**  
MetroTex

“As the father of two young daughters, I wanted to show them the value of chasing dreams with purpose and authenticity,” says Rick Ramirez, an agent with Ebby Halliday, REALTORS®. “Real estate allowed me to combine my love of neighborhoods, architecture, and connection with people.”

Ramirez left his corporate career to pursue residential real estate, becoming licensed in 2023. “I’ve worked closely with several other clients in their home search, helping them overcome obstacles like lending issues, job changes, and immigration challenges,” he says. “Each experience has deepened my commitment to being a resourceful and trusted advisor.” Continuing education and self-improvement have been top priorities for Ramirez since he started in real estate. He is working toward his Graduate, REALTOR® Institute and Accredited Buyer’s Representative certifications.

“My greatest challenge in real estate has been transitioning from a corporate environment to a career built entirely on self-direction and personal initiative,” he says. Being a native Spanish speaker allows Ramirez to connect and build trust with more clients. He touts his entrepreneurial and marketing training as how he stands apart in the market.

Ramirez serves on the MetroTex Association of REALTORS® YPN and Diversity advisory groups and the

**Leadership, to me, is about setting a positive example, creating opportunities for collaboration, and fostering growth—not just for myself but for those around me.**

City of Colleyville’s Zoning Board of Adjustment and Sign Board of Appeals. Ramirez actively volunteers at his children’s school and is always looking for ways to support his local community—organizing and contributing to fundraising efforts and giving back his time whenever he can.

He calls becoming a real estate professional the most fulfilling decision he has ever made.

“Leadership, to me, is about setting a positive example, creating opportunities for collaboration, and fostering growth—not just for myself but for those around me.”



**KAYLA SORRELL**  
Houston

Kayla Sorrell dreamed of being an entrepreneur to create a business with unlimited possibilities and a legacy for her family. “My personal goals of building a rental portfolio and rehabbing homes paired perfectly with my goal to run a residential real estate firm.”

The Broker/Owner of Pop Realty says what sets her apart is her comprehensive approach. “I specialize in assisting clients through complex processes, whether they are first-time homebuyers or investors expanding their portfolios.”

She strives to lead by example and foster collaboration. “I aim to be a dependable resource for guidance and support, offering expertise, encouragement, and mentorship to empower those around me,” the TRLP graduate says. “My leadership is rooted in integrity, hard work, and a genuine passion for helping others succeed.” She serves on the Houston Association of REALTORS® Management Central Advisory Board, participating in discussions on industry trends and helping shape initiatives that benefit REALTORS® and the community. She also volunteers through HAR’s Young Professionals Network and helps Houston food banks, educational initiatives, and individuals and families in need.

Sorrell remembers her mother working as a real estate agent with her MLS book and key map. Now a mother herself, she strives to inspire big thinking and instill a strong work ethic in her children.

“Starting this career came with a fear of failure, and my biggest hurdle was overcoming the limitations I had placed on myself,” she says. “Once I stopped restricting my own

**Once I stopped restricting my own beliefs about what I could achieve, the possibilities truly became endless.**

beliefs about what I could achieve, the possibilities truly became endless. Shifting my mindset transformed everything and empowered me to grow and build my business.”



**MIRIAM VALENCIA**  
Houston

Miriam Valencia’s passion is mentoring. “I’ve prioritized empowering agents through targeted training and development, equipping them to succeed in residential, commercial, and international real estate,” she says.

The Alumbra International Properties Broker strives to balance empathy with decisiveness. She encourages her agents to see real estate as not just a job, but a business to build with intention. Valencia’s journey into real estate began after buying a home with her ex-husband, a DACA recipient.

“I know firsthand the challenges immigrant families face in navigating the path to homeownership. That experience drives my commitment to serving clients with DACA, ITIN, TPS, and other statuses—helping them overcome obstacles and achieve what might have once felt impossible.”

She advocates for more resources and training in multiple languages across Texas, along with expanded financial literacy programs and increased housing assistance for underserved communities.

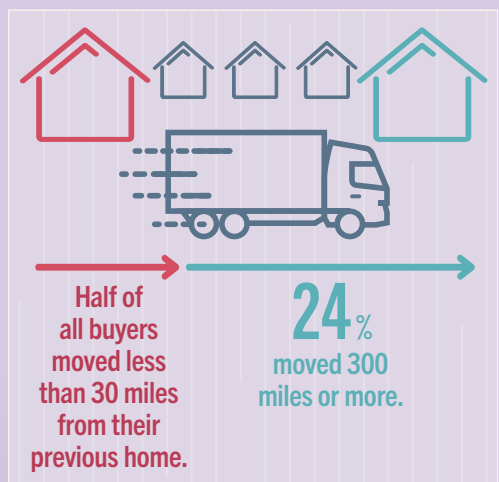
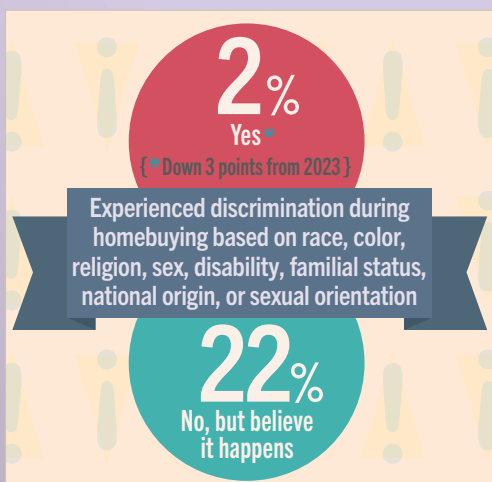
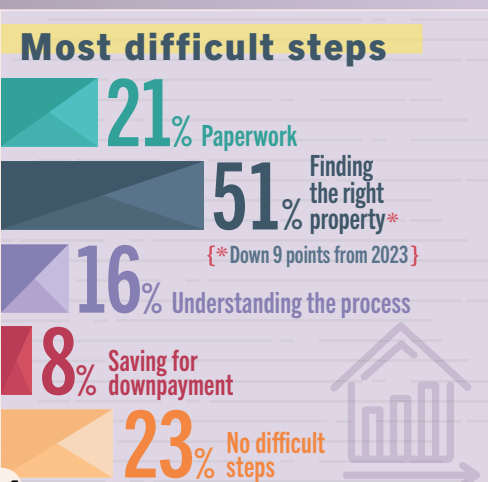
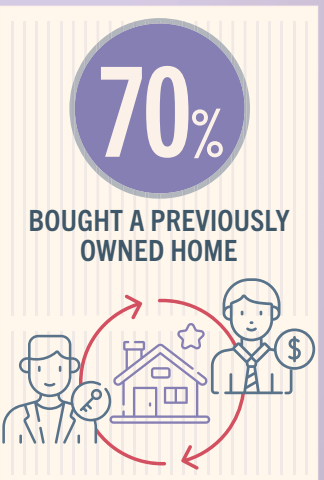
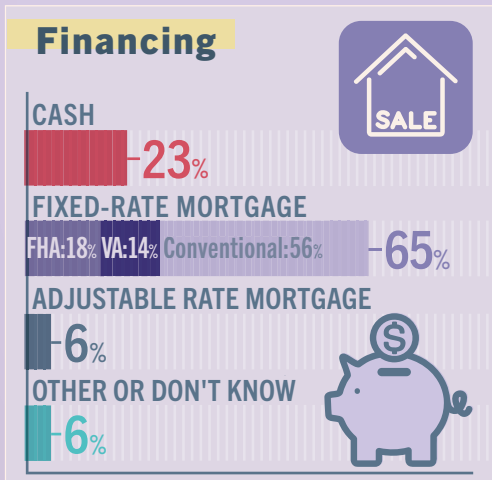
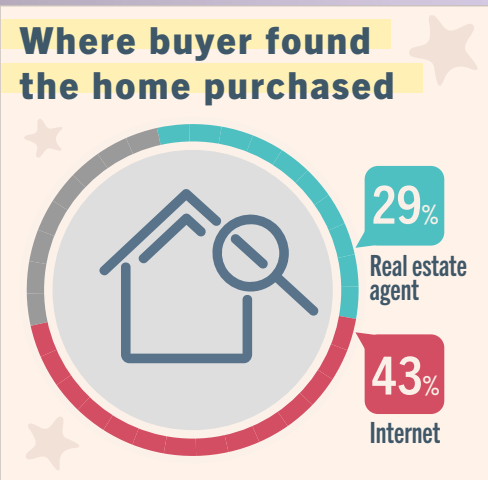
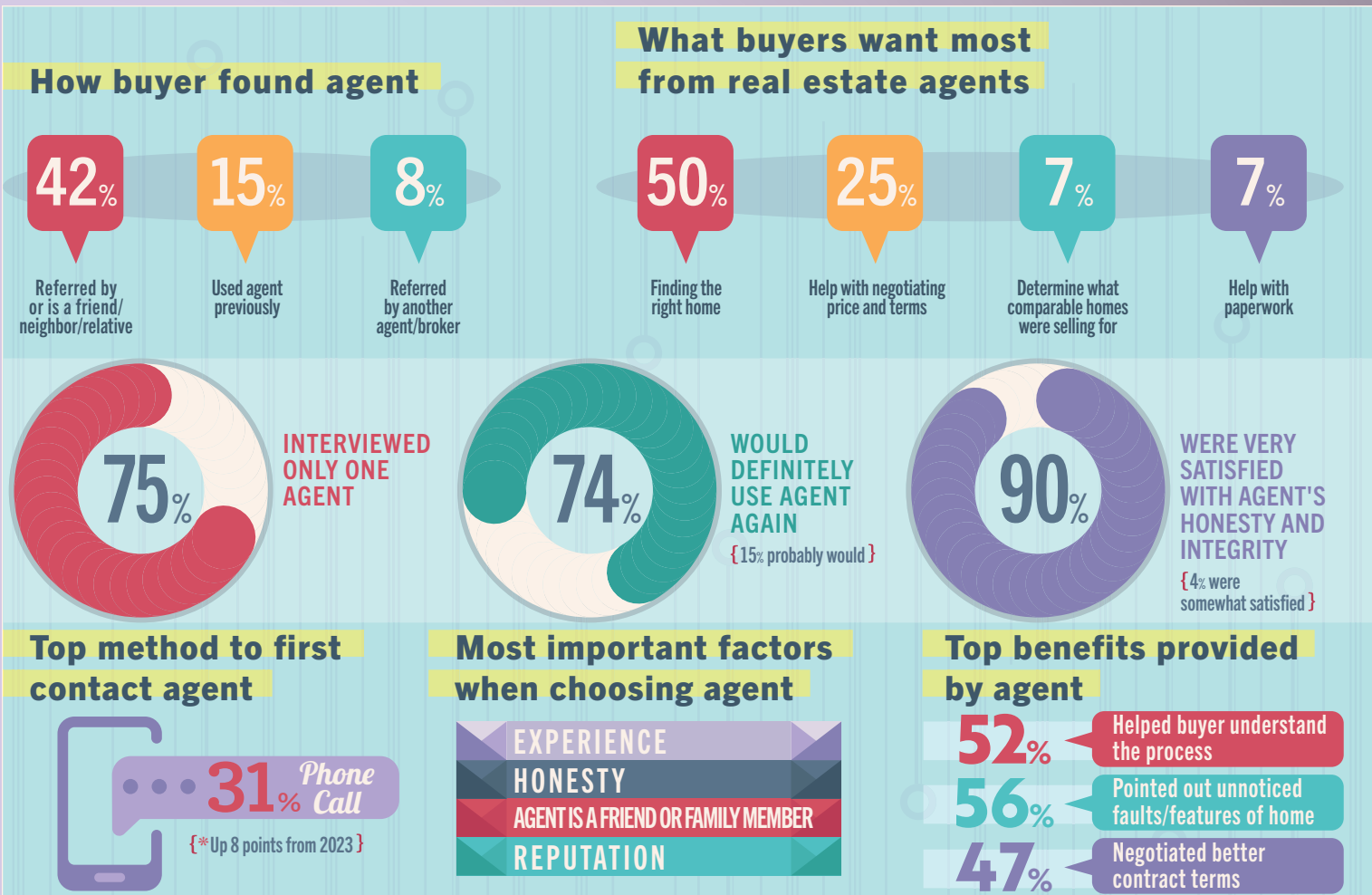
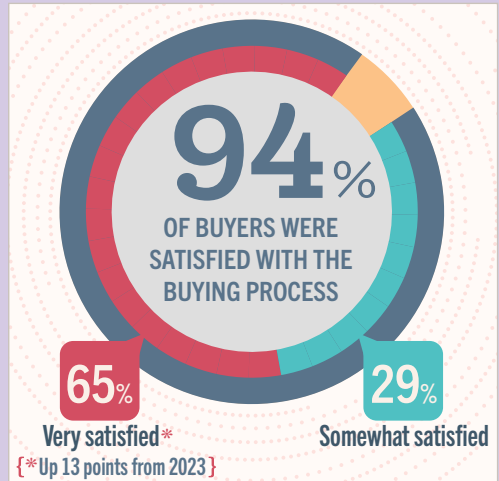
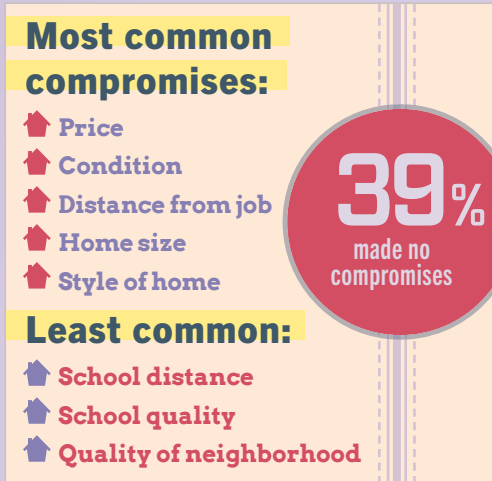
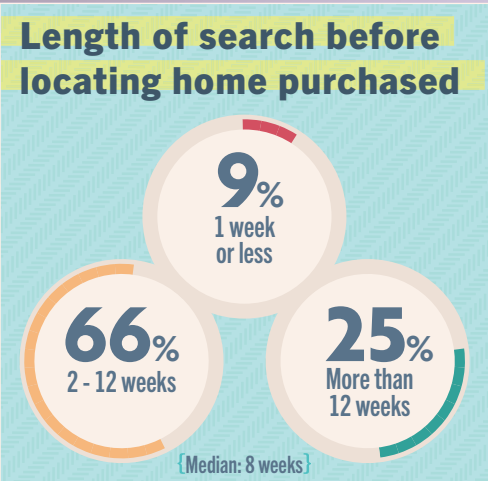
In addition to her work in real estate, Valencia is deeply committed to community service. The TRLP graduate regularly leads food drives, school supply donations, and holiday giving events—and founded Alumbra’s Heart and Hope Committee to further support charitable initiatives throughout Houston. Valencia is also actively involved in industry leadership, serving on the HAR Young Professionals Network and the HAR Global Advisory Group.

“Being a single mom has taught me the importance of balancing ambition with purpose,” she says. “It drives me to work harder—not just for myself but to set an example for my child. Every challenge—whether it’s managing my business, supporting my agents, or growing my brokerage—has been a learning opportunity. This isn’t just about real estate—it’s about building legacies, empowering families, and creating lasting impact.”

# TEXAS HOMEBUYERS

## Who They Are and What They Want

The more you know about homebuyers, the better you can market to them and help them achieve their dreams. These stats come from a Texas oversample of NAR's nationwide homebuyer and seller survey. Responses are from buyers who purchased a primary residence between July 2023 and June 2024. Next issue: statistics about sellers.



TEXAS HOMEBUYERS	2024	vs.	2023
AGE: ALL BUYERS (MEDIAN)	58		49
HOUSEHOLD INCOME (MEDIAN)	\$112,500		\$121,400
PURCHASE PRICE (MEDIAN)	\$353,000		\$350,000
HOME SIZE (MEDIAN)	2,095 sq. ft.		2,073 sq. ft.

# TAX HABITS THAT PAY OFF

7 practices to help you save money and hassles.



**GOOD HABITS CAN MAKE TAX TIME LESS TAXING**, according to David Crumbaugh, a certified public accountant and principal of Valentine & Associates CPAs. Crumbaugh, who has more than 30 years' experience working with REALTORS®, shares these tips:

## SAVE RECEIPTS

"The IRS is clear. You must report every dollar of income earned, and you must document any dollar of expense you claim. So, you want to make sure you have documentation." That means saving or scanning the actual receipts, he says. Credit card statements aren't sufficient, because they don't show what you bought and how you used it for your business.

## KEEP A MILEAGE LOG

"Mileage is the number one expense that most agents will take, and it is one of the most under-documented expenses," he says. "The rule that the IRS has is very specific: You must keep a mileage log if you are deducting auto expenses." Whether you use a pen-and-paper record or an electronic one, be detailed with your entries. "Add in who you met with and the business purpose of the meeting, so you have the complete log that would pass the IRS test. Make that part of your daily habit."

## USE A SEPARATE BANK ACCOUNT FOR TAXES

"The best practice I suggest is that when you get your commission, take 25% right off the bat and put it into a savings account that you don't touch. That becomes your tax account," Crumbaugh says. "That way there are no surprises. If you have a decent year and you owe a bunch of tax, you've got the money right there, because you tucked it away."

## SET UP A SYSTEM YOU WILL USE

"Your system just needs to work for you." You could use an app

on your phone, software or spreadsheets on a computer, or pencil and paper. What matters isn't what a system looks like; it's what it does. "You must meet three criteria to maintain a good set of accounting records: You have to be able to run your business off of the records, your tax professional must be able to prepare a tax return, and the appropriate government agency has to be able to audit those records."


## SCHEDULE BLOCKS OF TIME

"Set aside a couple of hours a week to update your bookkeeping." Make sure your mileage log is up to date, document your expenses, and make sure your records show enough detail. You might consider forming a monthly habit of producing a profit-and-loss statement, so you can see how your income and expenses line up. "You'll know where you stand, and you can make better decisions."

## WORK WITH A PROFESSIONAL

Like REALTORS®, CPAs adhere to a code of ethics and take continuing education courses. "That designation comes with a lot of responsibility to stand behind our work," Crumbaugh says. He likes consulting with agents from the beginning of their careers to help them start off on the right foot but says that people know when they can best use tax planning advice. "A lot of times, I get a phone call from a seasoned agent who just got their broker license, and now they're opening their own brokerage and want to discuss all the things that go into that."

## START NOW

"Don't wait till the end of the year." Some opportunities are only open during the tax year itself, not early the next year when you are preparing your return. "If you miss that deadline, you may miss a golden tax planning opportunity." 

# SHARE THIS

Content you can provide to prospects, clients, and other real estate professionals.

## YOUR OPTIONS WHEN MARKETING YOUR HOME ON AN MLS

A multiple listing service can be a powerful tool, and you get to decide how to use it.

You probably want to sell your home for top dollar—or maybe as quickly as possible or with the least disruption to your life. Chances are you'd like all three. Whatever your goals, your Texas REALTOR® can help you choose the best marketing strategy, and a key tool may be the MLS. Here are some basics to consider.

## WHAT'S AN MLS AND HOW DOES IT HELP YOU?

Multiple listing services (MLSs) are online databases where licensed real estate brokers share information about home listings. They help your home reach the widest audience of buyers by allowing other agents to view, share, and promote your home. MLSs also feed listings to public real estate websites where buyers search for homes.

MLSs require your agent to add your home listing within one business day after any public marketing—like putting up a yard sign or posting on social media. This promotes equal opportunity and fair housing.

## WHAT IF YOU WANT TO LIMIT EXPOSURE THROUGH THE MLS?

If you prefer limited marketing for privacy or other reasons, you have two main options. Note that while all MLSs provide these options, not every real estate broker will offer them to sellers.

- **Office Exclusive Exempt Listing:** Your home won't appear on the MLS or be publicly marketed. It's only shared within your listing agent's brokerage. (Your agent may still need to submit details to the MLS for compliance, but the listing won't be visible to other agents outside the firm.)  
Buyer's agents within the same firm can connect with your listing agent if they have clients interested in your home.
- **Delayed Marketing Exempt Listing:** Your home is entered into the MLS but not advertised on public sites for a set period. During this time, you and your agent can market your home however you like—on your agent's website, with yard signs, on social media, or other means.  
While in this period, other agents outside the listing broker's firm can still see your listing in the MLS and reach out if they have potential buyers.

## READY TO MOVE FORWARD?

There can be many components to a successful marketing plan for your house. If you choose an exempt listing, your agent will ask you to sign a disclosure acknowledging that you're temporarily or completely waiving some of the benefits of MLS or public marketing.

However you decide to proceed, there's no one more qualified to help you achieve your goals than a Texas REALTOR®.



Scan the code or visit [texasrealestate.com/sharethis](https://texasrealestate.com/sharethis) to download this flier and other sharable content for sellers, buyers, and landlords.



# THE CLOSING

## Let's Take This Outside

Spending time in nature lowers your stress level and makes it easier to concentrate. But you don't need to completely get away from it all to feel the benefits. Studies have found that just two hours a week outdoors improves well-being and health. Here are some tips for fitting more outside time into your workflow.

### EXPLORE YOUR AREAS

Take a walk or otherwise get outside in neighborhoods where you do business. In addition to the exercise and outdoor time, you'll gather valuable on-the-ground knowledge.

### RESEARCH YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

When you talk with clients about local parks, pools, hiking trails, and other outdoor opportunities, you'll be more helpful if you have tried them yourself. So rent a kayak or play a round of mini-golf; it's research.

### HELP OUT(SIDE)

Volunteer with a local park clean-up group or community garden to give back while strengthening your ties with the neighborhood.

### LOOK UP

You don't have to be in a forest to connect with nature. Even in the middle of a city, there are often street trees, hanging plants, and birds. And there is always our beautiful Texas sky.

### MAKE IT A HABIT

Small changes can help you rack up time outdoors. If you take your laptop to coffee shops or restaurants, sit outside whenever possible. Park farther away from entrances so you spend more time between getting out of the car and going inside. Wait for clients outside when you can, and look for opportunities to take meetings outdoors.

### HAVE SOME FUN

It's also okay to just unplug without trying to boost your business. Besides, if you're healthy, there's a better chance your business will be, too.



## CORPORATE ALLY PROGRAM



### WHAT IS THE CORPORATE ALLY PROGRAM?

*The Corporate Ally Program (CAP) is a powerful partnership between the National Association of REALTORS® and corporate entities aimed at protecting, promoting, and strengthening the real estate profession. With contributions from state and local REALTOR® associations, affiliates, industry partners, and institutes, societies, and councils, CAP supports federal, state, and local advocacy campaigns and public policy priorities.*

OVER \$1 MILLION

has been invested in the Corporate Ally Program by Texas organizations and businesses since 2019.

OVER \$25 MILLION

is being put to work on local, state, and national initiatives that protect and strengthen the real estate industry.

### HOW IS THE CORPORATE ALLY PROGRAM WORKING FOR YOU?

1. Fighting to reduce your property taxes.
2. Fighting for affordable and reliable property insurance.
3. Seeking long-term investments in community infrastructure, such as roads, water, and electricity.
4. Protecting independent contractor status and business operations.
5. Protecting property rights for all.

### WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

*Invest in the Corporate Ally Program today.*  
**Contact Zhelun Chen • [zchen@texasrealtors.com](mailto:zchen@texasrealtors.com) • 512.370.2164**

### THANK YOU TO ALL OUR CAP INVESTORS

Corporate Ally Program (CAP) investments are not deductible for federal income tax purposes. CAP investments classified as "issues" will assist NAR's issue related advocacy (50% federal issue advocacy, 50% state or local issue advocacy). CAP investments classified as "Political Advocacy Fund" will fund federal (70%), state/local (30%) advocacy activities. Investors wishing to direct their investment for use in candidate-related activity require legal consultation prior to finalizing, as such investments may be subject to income tax and/or disclosure requirements.

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It's been said everything is  
*bigger in Texas.*  
Including the dreams.

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