

FEBRUARY 2025



HOUSE TALK

A LOCAL REAL ESTATE MAGAZINE

HOME ESSENTIALS FOR COUPLES

What your home needs as a newlywed couple

LOCAL AREA MARKET UPDATE

Taking a look back at the last months statistics

MONTHLY HOME MAINTENANCE TIPS

Keep your home in top shape with these tips

FIRST TIME BUYER PRIORITIES

Tips to help you own your own home

FEBRUARY FEATURES

Jeanette Solis - REALTOR®,
La Qunita Group powered by Smart Home Realty

Carandus Brown - Human Services Manager, *Rockford Housing Authority*

Kenaniah Saunders - Owner/President, *Saunders Media*

A TITLE MINUTE WITH JEREMY

Jeremy Pettit

CLOSER & REALTOR®

ATN ADVISORS
TITLE NETWORK

Midwest Title Services

815.283.3300

info@mtstitle.com

www.mtstitle.com

FEATURED JEANETTE SOLIS, REALTOR®



54698726114

HAPPY
Valentine's
DAY





» Table of Contents

01 Market Update | Local Events |
Small Business of the Month

03 Home Essentials For Newlywed
Couples | February Home
Maintenance

07 Getting Into the Airbnb and Rental
Property Market:

11 **The Psychology of Home**

19 Embracing Winter: Navigating the
Illinois Real Estate Market with
Confidence and Care

21 Recipe: Chocolate Covered
Strawberries

22 First Time Buyer Priorities |
5 Signs It's Time To Move

23 Featured House & REALTOR®:
Jeanette Solis, La Quinta powered by
Smart Home Realty

34 A Title Minute with Jeremy Pettit,
Advisors Title Network (ATN)

38 February Is The Perfect Time To Fall
In Love with Your Dream Home

44 Featured Community Leader:
Carandus Brown, Human Services
Manager - Rockford Housing
Authority

48 Featured Small Business: Saunders
Media, Owner/President - Kenaniah
Saunders

52 Efficient House Cleaning: Tips and Tricks
for a Spotless Home | Protect Your
Home with Effective Basement
Waterproofing Solutions

House Talk Magazine powered by:



Midwest Title Services



OUR LOVE

FOR OUR CLIENTS & PARTNERS



Midwest Title Services

"Your Gateway

TO CONFIDENT & SECURE CLOSINGS"

LOCAL EVENTS

Small Business OF THE MONTH

FEB 1 815 ALE Fest 2025 | Tebala Event Center
7910 Newburg Rd, Rockford, IL 61108

FEB 1 Handbuilding BUYOB Pottery Date Night
Three Ravens Pottery , 1005 5th Ave,
Rockford, IL 61104

FEB 1 Rockford IceHogs: Screw City Night |
BMO Center, 300 Elm Street, Rockford,
IL 61101

FEB 3 SOAR Awards at Hard Rock | PM | Hard
Rock Casino | 7801 E. State St, Rockford,
IL 61108

FEB 14 Happy Valentine's Day!

FEB 14 Marlon Wayans Wild Child Tour | 7PM
Hard Rock Casino |7801 E. State St,
Rockford, IL 61108

FEB 21 Jerry Seinfeld live at Coronado Theater |
7PM | Coronado Theater, 314 N. Main St.,
Rockford, IL 61101

Join in with local events!



**Kenaniah Saunders, Owner/President
SAUNDERS MEDIA**

Kenaniah "Kenny" Saunders, founder of Saunders Media is a digital marketing expert specializing in SEO, Google Ads, and social media management. After graduating from Augustana College in 2018, he launched the company with his wife, Britney, to help businesses grow online with customized marketing solutions. Feature story on Page 48.

MARKET UPDATE

DECEMBER 2024 | BOONE, OGLE & WINNEBAGO COUNTIES

Source: Northwest Illinois Alliance of REALTORS®, Facebook Post, December 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/3frujfbt>

306
SOLD
HOMES

206
NEW
LISTINGS

20
AVG DAYS
ON MARKET

\$217,968
AVG SALE
PRICE

276
SALES
PENDING

FEATURED LISTING

4524 RIVER RD, RIDOTT, IL 61067

This spacious ranch-style home on 3.26 acres is the perfect place to call your own! With a thoughtful layout, the main level offers three bedrooms, two full baths, first-floor laundry, and an open-concept living area ideal for gatherings and entertaining. Step out onto the first-floor deck from the living room... Continue on Page 28.

LISTED AT \$269,999



4 Beds



2482 Sqft



3 Baths



HABLO ESPAÑOL

JEANETTE SOLIS
REALTOR® | LICENSE # 475.205326
779.500.9807 | @jsolis@laquintag.com

SMART HOME REALTY

La Quinta Group

FOR HIM

best winter◆ *Fragrance*

Wrap him in warmth and allure this Valentine's Day with a fragrance as captivating as he is. From the rich, woody depth of Tom Ford Noir Extreme to the smoky sophistication of Creed Aventus, these seductive winter scents will leave an unforgettable impression. Whether it's the spicy embrace of Dior Sauvage Elixir or the sensual leather and amber notes of Tom Ford's Black Lacquer, these fragrances are the perfect gift to ignite his senses and your connection.

*Valentine's Day* MUST HAVES

FOR HER

best winter◆ *Fragrance*

Indulge her senses this Valentine's Day with the best winter fragrances for 2025. From the rich vanilla and amber of Tom Ford Black Orchid to the seductive rose and oud in Creed Royal Princess Oud, these warm, cozy scents are perfect for the colder months. Chanel Coco Mademoiselle and Yves Saint Laurent Libre Intense offer a romantic blend of elegance and warmth, making them the perfect gift to captivate her heart.

HOME ESSENTIALS

for newlywed couples

Most newly married couples find themselves quite surprised at the number of items that are needed for a comfortable home. Here are a few home essentials for every newlywed couple.



1. ADDITIONAL KITCHEN STORAGE

If both of you love to cook, then you know how chaotic things can get in the kitchen. This is why you want to keep things tidy and invest in some additional storage. One of the simplest things that you can buy is a spice rack, that will not take up too much space.



2. A NICE MATTRESS

Know that your bedroom will play a very important role in your life as a couple, and you'd be surprised at the number of marriages that were ruined because of poor sleeping arrangements or habits. This is why you need to invest in a good mattress!



3. SET OF TOOLS

If you bought your home, you have to be ready for things to break down. Or you may want to make some adjustments. In this case, you will need some tools.

February HOME MAINTENANCE

- ✓ DEEP CLEAN YOUR GARBAGE DISPOSAL
- ✓ TOUCH UP INTERIOR WALLS AND DOORS
- ✓ CLEAN REFRIGERATOR COILS
- ✓ CHECK CAULKING & GROUT AROUND HOUSE
- ✓ TEST YOUR HOME FOR RADON



February is also the perfect time to prepare your house for the upcoming spring and freshen up the space, focusing on planning for the spring rains.

FINDING LOVE IN REAL ESTATE:

How February's Heartfelt Charm Can Lead to Your Perfect Home

There's something magical about February, isn't there? While the world may be wrapped in winter's chill, this special month brings a warmth to our hearts—filled with love, hope, and new beginnings. Valentine's Day, celebrated on February 14th, encourages us to reflect on the connections that matter most, whether with a partner, a friend, or even with our home.

Valentine's Day has a history as enchanting as any love story. It began with Saint Valentine, a Roman priest who risked everything to marry couples in secret during a time when love was forbidden. Over the years, this act of defiance blossomed into the celebration we now know, filled with sweet gestures, heartfelt words, and the promise of love.

While February is often associated with romantic love, there's another powerful connection we experience: the bond we form when we find the perfect place to call home. Just like discovering a soulmate, finding the right home is about that deep connection—a space that resonates with who you are, a place that welcomes you with open arms.

So, how does this tie into real estate in February, especially in Illinois, where winter reigns supreme? It turns out, winter may be the perfect season to fall in love with your next home.

Sure, spring is often seen as the "prime" season for buying and selling, but there's something uniquely special about the winter months.

Homes on the market now showcase their cozy side, just when you need it most. Picture yourself walking through a home with a crackling fire in the fireplace, soft lighting casting a gentle glow across every room, and the promise of peaceful, comfortable living.

For sellers, February is a time to highlight the warmth and charm of your home. Potential buyers are looking for more than just four walls—they're searching for a feeling, a place to build their lives and create memories. If your home exudes warmth and care, it's time to let that shine through.

And for buyers, February offers the opportunity to connect with a home that truly fits your needs. While the streets may be snow-covered, the search for the perfect space can still feel like a warm embrace. Plus, there's a special kind of peace that comes with buying a home in winter—fewer distractions, more time to reflect, and a real sense of anticipation for the future.

In the end, whether you're selling or buying, February is a month of new beginnings, fresh connections, and love. After all, when you find a home that makes you smile, it's not just a property—it's where your heart feels at peace. And

just like finding love, your perfect home is out there, waiting for you.

Let February be the month when you find not just a house, but a place that feels like home. ❤️







HAPPY
Valentine's
DAY



WWW.MTSTITLE.COM



GETTING INTO THE AIRBNB AND RENTAL PROPERTY MARKET:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTORS

www.mtstitle.com

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

By investing in rental properties, you can benefit from Airbnb's growing popularity and the increasing demand for short-term stays. If done thoughtfully, it can turn into a lucrative venture, all while providing a valuable service to travelers looking for unique and comfortable accommodations.

Whether you're seeking a romantic Valentine's Day getaway, a family retreat, or you're exploring the idea of investing in the Airbnb market, Illinois has an abundance of opportunities that can help make your dreams a reality. With its range of destinations, from bustling cities to peaceful countryside escapes, you'll find the perfect setting for any occasion. And as the demand for unique and personalized accommodations grows, Airbnb is not only an excellent option for travelers, but also an exciting avenue for real estate investors to explore.

This Valentine's Day, treat yourself and your loved ones to a one-of-a-kind experience—whether it's in a private Airbnb getaway, a luxurious Sybaris retreat, or a family-centered vacation house. Whatever you choose, it's the perfect way to celebrate love, family, and cherished memories.

Source: "Valentine's Day Getaway: Why an Airbnb or Romantic Staycation is the Perfect Choice in Illinois," Midwest Title Services, House Talk Magazine, January 2025.

Valentine's Day Getaway:

WHY AN AIRBNB OR ROMANTIC STAYCATION IS THE PERFECT CHOICE IN ILLINOIS



Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and what better way to celebrate the season of love than by escaping the everyday routine and enjoying a memorable getaway with your loved one? Whether you're planning a romantic escape with a significant other or a family getaway filled with warmth and togetherness, Illinois offers a variety of enchanting options that will make your February 14th unforgettable.

Instead of the typical dinner-and-movie date, why not elevate your celebration this year? Imagine cozying up in a charming Airbnb cabin tucked away in the woods or unwinding at a luxurious Sybaris in one of Illinois' romantic locales. From city chic to countryside charm, the options for a perfect Valentine's Day experience are endless. Let's take a closer look at some ideas for a festive and loving celebration, and why booking an Airbnb or indulging in a luxurious hotel or Sybaris stay could be just the romantic occasion you need.

A Romantic Retreat in an Airbnb

For those who prefer something personal, unique, and intimate, an Airbnb could be the ideal way to celebrate. Whether you're drawn to a sleek loft in Chicago or a cozy log cabin by a serene lake in the northern suburbs, Airbnb offers a wide range of rental properties that cater to all tastes. Imagine a warm, rustic cabin with a hot tub under the stars, or a cozy apartment in a historic neighborhood perfect for a weekend stroll. Illinois is home to many picturesque towns and cities that make perfect settings for a Valentine's escape. The rolling hills of Galena or the peaceful countryside of Southern

Illinois offer tranquility and charm. On the other hand, the vibrant city life in Chicago offers a variety of hidden gems that will leave you enchanted.

Booking an Airbnb can offer more flexibility than traditional hotel stays. You can choose a place that fits your personal style – perhaps a vintage apartment with antique furniture, a modern penthouse with skyline views, or even a farm stay where you can wake up to the sound of chirping birds and enjoy a peaceful morning with your loved one.

Sybaris: The Ultimate Romantic Getaway

If you're looking for something ultra-luxurious and utterly romantic, a stay at a Sybaris is an excellent choice. With locations in Downers Grove, Northbrook, and Frankfort, Sybaris specializes in couples' retreats, offering an unmatched level of romance and indulgence. With amenities like private whirlpool tubs, fireplaces, and in-suite massages, you'll feel like you've stepped into a world of pure bliss.

Sybaris' secluded rooms are designed to encourage intimacy and relaxation. From the moment you walk in, the atmosphere will help you escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life and focus solely on each other. Whether you want to relax in the bubbles of your private jacuzzi or snuggle up by a warm fire, Sybaris is all about creating an unforgettable experience.

Family Getaways: Creating Memories Beyond the Valentine's Day Romance

While Valentine's Day is often associated with romantic love, it's



UNVEILING THE BEAUTY OF WHAT'S AN AIRBNB?

also a wonderful time for families to come together and create memories. Airbnb offers great options for families looking to escape the stress of daily life. Consider renting a charming cottage or a large home where you can cook a family meal, play games, and spend quality time together. Whether you're visiting the charming town of St. Charles or heading to a cozy house in the quiet woods of Illinois, Airbnb can provide a warm and welcoming space for the entire family.

Some Airbnb homes even offer unique features such as game rooms, large kitchens for cooking together, and spacious living areas perfect for family movie nights. Renting a home can allow you to experience a more personalized getaway, enjoying quality family time without the crowds of traditional tourist spots.

What is Airbnb? An Innovative Way to Stay and Travel

You've likely heard of Airbnb, but what exactly is it, and how can it benefit both vacationers and property owners alike? Airbnb is an online platform that allows homeowners to rent out their properties to guests for short-term stays. Whether it's a single room, an entire home, or a unique property like a treehouse or houseboat, Airbnb offers diverse options for travelers looking for a different kind of experience.

With millions of listings in cities worldwide, Airbnb has revolutionized the way we think about accommodation. It



allows people to find lodging that suits their tastes and preferences—whether you're seeking adventure, relaxation, or a one-of-a-kind experience. Additionally, guests are often able to interact with the host, gaining valuable insider tips about the area they're visiting.

For those seeking a home away from home, renting an Airbnb property provides the comforts and privacy of your own space. With features like fully equipped kitchens, cozy living areas, and the option to stay in unique or off-the-beaten-path locations, Airbnb lets you create your own experience. Plus, with reviews and ratings from previous guests, you can be sure you're selecting a property that fits your needs.

Getting Into the Airbnb and Rental Property Market: Opportunities for Investors


If the idea of staying in an Airbnb property has captured your attention, you may also be intrigued by the possibilities it presents for real estate investment. Illinois, with its diverse regions and bustling cities like Chicago, is a prime location for Airbnb and short-term rental properties. Investing in rental properties, whether through Airbnb or other platforms, offers a way to earn passive income while capitalizing on the growing demand for unique accommodations.

The Airbnb market is especially attractive for those looking to generate income from properties that might otherwise remain vacant. You can either buy a property to rent out on Airbnb or turn an existing property (such as a second home) into a short-term rental.

Here are some tips for getting started in the Airbnb investment market:

1. **Research the Market:** Understand the demand for short-term rentals in the area you're interested in. Is there a steady stream of tourists, or is the location more popular for business travelers?
2. **Calculate Your Investment Costs:** Be sure to factor in property costs, maintenance, and any necessary upgrades to ensure the space is inviting to guests.
3. **Create a Unique Experience:** Differentiate your property by offering something unique. Whether it's a themed space, exceptional amenities, or a perfect location, finding a niche can help attract more guests.
4. **Stay on Top of Regulations:** Many cities have specific laws around short-term rentals, so make sure you are complying with zoning and rental laws in your area.
5. **Manage Your Property Well:** Positive reviews are essential for success on Airbnb. Provide excellent service, keep the property well-maintained, and create a welcoming environment to earn repeat customers.





The Psychology of Home:



2025

WWW.MTSTITLE.COM

WHAT REALLY MAKES A HOUSE FEEL LIKE HOME?

A house is more than just four walls and a roof. It's the setting of our lives, the backdrop to our memories, and, for many, the embodiment of who we are. When you step through the front door of a place that feels like home, it's not just the physical structure that makes it special—it's the emotional connection, the sense of

comfort, and the profound sense of belonging it evokes. But what is it that makes a house feel like home, and why do some spaces instantly connect with us while others feel cold and sterile? The answer lies in the fascinating intersection of psychology, design, and personal experience. (Continue reading on next page).

HOUSE TALK MAGAZINE




Why We Fall in Love With Certain Homes

There's an undeniable magic that happens when you find a house that just feels right. Whether it's the open, airy feel of a spacious living room or the cozy nook by the window that promises hours of reading, something clicks. But what is it about certain homes that draw us in?

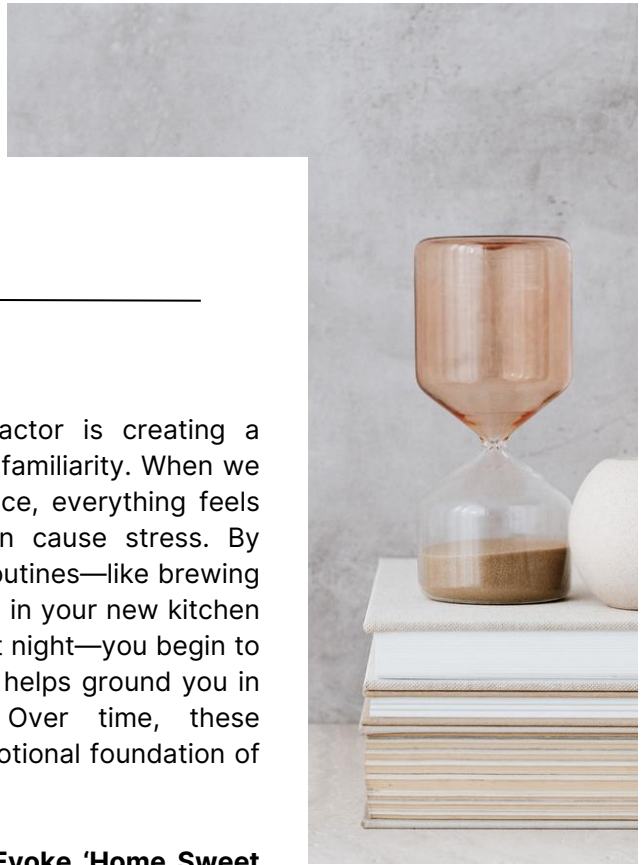
It's not just the layout or the aesthetics. Our brains are wired to respond to specific stimuli that trigger feelings of safety, comfort, and joy. The layout of a home plays a crucial role in how we perceive it. Open floor plans can evoke a sense of freedom and space, while more intimate, closed-off designs often create a feeling of coziness and security. Even the smell of a home can influence our emotional connection; studies show that pleasant scents, like fresh-baked bread or lavender, can activate areas of the brain associated with memory and happiness.

But perhaps most importantly, we're naturally drawn to spaces that resonate with our personal preferences and experiences. For example, someone who grew up in a house with a large, central kitchen might feel immediately at home in a similar space, while others might seek out homes with natural light or expansive outdoor areas. The combination of these psychological triggers, both universal and personal, is what creates that wow moment when you step into a house and feel like it could be yours.



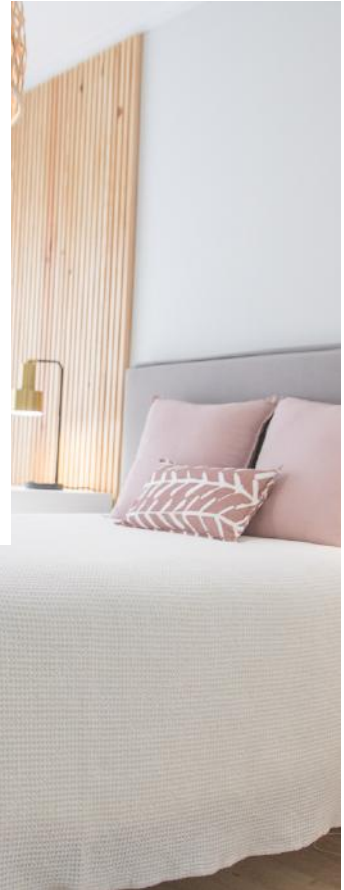
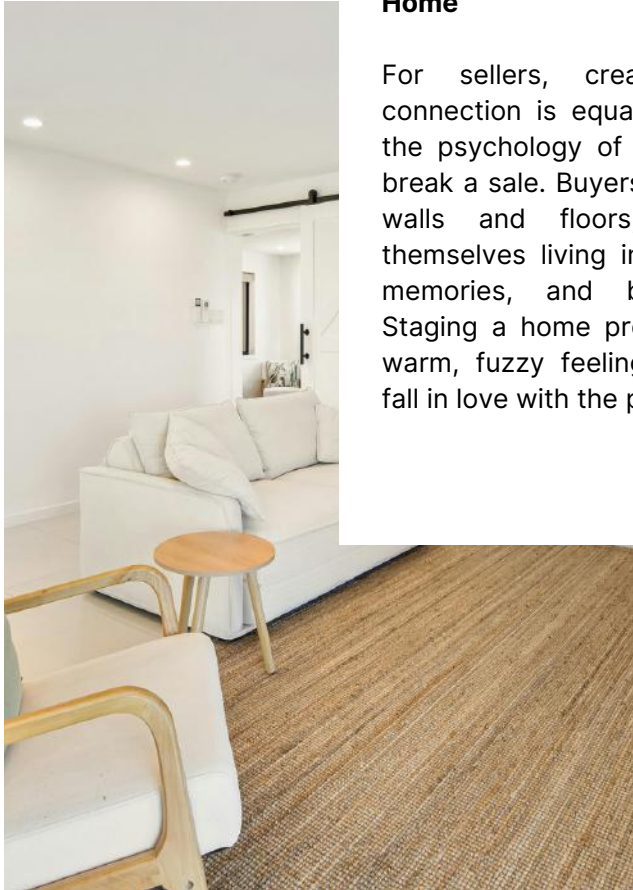
For many, the real magic begins after the purchase. It's when the house becomes more than just a place to sleep—it's when it becomes the place where you can fully relax, recharge, and live your life. But how can buyers turn a house into a home? It's not just about furniture and decor; it's about creating an environment that reflects your personality and meets your needs.

One of the first things buyers should focus on is comfort. A house may have all the right features—ample square footage, a perfect kitchen, or an ideal location—but without comfort, it won't feel like home. Start with the basics: soft lighting, cozy textiles, and furniture arrangements that encourage relaxation. Add elements that are uniquely you—whether it's a favorite piece of art, a collection of cherished mementos, or a splash of your favorite color. Home is where we can express ourselves, so make sure your space reflects your personality.

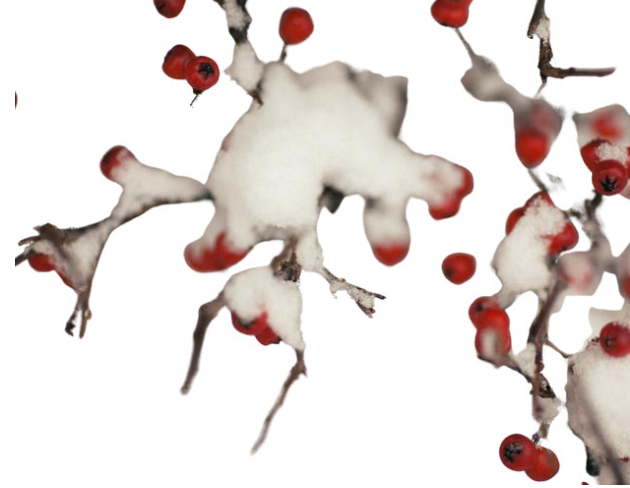


Another important factor is creating a sense of routine and familiarity. When we move into a new place, everything feels unfamiliar, which can cause stress. By establishing simple routines—like brewing coffee in the morning in your new kitchen or lighting a candle at night—you begin to create a rhythm that helps ground you in your new space. Over time, these routines form the emotional foundation of your home.

Staging Secrets to Evoke 'Home Sweet Home'



For sellers, creating an emotional connection is equally important. In fact, the psychology of staging can make or break a sale. Buyers aren't just looking at walls and floors; they're imagining themselves living in the space, creating memories, and building their lives. Staging a home properly can evoke the warm, fuzzy feelings that make buyers fall in love with the property.



Highlighting Your Home's Best Features:

A KEY TO EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

When selling a home, it's not just about showcasing rooms and square footage—it's about telling a story that helps potential buyers see themselves living there. One of the most effective ways to do this is by highlighting the home's best features. Whether it's a charming fireplace, a stunning bay window, or a cozy reading nook, these unique elements can become the emotional focal points that turn a house into a home.

DRAW ATTENTION TO SPECIAL FEATURES

Buyers want to imagine their lives unfolding in the spaces they view, and your job as a seller is to help them do that. A well-placed piece of furniture or a carefully arranged layout can draw the eye toward the standout features of the home. For example, position a comfortable chair next to a bay window to showcase the natural light and serene view, or arrange the furniture around a fireplace to highlight its warmth and inviting appeal. This not only makes the space look more appealing, but it helps buyers mentally "claim" the space as their own.

CREATE A VISION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The goal is to make buyers feel like the home was made for them. By emphasizing the best features, you help them picture how they would spend their time in the space—perhaps curled up with a book in that reading nook, enjoying a quiet evening by the fire, or basking in the morning sunlight coming through the bay window. When these features are showcased in a way that reflects comfort and warmth, it fosters an emotional connection to the home. Buyers can envision themselves creating their own memories there, which is a powerful motivator in the decision-making process.

MAXIMIZE THE POTENTIAL OF EVERY SPACE

Remember, the way you arrange furniture and stage a room should make each feature shine without overwhelming the space. Less is often more—keep the focus on the home's strengths and let those areas speak for themselves. A thoughtfully staged home not only highlights the best features, but also evokes an emotional response, encouraging potential buyers to imagine their lives unfolding in each room. This connection is typically the key to sealing the deal.

In home staging, it's not just about decorating—it's about creating an environment that invites buyers to emotionally invest. By thoughtfully highlighting the home's best features, you help them envision it as the backdrop to their own life stories.



CULTURAL AND GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES:

WHAT HOME MEANS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Our perception of what makes a house a home can vary dramatically depending on culture, age, and life experience. For example, in many Western cultures, the ideal home is often depicted as a private sanctuary—a retreat from the world where individuals or families can enjoy their own space. In contrast, in many Asian cultures, the concept of "home" is more communal. The home may be seen as a place for family gatherings and social interaction, rather than just personal relaxation.

Generational differences also play a role in how we perceive home. Younger generations, like Millennials and Gen Z, may be more inclined to seek out homes that are sustainable, flexible, and technologically advanced. They value things like eco-friendly features, smart home technology, and homes that can accommodate a variety of activities, from remote work to exercise.

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HOME

What Makes A Home

The Emotional Heart of “Home”

For Baby Boomers, on the other hand, the idea of home is often tied to tradition and stability. A family home may be the place where they raised children and created memories over decades, and the idea of “home” may evoke nostalgia and a desire for permanence. Understanding these cultural and generational nuances can help

both buyers and sellers better connect with the emotional power of home.

Ultimately, what makes a house feel like home is deeply personal. It’s not just about the physical attributes—though they certainly help—it’s about the emotions that space evokes.



Whether it’s the comfort of familiar routines, the warmth of well-chosen decor, or the deep, emotional connection we feel to the spaces that nurture us. The psychology of home is about creating an environment that makes us feel safe, loved, and at peace. For buyers, it’s about finding a space that resonates with them on a deeper level, while for sellers, it’s about crafting a home that invites others to feel the same connection. In the end, a house becomes a home when it reflects the heart of those who live there—when it becomes a place of comfort, joy, and belonging. That’s the true magic of home.



Making Winter Work for You

In Illinois, winter may be cold, but the real estate market is anything but frozen. Whether you're a seller preparing your home for showings or a REALTOR® guiding clients through winter, thoughtful preparation and attention to detail are key to success.

With the right approach, winter can be a season of warmth, comfort, and opportunity. By making your home inviting, flexible, and safe, you can create a memorable experience for potential buyers, while reaping the rewards of a motivated, engaged market. As we begin 2025, let's embrace the season and make the most of the opportunities it brings—because, as we all know, even in the coldest of seasons, the warmth of a great deal is always worth the effort.



EMBRACING WINTER: NAVIGATING THE ILLINOIS REAL ESTATE MARKET WITH CONFIDENCE AND CARE

As the snow begins to fall and the chill of winter settles over Illinois, the real estate market enters a season where opportunities are abundant for both buyers and sellers. While many may believe that the winter months are a slow time for real estate, the truth is quite the opposite. Serious buyers, motivated sellers, and savvy investors all understand that winter can present a unique opportunity to make their move.

In fact, winter in Illinois offers a distinctive charm—a time when homes appear cozier, more inviting, and full of potential. Whether you're a seller preparing your home for showings, a buyer braving the winter roads, an investor searching for value, or a mortgage lender working with clients, navigating this season requires thoughtful strategy, flexibility, and a little extra warmth.

Let's explore how sellers can effectively support their realtors during winter showings, and how realtors, in turn, can help sellers shine even when the weather is less than ideal. This guide offers key insights into ensuring that your winter real estate experience is successful and

rewarding, no matter which side of the transaction you're on.

FOR SELLERS: CREATING A WARM WELCOME IN THE COLD

The winter months in Illinois come with their own set of challenges, but with a little care and preparation, you can make your home stand out in a market that often brings more serious, motivated buyers.

1. Clear the Path to a Successful Showing

Nothing diminishes a buyer's experience more than encountering slippery steps or a driveway covered in snow and ice. As a seller, one of the most important things you can do is make sure that access to your home is safe and inviting.



Key Insights



Snow and Ice Removal: Regularly clear the walkways, driveway, and entry points to your home. This will ensure that buyers have a smooth and safe path as they approach your front door, setting a positive tone for their visit.

De-Icing: In addition to shoveling snow, use de-icing products on outdoor steps and driveways to minimize the risk of slips. This is especially important in shaded areas or on sloped surfaces where ice can linger long after a snowfall.

2. Setting the Perfect Temperature: Warmth Matters

As temperatures dip, it's crucial to make sure your home feels like a sanctuary from the cold.

Thermostat Care: Keep your home comfortably warm during showings. There's nothing more off-putting to a potential buyer than stepping into a cold home on a frosty day. A temperature around 68°F (20°C) is ideal—warm enough to feel inviting without being overwhelming.

Humidifier Magic: Illinois winters can be notoriously dry, so consider running a humidifier to maintain a comfortable atmosphere. It can also help prevent static electricity, which can be a common issue in dry environments.

3. Let the Light In

In the winter months, natural daylight is limited, but that doesn't mean your home has to feel dark and dreary. Embrace the beauty of winter light.

Maximize Natural Light: Open the curtains and blinds to let in as much natural light as possible. If your home has large windows with scenic views, make sure these are showcased to their full potential. **Additional Lighting:**

Ensure that every room is well-lit with functional lamps and overhead lights. Consider using soft, warm lighting to create a cozy, welcoming ambiance.

4. Enhance Your Home's Curb Appeal

Even in winter, curb appeal matters. Your home's exterior should convey warmth, charm, and attention to detail.

Landscaping: While snow may blanket much of the yard, you can still keep your landscaping tidy by trimming any evergreen shrubs or trees. If you have winter-friendly plants, make sure they're well-maintained.

Seasonal Touches: A tasteful winter wreath on your front door or a few soft outdoor lights can go a long way in making your home feel inviting. Keep it simple and elegant—less is often more.

5. Stay Flexible and Adaptable

Winter weather can sometimes lead to schedule changes, but remaining flexible is crucial to maintaining momentum during the sales process.

Adapt to the Weather: Be prepared to reschedule showings if necessary due to snowstorms or icy conditions. Buyers may also request flexible viewing times, and as a realtor, it's your job to accommodate their needs and adjust plans accordingly.

6. Proactive Maintenance and Inspections

As the seller's trusted advisor, it's important to stay on top of any winter-related maintenance issues that could impact the showing process.

Check Heating Systems: Ensure that the home's heating system is working optimally before showings. A malfunctioning heating system during a showing could leave a poor impression.

Winter-Proofing: Encourage your seller to check for potential issues such as roof leaks from snow buildup or frozen pipes. Addressing these concerns proactively can prevent larger issues down the road and keep the sale process moving smoothly.



Chocolate Covered Strawberries

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pint of fresh strawberries (preferably large and ripe)
- 1 cup of semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 1/2 cup of white chocolate chips (for drizzling)
- 1 tablespoon of coconut oil (for smoothness)
- Sprinkles, crushed nuts, or edible glitter (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Prepare the Strawberries: Wash and dry the strawberries thoroughly. Make sure they are completely dry to ensure the chocolate adheres well.
2. Melt the Chocolate: In a microwave-safe bowl, combine the semi-sweet chocolate chips and coconut oil. Microwave in 20-30 second intervals, stirring in between, until the chocolate is fully melted and smooth.
3. Dip the Strawberries: Hold each strawberry by the stem and dip it into the melted chocolate, ensuring it's covered about halfway or to your preference. Let any excess chocolate drip off.
4. Optional Decorations: If you'd like to add a little extra flair, sprinkle crushed nuts, sprinkles, or edible glitter on the chocolate-covered strawberries while they're still wet.
5. Drizzle with White Chocolate: Melt the white chocolate chips the same way as the semi-sweet chocolate, and then drizzle it over the dipped strawberries for a decorative touch.
6. Set the Strawberries: Place the strawberries on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to allow the chocolate to set.

FIRST TIME *Buyer priorities*

Being a first-time home buyer can be challenging. However, being fully prepared can help guarantee success.

FIRST - Start by knowing your financials inside out and backward. Get pre-approved by a mortgage lender and formulate a budget that will work for you.

SECOND - Take the time to understand your mortgage options fully. Eligibility and payments can vary significantly, you want to find the right mortgage program to fit your circumstances.

LAST - Make informed decisions. Partner with the right real estate agent, mortgage broker, & and home inspector. They can be a trusted advisor when it comes to making those tough decisions.

When it comes to buying your first home, you get out of it what you put into it.

Happy house hunting!



5 SIGNS IT'S TIME *to make a move*

It's important to learn to recognize the signs it's time to move to a new house. To help you decide, here are the top 5 signs it's time to move to a new home.

- 1 YOUR HOME HAS BECOME TOO SMALL
- 2 YOUR HOME HAS BECOME TOO BIG
- 3 YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD IS IN DECLINE

- 4 YOUR HOME HAS BECOME A MONEY PIT
- 5 YOUR HOME IS NOT MAKING YOU HAPPY ANYMORE



"You don't have to be a seasoned agent to make it, you need motivation! The best advice I can give is to build relationships, stay educated, and always focus on providing exceptional client service. Our success is built on trust and the belief in helping others make their dreams come true."

— Jeanette Solis, REALTOR®, La Quinta Group powered by Smart Homes Realty & Founding President of NAHREP® Rockford Chapter

ABOUT

JEANETTE SOLIS

Jeanette Solis is a dynamic force in the real estate world, having established herself as a lead REALTOR® with La Quinta | Smart Home Realty since January 2023. With an impressive track record, she has been recognized as one of the NAHREP® Top 100 teams, a testament to her dedication and expertise in the industry. As the founding president of the NAHREP® Rockford Chapter, Jeanette has not only paved the way for her own success but has also empowered others in the Latino real estate community.

In just two years, Jeanette has sold nearly 100 homes, racking up close to \$14 million in sales—a remarkable feat that underscores her status as a top producer. Her accolades don't stop there; she has been honored by *Negocios Now* and recognized in the *Who's Who of Latino Leaders*, affirming her influence and commitment to excellence.

Aside from her professional achievements, Jeanette is a devoted mother of five and a loving grandmother, balancing her thriving career with family life. Celebrating 30 years of marriage, she embodies resilience and dedication, both at home and in her

career. With her passion for real estate and her unwavering commitment to her community, Jeanette Solis continues to inspire those around her, proving that success is built on hard work, leadership, and love.

Jeanette Solis is not only a thriving REALTOR® with La Quinta | Smart Home Realty but also an integral part of the leadership team, where she has embraced the role of mentor. Known for her transparency and generosity, Jeanette is an open book, eager to share her wealth of knowledge with others in the industry. Her mentorship has inspired many, helping them navigate the complexities of real estate.

Beyond her professional commitments, Jeanette is deeply engaged in her community. She actively participates in events such as South Main Mercado, Tamales Fest, Stroll on State, Día de Los Muertos, and Domingo's en el Parque, showcasing her passion for culture and connection. These events not only highlight her dedication to community engagement but also reflect her belief in the importance of giving back.

Jeanette's philanthropic spirit shines through her



HABLO ESPAÑOL

JEANETTE SOLIS
 REALTOR® | LICENSE # 475.205326
 ©779.500.9607 | @jsolis@laquintag.com




La Quinta Group

SMART HOME REALTY



generous donations to various causes, further solidifying her role as a community leader. Whether mentoring aspiring REALTOR®s or supporting local initiatives, Jeanette Solis embodies the values of service and leadership, making a lasting impact both in her profession and in the lives of those around her.

A House Talk Interview with Jeanette Solis, REALTOR® & Founding President NAHREP® Rockford

What recent milestones or awards are you most proud of, and what do they mean to you as a seasoned professional?

I was recently named Top Teams with Keller Williams Mid-American Region. I'm a recipient of the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP®) Top 100 Teams nationwide, and I could not have done that without all of my loyal clients and mentors. Along with that, I am the Founding President for the NAHREP® Rockford Chapter that has the goal of bringing resources to support both Hispanic professionals and sustainable homeownership. Additionally, named the Community Engagement Coordinator for RRHCC.

How have you contributed to promoting Hispanic homeownership, and what initiatives are you currently passionate about?

As a proud Latina, it is one of my top priorities to be able to enhance the homeownership dream and experience for the local Hispanic community. Some ways I do this are by educating in various different homebuyer and seller seminars that I collaborate with local Real Estate vendors to help educate the community. Additionally, creating accessibility to financing for different walks of life. We work with many ITIN homebuyers that need a little extra guidance and assistance when obtaining financing, and I try to get them the right resources in order to make their home buying dreams come true.

I am also very involved in my community by sponsoring and attending community events such as Domingo's en el Parque, South Main Mercado, Tamale Fest, and we're excited to be able to participate in Stroll on State this year.

Looking to buy or sell your home with confidence? Contact Jeanette Solis, REALTOR® at La Quinta Group powered by Smart Home Realty, for expert guidance and personalized service every step of the way. Call Jeanette today at (779) 500-9607 or email jsolis@laquintag.com—Hablo Español and ready to help you make your real estate dreams a reality!





JEANNETTE SOLIS, REALTOR®

FEATURE

ILLUMINATING PATHS TO PROSPERITY

As a leader in the real estate community, what advice do you have for newer agents looking to make their mark?

La Quinta Group was established in January 2023 and have sold over 80 homes and over \$13mil in these last two (2) years. You don't have to be a seasoned agent to make it, you need motivation! The best advice I can give agents is to build relationships, stay educated, and focus on the client service. Always finding a way to help one another, whether that be an agent to agent or an agent to lender, working together makes for the most effective outcomes for our clients. Always make sure you are

“Exceptional services always bring referrals.”

What's a fun or unexpected fact about yourself that your clients or colleagues might not know?

I am the mother to FIVE daughters! Hence, “La Quinta Group” I see a bit of myself in each one but have loved watching them all grow into their own lives and families. Although we didn't have any boys, we have my two grandson, who are the joy of our lives. An extra special note is that my oldest daughter served in the Navy for 7 years and my third daughter is currently serving in the Navy overseas. We are a proud Navy family!

What resources or advice would you recommend for buyers and sellers who may feel nervous about taking the first step in their real estate journey?

Taking it step by step and not being afraid to reach out to learn how to better prepare themselves. As a Local agent with local lenders, we are always open to exploring the options of what can be done for our clients. All it takes is taking that first step to begin the process and with the right help, it can be a smooth and easy thing! La Quinta Group and Smart Home Realty are always collaborating with other local vendors to set up informational seminars, so be on the lookout for those to come and get some insight into the possibilities available. As always, feel free to reach out to me for any information on how we can help sell or buy a home!

up-to-date with any and all changes in the Real Estate industry as it is ever-changing and in order to give your clients the best service, you have to be making sure you are the best. Lastly, we are no one and get nowhere without our client and the trust they put into us.



»»» REAL ESTATE

SMART HOME REALTY



FEBRUARY 2025
HOUSE TALK MAGAZINE

Join La Quinta Group | Smart Home Realty: A Place Where Your Success Matters

Smart Home Realty, we're not just a real estate brokerage; we're a community of dedicated professionals committed to supporting each other's growth and success. We believe in fostering an environment where talent thrives, and we're looking for top-tier agents to join our dynamic team. Whether you're an experienced REALTOR® or just starting, we offer the resources, mentorship, and support you need to reach your fullest potential.



As a bilingual team, we understand the unique needs of diverse communities, and we pride ourselves on providing exceptional service to our clients in both English and Spanish. At Smart Home Realty, you'll be surrounded by like-minded professionals who are passionate about their craft and eager to collaborate. We don't just focus

on transactions; we build lasting relationships with clients and help them navigate the real estate journey with confidence. We know that your success is tied to having the right tools and support. That's what we provide



to our agents which is cutting-edge technology, training, and a culture of mentorship that helps you grow, while also maintaining a healthy work-life balance. With us, you'll never feel like you're



»»» SMART HOME REALTY

going it alone — we are here to help you succeed every step of the way. Join us today and take your career to the next level with a brokerage that truly cares about your success. Let's work together to achieve new heights in the real estate industry!

Ready to make a change? Let's talk about how Smart Home Realty can elevate your career! Contact: (779) 500-9607.

JOIN THE TEAM

WE ARE HIRING

New and Seasoned Real Estate Agents

NO SPLITS

100% COMMISSION

\$500 Per Transaction

Restrictions May Apply

\$15 MONTHLY TECH FEE

Call For More Information



779.500.9607



SMART HOME
REALTY



4524 River Rd, Ridott, IL 61067



Just Listed

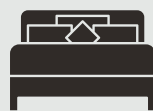
AVAILABLE FOR THE PRICE OF \$269,999



PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

This spacious 2,482 Sq ft ranch-style home on 3.26 acres features three bedrooms, two full baths, first-floor laundry, and an open-concept living area ideal for family gatherings. Enjoy morning coffee on the main level deck, or relax on the lower level with a bedroom, full bath, workshop, and second deck perfect for summer BBQs. Recent updates include a new roof (2022), furnace (2022), flooring, kitchen, bathrooms, laundry room, and decks (2023)—all ready for you to move in and make it your family home!

PROPERTY HIGHLIGHTS



4 BEDROOMS



3 BATHROOMS



2 CAR GARAGE
DETACHED

CONTACT US FOR MORE INFO.

HOUSE TALK

28



779.500.9607



jsolis@laquintag.com

4524 RIVER RD,
RIDOTT, IL 61067

OFFERED AT
\$269,999

just LISTED



BEAUTIFUL *home*

This is a spacious ranch home on 3.26 acres offers three bedrooms, two baths, first-floor laundry, and an open-concept living area. Recent updates include a new roof, flooring, furnace, kitchen, bathrooms, and decks (2022-2023), with a finished lower level featuring a bedroom, full bath, workshop, and second deck for outdoor enjoyment.



Jeanette Solis

779.500.9607

jsolis@laquintag.com

HABLO ESPAÑOL

HOUSE TALK







Celebrating African American Pioneers in Real Estate:

A LEGACY OF RESILIENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT



As we observe Black History Month, it's important to reflect on the remarkable history of African Americans in the real estate industry. From the era of slavery to the present day, African Americans have faced systemic challenges such as bondage, segregation, and racism—yet have continued to contribute significantly to the growth and development of the nation. Despite these barriers, Black Americans have thrived as craftspeople, financiers, designers, builders, and developers, leaving a lasting legacy in real estate.

THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND ITS AFTERMATH

During the era of slavery, African Americans played an essential role in the construction of the nation. Many enslaved people worked as skilled laborers—brickmakers, carpenters, and masons—helping to build the very infrastructure of America. Benjamin Banneker, a free Black man, famously helped survey the land for Washington, D.C., while enslaved workers contributed to the creation of landmark buildings such as the U.S. Capitol and the White House. Despite their exploitation, these workers

were integral to the nation's development, laying the groundwork for future African American involvement in real estate.

THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN REAL ESTATE BROKER: ZACHARY TAYLOR

In the early 1900s, Zachary Taylor became the first African American to own a real estate brokerage. In a time of harsh racial segregation, Taylor's achievement was groundbreaking, demonstrating the potential for African Americans to succeed in a field traditionally dominated by white professionals. His business opened doors for future generations of Black real estate professionals and remains a testament to the power of determination and vision.

THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN REALTOR: JOSEPH L. SYKES

Joseph L. Sykes stands as one of the earliest African American realtors, beginning his career in the early 20th century. His first listing was valued at \$1,500—a modest but significant milestone in an era when African Americans faced significant barriers to property ownership and financial stability. With his work, Sykes proved that success in real estate was not limited by race, setting an example for generations to follow. He likely earned a 3–5% commission on his first deal, an achievement that would inspire future Black professionals in the field.

BUILDING A LEGACY: THE MCKISSACK FAMILY

A shining example of African American perseverance and success in the built environment is the McKissack family, whose history dates back to slavery. Moses McKissack, a skilled carpenter and brickmaker, was an enslaved man who passed his trade down to future generations. Today, his descendants, such as Deryl

INSPIRING HISTORY

Meet Herman J. Russell and Philip Payton

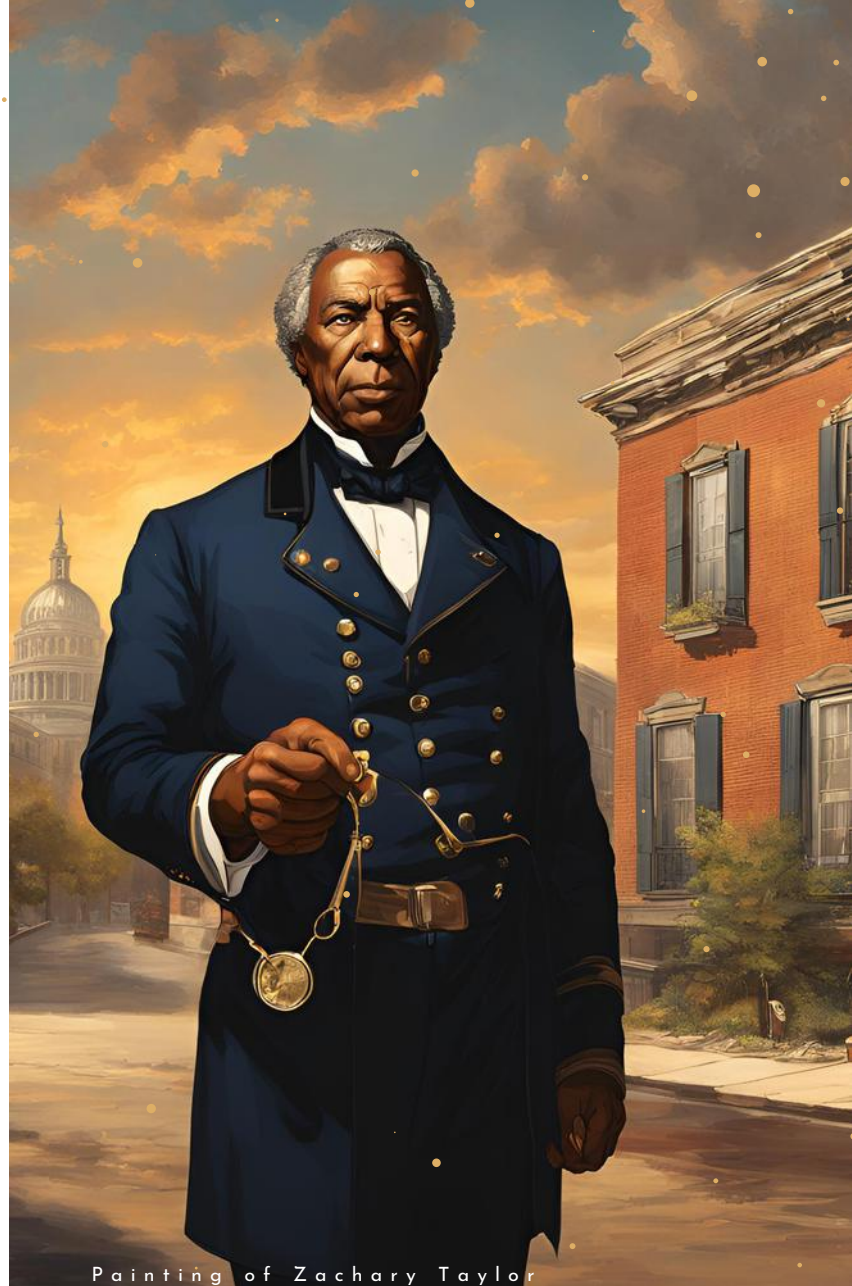
CONTINUED...

McKissack, continue to make waves in architecture and construction, with McKissack & McKissack serving as one of the premier firms in the field. The family's legacy is one of resilience, innovation, and breaking barriers, culminating in significant projects like the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY: FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA TO MODERN DAY

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s led to significant legislative changes that opened doors for African Americans in real estate, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. African American developers such as **Herman J. Russell** and **Philip Payton** continued to make strides in commercial and residential real estate, developing neighborhoods and businesses that enriched African American communities.

The fight for equality and economic empowerment in real estate is ongoing, but today, African Americans continue to influence and lead the industry. Their work is a testament to the strength, ingenuity, and determination that has defined African American involvement in real estate from its inception.



Painting of Zachary Taylor

CONCLUSION

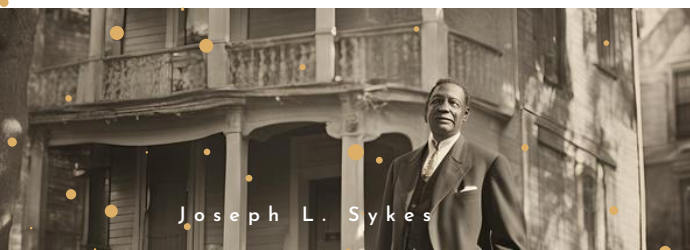
The history of African Americans in real estate is one of resilience, innovation, and breaking down barriers. From the days of slavery to the present, Black Americans have shaped the built environment and contributed significantly to the development of the nation. As we celebrate Black History Month, let's honor these pioneers and recognize their ongoing impact on the real estate industry.

At Midwest Title Services, we proudly recognize the contributions of African American pioneers in real estate and continue to support the development of a more inclusive and diverse industry.

Midwest Title Services - Your Gateway to Confident & Secure Closings | Contact us today at **815-283-3300** | info@mtsttitle.com | www.mtsttitle.com



Celebrate
Black
HISTORY
month



Joseph L. Sykes

A Title Minute With Jeremy



Jeremy Pettit

Closer | Advisors Title Network
REALTOR® | Smart Home Realty

In the fast-paced world of real estate, understanding the role of a title is crucial to a smooth transaction. A title ensures that the property being bought or sold is legally clear of any issues, such as liens or ownership disputes, making it a critical part of the closing process. Jeremy, a seasoned real estate closer at ATN Title in Schaumburg, IL, brings a wealth of experience and professionalism to every deal.

Closing at ATN Title means access to a dedicated team, efficient services, and a seamless experience

that minimizes delays. With Jeremy's expertise, clients can rest assured that their transactions are handled with precision and care.

Choosing the right closer is essential to avoid costly mistakes, and Jeremy's commitment to excellence ensures every closing is completed smoothly and successfully. For more information, visit ATNTitle.com. ATN is a full-service Title Insurance agency based in Illinois and Florida.

Jeremy's Journey: Passion, Precision, and Connections

A Sweet Start to February

Jeremy, February is all about hearts, love, and a fresh burst of energy for the year. What do you “love” most about your work with Advisors Title Network, and how does it inspire your success as both an escrow officer and a real estate broker at Smart Home Realty?

What I love most about my work is helping people navigate one of the most exciting—and sometimes stressful—milestones in their lives: closing on a home. Being part of that journey and making sure everything runs smoothly is incredibly rewarding. My goal is to ensure clients feel confident and supported every step of the way. That sense of responsibility and satisfaction drives me to do my best and find solutions to any challenges that arise.

February's Forward Focus

As we look toward the rest of 2025, what are your hopes for the title and real estate industries? What advice would you share with readers to help them “fall in love” with their own professional paths or the process of buying and securing a home?

I'm excited to see the continued growth of technology in the title and real estate industries. Digital advancements are making processes more efficient and accessible, but I hope the human element—the relationships and personal touch—never gets lost. My advice would be to stay patient and flexible, whether you're working through a title issue or navigating the home-buying process. Building trust and keeping an open line of communication with all parties involved makes the experience so much smoother. And remember, every home is a new opportunity to create a story—fall in love with that journey!

From Titles to Triumphs

Advisors Title Network, as Midwest Title Services' sister company, plays a unique role in the industry. How does ATN's approach set it apart, and what has been your proudest accomplishment since joining their team?

Advisors Title Network stands out because we go the extra mile for every client. We're committed to providing not just accurate title work, but also a smooth, stress-free closing experience. Our attention to detail and personalized approach set us apart in the industry. One of my proudest accomplishments at ATN has been helping clients overcome complex title issues that seemed impossible to resolve. Turning challenging situations into success stories and making the process easier for clients is incredibly rewarding.



Advisors Title Network, LLC is a full-service Title Insurance agency based in Illinois and Florida. Rely on our experts and top national title insurance underwriters to safeguard your property rights.

We offer a full complement of title insurance, settlement, and escrow services for residential, commercial, and new construction real estate in Illinois, Florida, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Maryland. Our team consists of seasoned industry professionals who stand ready to make your next real estate transaction smooth and efficient. We care about our clients and treat each transaction as if it were our own. We offer flexible closing hours and multiple office locations to serve you.

We are members of the Illinois Land Title Associations. ILTA is a regional title insurance industry trade association that is actively involved in all real estate related regulatory and legislative issues. Our membership ensures that we are your trusted source for up to date information related to property transfers and title protection for consumers.

Our title products are underwritten by First American Title, Chicago Title, Fidelity National Title, Alliant National Title and AmTrust Title Insurance Companies. Through our underwriter's backing, we can ensure that our clients are secure in entrusting their transactions to us.

Why Choose Us

- Convenient closing locations
- Knowledgeable staff with over 20 years average experience
- Efficient and prompt closing processes
- Competitive pricing



Ready to close your next transaction!

*Family & Friends:
The heartbeats of my life!*

Building Bonds and Trust

Valentine's Day reminds us how important relationships are. In your dual roles, how do you cultivate meaningful relationships with clients and colleagues that help drive your outstanding success?

Relationships are at the heart of what I do. I build trust by being approachable, transparent, and reliable. Listening to clients' concerns and understanding their needs allows me to provide the best possible service. The same goes for my colleagues at Advisors Title Network—we're a team that thrives on communication and support. Whether it's a quick question or a complex issue, we work together to ensure our clients have the best experience. Strong connections are the key to success and lasting satisfaction.

Real Estate Meets Romance

Real estate is about finding people their perfect match—a home they'll love. As a broker and title expert, what's been your most rewarding moment helping clients find their dream homes or navigate through tricky title situations?

One of my most rewarding moments was helping a family close on their dream home despite a last-minute title issue. An unexpected lien almost derailed everything, and they were devastated. The team and I worked quickly to resolve it, coordinating with lenders and tracking down records to clear the title. When they finally got their keys, the relief and joy on their faces made all the effort worth it. Moments like that remind me why I love what I do—helping people move forward with confidence into a home they truly love.

Fun Fact Spotlight

Here's a playful one: If your career in real estate and title services were a Valentine's Day card, what would the message say? (Feel free to get creative—or even punny!)

You'll always have clear title to my heart! 💕🔑

Jeremy Pettit

ATN ADVISORS
TITLE NETWORK





February



Is The Perfect Time To Fall In Love With Your Dream Home

If you've ever looked at a house and thought, "Wow, I'm totally falling for this place," you're not alone. In fact, it happens more often than you think—because finding your dream home isn't just a transaction; it's like a relationship. And just like with any great romance, it all starts with that magical moment of connection.

But let's be real: house hunting isn't always all hearts and roses. It's more like a rollercoaster—there are highs, lows, and a few twists and turns that might make you question if you've signed up for the right ride. But when you do find the one, it's like all the pieces fall into place.


First, there's the initial spark. You're scrolling through listings, maybe sipping your coffee, when suddenly—bam—you see that one. It's love at first sight. The curb appeal is on point, and you feel an instant connection with the open-concept kitchen. Is it real, or is it just the lighting?

Then comes the first date. You schedule a viewing, butterflies in your stomach, thinking, "Is this the one? Am I just imagining things?" As you step through the front door, you feel it—like the house is saying, "Welcome home." The living room is spacious, the floors creak in all the right ways, and the kitchen? It's just waiting for you to throw a dinner party. It's official. You're hooked.

But, just like any relationship, it's important to keep your eyes wide open. That beautiful backyard might have a few too many trees (and a few too many squirrels), or the bathroom might have more vintage charm than you anticipated. Don't let those little quirks rain on your parade. Every home has its imperfections, but it's all about seeing past the small things and imagining the potential. After all, every great relationship has its ups and downs—but if the connection is strong enough, you work through it.

And then, there's the commitment. You've been to enough open houses to know when you've found the one. It's time to make an offer. Will they accept? Will you seal the deal? It's nerve-wracking, but the excitement is undeniable. Once you get the keys, it's like being handed the keys to your future—because this isn't just a house; it's the place where your story begins.

Now go ahead—fall in love with that dream home. It's waiting for you! ❤️



"LOVE IS THE
ARROW THAT
LEADS US HOME,
NO MATTER
WHERE WE ARE."

— CUPID



STRUCK BY CUPID'S BOW: A HEARTFELT JOURNEY TO FINDING THE PERFECT HOME

In Machesney Park, Illinois, Jessica sat alone in the house she had shared with her late husband, Mark. After his passing a year ago, the home, once filled with joy, now felt empty and cold. The grief was compounded by the loss of their dog, Charlie, and the overwhelming uncertainty of what came next.

With encouragement from her best friend, Emily, Jessica decided it was time for a fresh start and reached out to Jeanette, a compassionate real estate agent. Jeanette promised to help her find a home where she could build new memories. Though doubt and anxiety lingered, Jessica felt hope stir as the search began.

The journey was filled with challenges—from mortgage pre-approval to negotiations—but Jeanette and her team, including a transaction coordinator and her real estate attorney, kept Jessica grounded. When she found the perfect house in Roscoe—a cozy three-bedroom with a fireplace and spacious backyard—she knew it was meant to be. The process wasn't without its hurdles, but Midwest Title Services made the closing seamless. On the day of finalizing the deal, Jessica felt a warmth she hadn't experienced in a long time.

With keys in hand, she drove to her new home, stepping out into the crisp January air. She wandered across the snow-covered lawn, a steaming mug of hot chocolate in one hand and a cookie in the other. The snow glistened in the stillness, and as she looked around, Jessica realized it wasn't just the cold air that made her feel alive—it was the realization that she was finally home.

Just before Valentine's Day, Jessica found her happily-ever-after, thanks to the love, care, and dedication of the team at Midwest Title Services, my wonderful REALTOR®, Jeanette, and mortgage loan officer, who made this new chapter possible.

MAXIMIZING YOUR HOME'S VALUE IN 2025



A Fresh Start for Illinois Sellers

Illinois homeowners now have a prime opportunity to sell at a time of evolving market conditions. Whether you're upgrading, downsizing, or relocating, positioning your home to stand out can make all the difference. Simple, cost-effective improvements—like adding energy-efficient features or making minor updates to kitchens and bathrooms—can significantly increase your home's appeal without requiring costly renovations. Thoughtful staging and strategic pricing will also help attract serious buyers and ensure your home sells for its highest value.

For those looking for a quicker, hassle-free sale, real estate investors offer an appealing alternative. With cash offers and fast, as-is closings, investors streamline the process and eliminate the need for repairs or staging. Whether you opt for a traditional sale or choose to work with an investor, now is the time to take action and maximize your home's value. In this issue, we'll provide valuable insights to help you navigate the market and achieve the best possible return on your property.

WWW.MTSTITLE.COM

Maximizing Your Home's Value in 2025: A Fresh Start for Illinois Sellers

As we begin 2025, Illinois home sellers have a fresh opportunity to capitalize on the evolving real estate market. Whether you're upgrading, downsizing, or relocating, now is the time to take action and ensure your home stands out and achieves the best possible sale price.

In this year's market, simple and cost-effective improvements can significantly boost your home's value. Buyers are increasingly drawn to energy-efficient features, so consider upgrades like smart thermostats, energy-efficient windows, or LED lighting. Even smaller changes, like installing water-saving faucets, can enhance appeal. The kitchen and bathroom are always crucial selling points, and minor updates such as new paint, hardware, or backsplashes can modernize these spaces without the need for expensive renovations. Don't forget curb appeal—fresh landscaping, a clean yard, and a newly painted front door can make a big difference in how your home is perceived.

Staging continues to be a powerful tool for attracting buyers in 2025. The key is to create a welcoming, neutral space that allows potential buyers to envision themselves living in the home. Start by decluttering and removing personal items. Highlight your home's best features, such as large windows or a cozy fireplace, through strategic furniture placement and décor. If your home is vacant or requires extra polish, virtual staging offers an affordable way to show its potential without the expense of traditional staging.

Pricing your home correctly is essential in today's market. With the real estate landscape stabilizing, it's important to work with an experienced agent who can help you understand current market conditions and set a competitive price. Overpricing can lead to longer listing periods and price reductions, which could deter potential buyers. It's better to price right from the beginning to attract serious offers. Being open to negotiation can also help you close the deal faster.

For sellers looking for a quicker, hassle-free sale, working with real estate investors is a great option. Investors typically buy homes as-is, meaning you don't have to worry about making repairs or staging the property. They also tend to close deals quickly, often with all-cash offers, eliminating the delays that come with traditional financing.

In 2025, there are plenty of opportunities for Illinois home sellers. By making smart improvements, staging thoughtfully, and pricing strategically, you can maximize your home's value and take advantage of the current market conditions. Whether you sell through a real estate agent or choose to work with an investor, now is the time to make your move and get the best possible return on your property.





FEATURE



CARANDUS BROWN

HUMAN SERVICES MANAGER
ROCKFORD HOUSING
AUTHORITY

Carandus, let's start with you! Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you got started in your role at the Rockford Housing Authority?

Thank you for the opportunity to share my background. I've had a unique journey that has ultimately shaped my commitment and passion for community service, particularly through my work at the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA).

As a father of six—five daughters and one son—and a grandfather of seven, I deeply value family and understand the challenges that many face in providing a stable home environment. My early years were not without difficulties; I experienced my fair share of challenges as a troubled teen, which provided me with valuable insights into the struggles individuals can face when navigating life's complexities.

I joined RHA nearly 11 years ago, driven by my desire to help others identify and overcome obstacles in their lives. My personal experiences, including the mistakes I made as a young adult—like dropping out of high school and grappling with negative behaviors—have equipped me with a unique perspective. I understand how daunting it can be to feel stuck, and I aim to guide our residents toward realizing their potential and moving beyond their past.

At RHA, I leverage my experiences to connect with residents who may feel discouraged or unsure about their paths. I work tirelessly to empower them, fostering an environment where they can envision and pursue a brighter future. My journey has not only made me resilient but has also instilled a deep sense of purpose in my work. I look forward to continuing to make a positive impact in the community as we help individuals and families thrive.

You've been with the Rockford Housing Authority for over 11 years. In your current role as Human Services Manager, what are some of the core services that you see most frequently benefit new and existing clients in our community?

In my 11 years with the Rockford Housing Authority, I have witnessed both the challenges and triumphs that our residents experience as they navigate their housing needs. As the Human Services Manager, I have identified several core services that significantly benefit our clients, both new and existing. Firstly, one of the most critical services we provide is educational resources that enhance residents'; understanding of available in-house and community resources. Many residents face barriers due to a lack of awareness regarding the support that is accessible to them.

By facilitating workshops and personalized consultations, we empower clients with knowledge about housing assistance, financial literacy programs, job training opportunities, and health services. This not only demystifies the available support but also instills a sense of belonging in our residents. I believe everyone wants to feel they belong somewhere, and we provide a home in their first step to belonging.



Secondly, we prioritize connecting clients with comprehensive support services. This includes partnerships with local organizations that offer counseling, employment assistance, and childcare services. By taking a holistic approach, we address the multifaceted challenges our residents face, ensuring they have the necessary tools and support systems to improve their quality of life.



Moreover, I take pride in fostering a culture of hope and resilience among our clients. Many individuals come to us feeling overwhelmed and hopeless about their circumstances. By establishing strong relationships and offering guidance through the process of accessing resources, we help clients envision and pursue attainable goals. Our work is not just about providing services; it's about building a pathway for individuals and families to gain independence and thrive within our community.

The core services I oversee are designed to educate, connect, and empower our clients. I strive to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access resources that can lead to meaningful improvements in their lives—ultimately helping them to build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

That's great! Now, are there any new programs or initiatives at the Rockford Housing Authority that you're excited about, and that might be particularly helpful for our readers who are seeking assistance or looking to get involved?

At RHA, we're committed to innovative approaches that not only benefit our residents but also foster a stronger sense of community. One of the programs that I'm particularly enthusiastic about is the Lifeforce Development Institute (LDI) program. The LDI program is a unique offering that not only supports Rockford Housing Authority residents but also welcomes community members seeking growth, opportunity, and empowerment. This comprehensive program equips participants with essential soft skills, digital literacy, education, and financial management skills. By understanding the complexities of poverty and its effects on individuals and families, participants gain the tools to break free from cycles of poverty and build a more secure future.

I believe in thinking outside the box and utilizing existing services in innovative ways that benefit our community. Through creating new relationships and bringing in new programs, will provide greater opportunities to not only address the immediate needs of our residents but also provide a continuous long-term, sustainable solution that can have a lasting impact on the well-being of our community. I encourage readers to explore the LDI program for assistance or involvement.

I understand you recently had the honor of speaking at the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals Installation event in Rockford, where you shared insights into the real estate market. For those who weren't able to attend, could you share a few key takeaways that you think our readers should know about the current state of the real estate market here in Rockford?

I was honored to participate in the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals Installation event in Rockford. I believe it's essential to acknowledge that Rockford is experiencing a resurgence in growth, driven by the influx to be a leading community of diverse cultures. One key takeaway from our discussion is that there is a significant need for accessible and inclusive housing options that cater to the unique needs of low-income

individuals and families from various cultural backgrounds.

Our goal at Rockford Housing Authority is to support this growth by providing tailored guidance and resources to help these families achieve a sense of unity and belonging.

We believe that with a step-by-step approach, we can empower them to succeed in all aspects of life. This includes acknowledging the challenges that exist in the current housing market and working towards creating more accountable and equitable opportunities for our Hispanic and Latino neighbors.

As more diverse communities move to Rockford and the increased demand for affordable housing is growing, there is a need for better housing options that meet their specific needs. We want to design a structure that is culturally sensitive and aware of the unique challenges faced by diverse communities with high poverty rates to provide effective support for low-income families to thrive. By building relationships that acknowledge these challenges and with local community leaders working together, we can create a more inclusive and equitable housing market that benefits everyone in Rockford.

You've helped so many people over the years, Carandus. What's something most people don't know about you that could surprise our readers?

That is a great but difficult question! While I hope that I have been able to help others, I tend to be secluded and distant from people at work. However, at home, I have a vibrant and fun-loving personality that contrasts with my more reserved demeanor in professional settings. I am a very observant and thoughtful reflective person, but inwardly, which can make me appear quiet in group situations.

At home or with close friends, I'm quite talkative and enjoy engaging deeply in conversations and activities. I believe this duality helps me gain perspective and empathy, allowing me to relate to others even more effectively in my professional role.

Lastly, for anyone interested in learning more about the services you offer or to see if they qualify for any programs, how can they get in touch with you or find more information about the Rockford Housing Authority's programs?

If anyone is interested in learning more about our programs or how to become involved, Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at (815) 509-6822 or email cbrown@rockfordha.org.

“ I was honored to participate in the NAHREP® Installation event in Rockford. ”

COMMUNITY



Rockford Housing Authority
223 S Winnebago St
Rockford, IL 61102
<https://rockfordha.org>



**WINTER
FUN**

.....

What's Your Favorite Activity In
The Winter Months?

.....

STAYING ACTIVE!



Winter is the perfect time to try something new and embrace the season's chill with exciting activities that keep both your body and spirits high! Bundle up, grab some hot chocolate, and bring along your friends or family for a fun day outside. Whether it's ice skating, snowshoeing, or even a cozy winter hike, these activities boost your endorphins and keep you healthy and happy all season long. What's your favorite winter activity? Let's make the most of this magical time of year!

HOW DO WE MOLD THE FUTURE IN OUR HANDS

FEATURE



Kenny Saunders

Owner/President
Saunders Media



815-670-3998

kenny@saundersmedia.net

www.saundersmedia.net

Rockford, IL

AN INTERVIEW WITH KENANIAH SAUNDERS



Kenaniah Saunders

Owner/President
Saunders Media

As we conclude this month's issue filled with home inspiration and seasonal insights, we're excited to shift gears and dive into the world of digital marketing—an essential tool for businesses of all sizes. In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, connecting with your audience and driving meaningful engagement can be the key to success. Enter Kenaniah Saunders, Owner/President of Saunders Media whose expertise in tech, marketing, and real estate has been instrumental in helping businesses elevate their online presence. Kenaniah brings a unique blend of experience and passion for innovation, and today, he shares his insight into the strategies that can help businesses thrive in the digital age.

Kenaniah, you've had an impressive journey in both tech and real estate. How did your background in Business Administration and Management Information Systems lead you to your current focus on digital marketing?

My college experience provided a strong foundation for understanding business's technical and strategic aspects. During that time, I immersed myself in computer science, business management, and marketing clubs—though marketing wasn't even a major/minor of mine—which allowed me to explore the intersection of technology and business innovation. After graduating in 2018, I spent six years honing my marketing skills in the real estate industry. After my six years in real estate, I decided to join an information technology firm based in Chicagoland. It was here that I was able to use my digital marketing experience

to assist other industries both in-state and out-of-state. Shortly after, my wife and co-owner, Britney, and I discussed the possibility of starting our own company. Together we got to work. Britney's valuable experience in social media, broadcast, and journalism and my experience in the real estate and technology industries gave us invaluable insights into



BUSINESS NEWS

Feature Story: Saunders Media — Kenaniah Saunders' Vision for Revolutionizing Small Business Marketing

creating impactful strategies to drive engagement and growth in a highly competitive field. Seeing the success of these efforts and recognizing the growing demand for digital marketing expertise, we were inspired to start Saunders Media to help businesses across industries enhance their online presence and achieve their goals.

I couldn't have done it alone, of course. With Britney's help, we created a stand-out logo, and she helped me define what our services would be and where our strengths are. Even today, she continues to give me input on campaigns and strategies and helps me handpick which clients we work best with.



With your experience managing SEO, social media campaigns, and CRM systems, what do you think is the most important element for a business to get right when it comes to their online presence?

The most important element for businesses to get right is consistency. Consistency in branding, messaging, and engagement. Your online presence is now your customer's first impression, so it's essential to maintain a cohesive brand identity across all platforms, from your website and social

media to SEO and email campaigns. This means using the same tone, visuals, and messaging to build trust and recognition.

Businesses need to prioritize understanding their audience. Leveraging tools like social media insights and CRM data helps tailor content and strategies to meet the needs of their audience and create meaningful connections.

You've worked with a wide variety of clients, from real estate agents to small businesses. How do you tailor your digital marketing strategies to meet the specific needs of each?

Meeting our client's needs starts with understanding their goals, audience, and challenges in their industry. We begin with a discovery meeting to see if we're a right fit - this is where we dig into their target market, their competitors, and current online presence. This helps us identify key opportunities to differentiate their brand and maximize impact. For real estate agents, the focus is often showcasing



OWNER/PRESIDENT
SAUNDERS MEDIA

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

properties through visually compelling content, leveraging platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and optimizing local SEO to reach buyers and sellers in specific markets.

As we approach Valentine's Day, how can businesses build stronger "relationships" with their customers online—what's your "secret ingredient" to fostering meaningful engagement through social media and digital marketing?

For small businesses, our strategies may focus on building brand awareness, driving website traffic, and converting leads through targeted advertising, SEO, and email marketing. The real key is flexibility - adapting tools and tactics to align with each client's budget, audience, and objectives while ensuring measurable results. By staying data-driven and creative, we can deliver strategies that resonate with their audience

EMPOWERING MEDIA

and help them achieve their business goals.

You're a Google Certified marketing pro with tons of experience, but I'm sure technology is constantly evolving. How do you stay ahead of the curve and keep your clients' digital strategies fresh and effective?

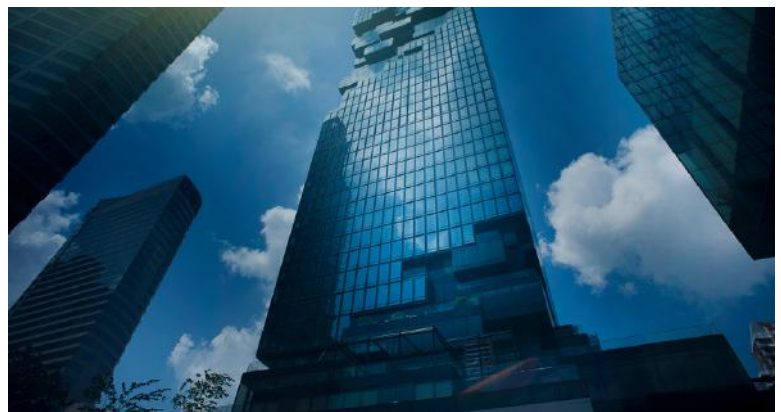
I subscribe to many great thinkers and leaders in the digital space - Neil Patel and Brock Johnson to name a few. We find that by surrounding ourselves with people smarter than us, both online and in-person, we can adopt their strategies to our own business and this helps keep Saunders Media ahead of this constantly evolving industry.

We also use smart programs to check what works and what doesn't. This helps us make better plans for our clients.

Most importantly, we pay attention to what people like and want online, so our clients can connect with them in a way that's exciting and helpful. It's all about mixing creativity and technology to help them shine.

Kenaniah, for businesses looking to grow and connect with more customers, what makes Saunders Media the right choice to help them succeed?

At Saunders Media, we're dedicated to helping your business succeed because we recognize and value the effort you put into it every day. Unlike many digital marketing companies that focus on doing the bare minimum just to meet a deadline, we take the time to truly understand your goals and the message you want to share with your audience. We go beyond surface-level results by providing detailed case studies that showcase raw data and actionable insights. These reports help you see what's working, what isn't, and how we can use that information to refine strategies for even greater success. With Saunders Media, you're not just another client - you're a partner, and your success is our top priority.



2 HANDY WAYS TO REMOVE SNOW WITHOUT A SHOVEL

Shoveling snow can be exhausting and time-consuming, especially when winter storms strike unexpectedly. However, there are several efficient ways to manage snow and ice accumulation on your driveway without lifting a shovel. By using a combination of preventative measures and smart tools, you can reduce the need for manual labor and make your driveway safer and more accessible. Here are some strategies to keep your driveway clear and minimize the need for heavy shoveling.



1. APPLY DE-ICER BEFORE SNOWFALL

One of the best ways to prevent snow from sticking to your driveway in the first place is to treat it with a de-icer before the snow falls. De-icing products, like magnesium chloride, can be sprinkled over your driveway to help prevent ice buildup and make it easier to remove snow when it does accumulate.

Magnesium chloride is a particularly good option because it works in temperatures as low as -13°F , and it's less harmful to the environment compared to rock salt or calcium chloride. Mixing sand with the de-icer can also provide extra traction on icy surfaces, making your driveway safer to walk on.

2. USE A SELF-PROPELLED SNOWBLOWER



For those who prefer a more hands-off approach, a self-propelled snowblower can be an excellent investment. These machines are designed to quickly clear snow without requiring the physical effort of a shovel. The self-propulsion feature allows the machine to move on its own, which can make clearing a driveway much easier. Just make sure to keep the snowblower well-maintained for maximum performance.

While shoveling snow is a time-honored winter chore, there are many alternatives that can save you both time and effort. From using a snowblower to applying de-icers, there are various ways to keep your driveway clear without lifting a shovel. Choose the method that works best for your budget and lifestyle to make winter more manageable and your driveway safer.

Source: Emily Fazio, "How to Remove Snow From a Driveway Without a Shovel," HGTV, <https://tinyurl.com/2xbs833e>

Efficient House Cleaning: Tips and Tricks for a Spotless Home



House cleaning can feel overwhelming, but with a few smart strategies, you can keep your home sparkling clean with minimal effort. Start with surface cleaning by focusing on high-touch areas like countertops, doorknobs, and light switches. Use a multipurpose cleaner for quick wipe-downs and keep a microfiber cloth handy for dusting to trap dirt without spreading it around.

Seasonal cleaning is a great opportunity to give your home a deeper clean without feeling rushed. During winter, clear out the dryer vent and clean windowsills, while in the spring, focus on decluttering and vacuuming carpets. Adjust your cleaning tasks to the changing seasons, making sure to give attention to specific areas that might need extra care during each time of

year. Using the right cleaning tools can make all the difference. Invest in a good vacuum with HEPA filtration, a steam mop for floors, and a microfiber mop or cloth to dust without leaving streaks. Always keep your cleaning tools organized and in easy reach to save time, and remember to clean them regularly to maintain their effectiveness.

Lastly, having a checklist or cleaning chart can help keep you on track when time is tight. Whether it's daily, weekly, or monthly tasks, check off each chore as you go, and break up bigger jobs into smaller, more manageable tasks. With these efficient techniques, you'll be able to clean your home quickly and thoroughly, no matter how busy life gets!

Protect Your Home with Effective Basement Waterproofing Solutions

Water in the basement is a common concern for homeowners, especially in Illinois' unpredictable weather. Solutions like interior drainage systems, including French drains and sump pumps, help redirect water and protect your foundation. French drains are installed along the perimeter to channel water to a sump pit, where a pump removes it from the basement. The right system depends on your foundation type, with on-slab systems suited for poured walls and below-slab systems for traditional foundations.

Sump pumps are essential in managing excess moisture. They activate when water levels rise and come in submersible or pedestal models, with



submersible pumps being more efficient for deeper basements. While professional installation is recommended, homeowners with DIY skills can attempt simpler systems, but poor installation could lead to future issues. Investing in the right drainage system helps safeguard your basement from water damage, and consulting a professional ensures proper installation and protection.



Title Insurance

SETTLEMENT INSURANCE



Navigating real estate transactions can be complex, but Midwest Title Services simplifies the process with comprehensive title insurance and professional settlement services. Whether you're a homebuyer, seller, real estate agent, mortgage broker, lender, investor, commercial property professional, builder, developer, or legal professional, we're your trusted guide for seamless closings.

Why Title Insurance Matters

Title insurance protects against potential losses from defects in property titles, such as undiscovered liens or claims. Our thorough title examinations ensure that your investment is secure.

The Role of Settlement Services

The Role of Settlement Services
Settlement services coordinate the final steps of transactions, including document preparation and fund disbursement. Our experienced team manages these details efficiently, allowing you to focus on your priorities.

For comprehensive title insurance and efficient settlement services, choose Midwest Title Services as your partner in real estate. Contact us today to ensure a smooth closing process and protect your investments!



Midwest Title Services, LLC

"Your Gateway to Confident & Secure Closings"

4855 E. State Street, Suite 25, Rockford, IL 61108

info@mtstitle.com

Office: (815) 283-3300

www.mtstitle.com



Why Choose Us?

- Expert Guidance: Our professionals provide support throughout the process.
- Streamlined Transactions: We use cutting-edge technology to reduce delays.
- Tailored Solutions: We cater to both residential and commercial needs.
- Commitment to Excellence: We prioritize customer service and reliability.

Who We Serve

- Homebuyers and sellers
- Real estate agents
- Mortgage brokers and lenders
- Commercial property professionals
- Builders and developers
- Legal professionals
- Investors



FEBRUARY
2025

WWW.MTSTITLE.COM



Midwest Title Services

4855 E. STATE ST, SUITE 25
ROCKFORD, IL 61108
(815) 283-3300



TO SUBSCRIBE TO
OUR MAGAZINE
EMAIL:
INFO@MTSTITLE.COM

