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SHAYLA TWITT

►► top producer

The 18-Year “Overnight Success Story” of Shayla Twitt

Ahh, if I could turn back the hands of time and start all over again in real estate, knowing what I know now – the good, the bad, the super ugly – I would, but a lot smarter!

In the beginning, it was somewhat smooth sailing...I was fresh out of college, with a Business Administration degree in hand, applying to many jobs with a strong preference for a professional position but my heart was not content staying in the Midwest. I loved growing up in Wisconsin but I wanted a fresh start in warmer weather – and Florida was calling my name!

My younger brother was already living in Sarasota, Florida attending Ringling School of Art and Design and he suggested I move down. So I packed up my red 1999 Oldsmobile Cutlass Calais with everything I owned and drove down. It was an emotional next step but one I found myself happy with and excited for the next chapter.

Once I settled in, I implemented a much-needed break and took advantage of the sun, beach and surf. I joined the local gym and landed a waitressing job at Outback. Getting into the swing of things here didn't take too long. But the one thing that was consistent was some of the conversations I had among the folks I met - and that was the topic of real estate. The more it came up, the more I mulled it over and thought, “I could do that and be successful!” but I knew next to nothing about what it really entailed.

As of June 2002, I was welcomed by a high producing agent with whom I worked alongside for a year. What a learning curve that was. I didn't re-

alize I was an independent contractor working for REMAX and all agents had to pay for everything, down to pen and paper. I made a few sales, but nothing consistent or grandiose. My first sale was \$250,000 of which I had to split 50/50%. Regardless, this sale was the push that allowed me to quit my job at Outback Steakhouse and take this career on full speed and full time.

By my second year in the business, I elected to move on to a team within the same company. It was more of the same, an up and down year, but on the upswing. Thereafter, it was a very slow growth process for me and not entirely how I had envisioned it to go!

Finally, after several months, I started gaining some traction. I even traded in my Oldsmobile for an upgraded, newer Saturn. I was proud that I had something a lot more presentable and professional. Later down the road I found myself upgrading yet again, this time into a Mercedes. But when I look back, this was the beginning of some extremely poor decision making. The interest rate on the vehicle was ludicrous, but I wanted to be taken more seriously in this business. And a Mercedes emits success. Too bad I was “faking it ‘til I made it.”

Shortly after that, age 25, I bought my first home, a small condo. Since I was less than 2 years in the business, a family member co-signed for me. I put zero percent down but this was NOT the right thing to do at the time.

Sometime between 2004-2009, I bought two additional properties – a villa and a single-family home with a pool to add to my portfolio. I had great

...

luck with leasing out both properties with fabulous tenants who always paid on time and took great care of my rentals. So, all was grand. Again, all investments were purchased with \$0 down, but I felt “rich” regardless. My family warned me to be more careful but I did not listen. They had taught me to save and invest wisely. But again, my hard-headedness got the best of me.

And that’s when the Great Recession hit which couldn’t have come at a worse time. I was slowly

drowning. My sales were decreasing. To top it off, 99% of my clientele were buyers. And they literally had 46 months of inventory to select from at the worst of the market; meaning it would take 4-6 years to sell off the inventory. To say it was a brutal market for someone in my position is the understatement. Buyers wanted to see everything, so I felt like a taxi driver instead

of an established real estate agent. It was more time consuming with little payoff than ever before. I was clearly working hard, not smart. But even during the worst of times, I still enjoyed most aspects of the business. The freedom, the limitless income potential, the ability to be my own boss and so much more.

Meanwhile, my home life was not a life. I had roommates to assist in subsidizing my overhead. One of them later dipped out on me and never paid the \$600. It was getting to be so stressful I could barely focus.

I knew something had to give. I needed an income – stat! I sought out a part-time job – all while still working real estate as full time as humanly possible, and still actually trying to sleep at night. Naturally I wanted something in a professional setting and this time one whereby I could apply my real estate skills in some way. Stumbling upon a State Farm Insurance Agency, I sauntered in the door and met with the owner. He told me he was not hiring anybody part-time but I never took that for an answer. After I chased him down and showcased what I could do for his company, he finally carved out a part-time gig for me. But then I had to get my life/health/variable annuities licenses, which I did.

It was a lot to manage and I was stressed like never before; my real estate sales decreased which resulted in me having to pay for all of my mortgages, two with second mortgages, HOA dues, taxes, keeping my dog, Leroy, happy and fed, and other life expenses was impossible to keep afloat. I also had a \$20,000 tax lien. When the IRS started calling, I knew I was drowning and that the dam was about to break. I was mentally breaking down but trying not to show it. Talk about pride-swallowing and embarrassing.



When the IRS started calling, I knew I was drowning and that the dam was about to break. I was mentally breaking down but trying not to show it.



Finally, I sought advice from those dearest to me. The conclusion was to file for bankruptcy. Feeling like an utter failure, it took me time to conclude the same, and in the end, it was my saving grace. The investments I had worked so hard to acquire for retirement were dissipating before my eyes.

I had to figure out a way to muster up funds to pay my attorney, and I’m not even sure how I scrounged the money, but once the paperwork was signed, I was able to slowly breathe and figure out my next move. I was ready to start over but in a smarter way.

Thankfully I was able to move into a family member’s condo while I proceeded to dig my way through this awful bankruptcy experience. But slowly and surely, my business started taking off again!

Feeling great about this newfound positivity, I slowly started investing in online advertising. Zillow felt like a great avenue to pursue. Over time I had earned a great living through those means. Leading up to 2015-2016, I found myself spending \$1,000’s each month to sustain this. In 2016, I felt like Zillow peaked in terms of ROI, which is when I knew that change was critical. Pressure to maintain those high payments each month regardless of sales was starting to wear on me! I wanted to work smarter and with a much higher net income.

During this time, I would often also ask top 1% colleagues what they’d advise me on how to get to that “next level.” Consistently the answer was to get an assistant. “A what? And who’s paying for this?” I thought.

But I knew I had to. Being a one-woman show for too long was clearly not allowing me to move to the next level. And that’s when I met Shaela. Yes... another Shaela! And what a blessing she has been to me!



...

In more ways than I can even express, Shaela Lollar, has now been alongside me since August 2016 and the best possible addition to our little team. Not only that, Shaela has become a true friend and confidant as well. And I am eternally grateful for having her in my life and working alongside me every day.

In 2016-2017 business was trucking along. I grossed \$18M in sales during 2016. But the business model was primarily buyers. Change was needed, both for my sanity as well as for a longer-term better-rounded business model.

Then along came Miss Ellen O'Day, Managing Broker of Coldwell Banker Longboat Key. We had a couple of conversations about what her firm, and what both the company as well as she had to offer me. It took some time for me to see that this be the best move for my career... but it was not without some internal/personal challenges that were headed my way.

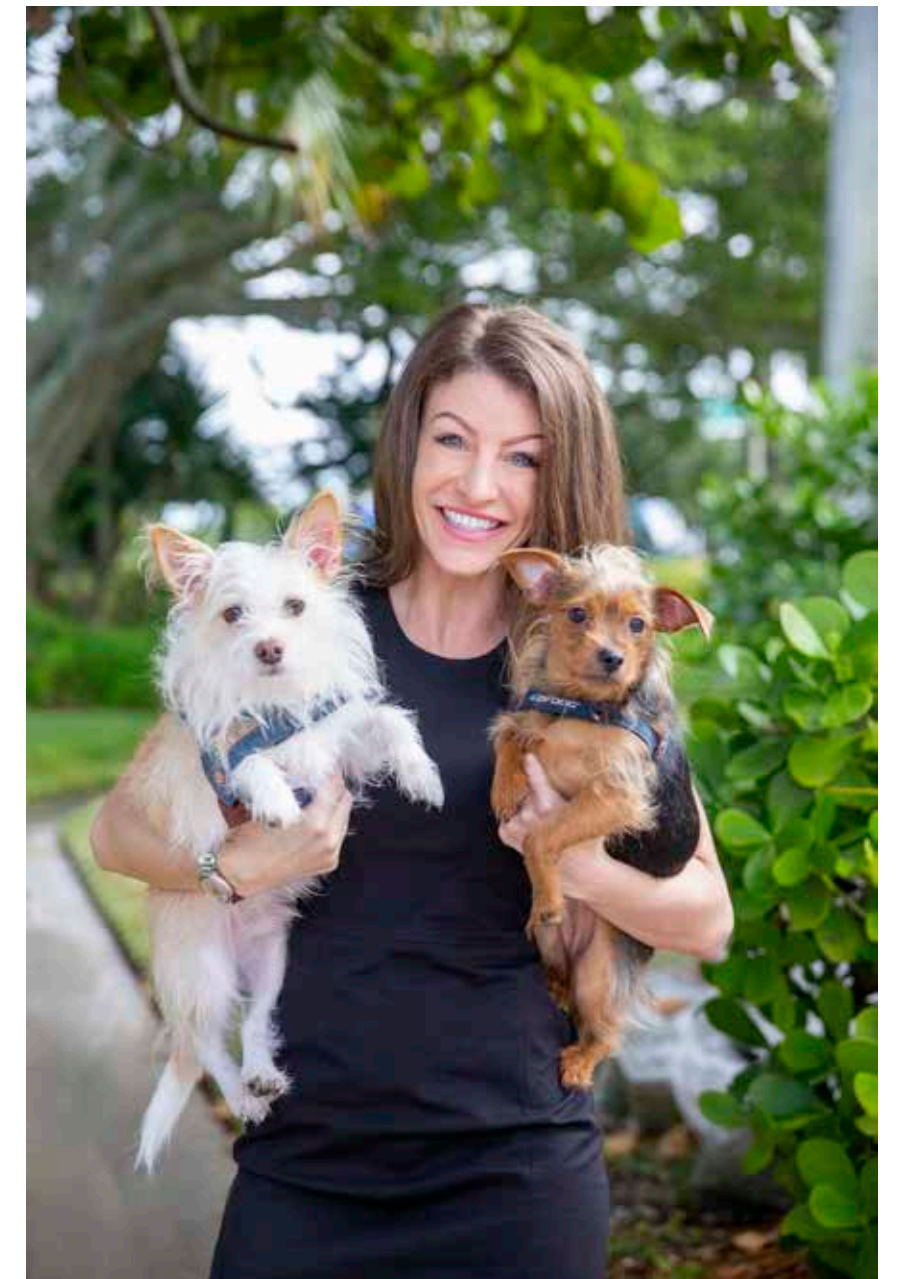
In 2017 I lost my best friend, Leroy, my 15-year-old Pomeranian. He had lost his battle with kidney disease and I was a wreck. Some of you will not understand, but it really set me on an emotional roller coaster that was truly not predicted. He had been my world for almost all of his 15 years. Leroy was my best bud. At the end of his precious life, I was giving him IV fluids 2-3 times a day, changing his diapers, sleeping with him on the bathroom floor some nights just so I could hear him still breathing. Losing him was like losing a piece of my heart. To this day, nothing tears me up like this event. I thank my lucky stars that I was able to provide him the best life possible, having traveled to more states than even some humans ever do in a lifetime. He was loved so much. That loss really shattered me. Needless to say I was in no capacity to make big changes, let alone change companies.

But toward the end of 2017, two amazing things happened in my life. #1, I rescued my first of two doggies, Pepe Irma, during Hurricane Irma. And #2, the opportunity to join CB presented again, and this time after having dealt with grief, I felt it was time to hop the fence and join the ranks of the elite at Coldwell Banker LBK.

With Ellen's guidance and the assistance of \$100M producer Roger Pettingell and #1 agent in both

counties, I have been able to reach goals that I didn't even know I had by the time I turned the ripe age of forty! I all but eliminated my Zillow advertising "nut," selling \$20M in 2019, paying off my home and becoming 100% debt-free. I shifted my business from mostly a buyer-focused model to a 65-75% listing-focused business model, lowering my overall expenses by over 75% and increasing my net profits by huge margins. With these changes I was able to save more for retirement and have that sense of security that comes with that. I rescued a second "fur baby" from Nate's Honor Rescue and overall, I feel like I am in the best place, both financially and emotionally, I've ever been in my entire life.

I have a tremendous amount to be thankful for and am looking forward to a healthy and prosperous 2020.





impact!

By Robert O'Brien

TRAFFIC!

The Wheels Are Turning at FDOT



I-75 - SR70 Interchange Looking West



Dirt is flying on the \$80 million I-75/SR 70 interchange in Manatee County (and its on-time!...so far)

From the Florida Department of Transportation Website: “The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District One is improving approximately 6.75 miles of Interstate 75 from north of University Parkway to south of State Road (SR) 64 and reconstruction of the I-75/SR 70 interchange in Manatee County, Florida.”

You may have noticed.

From this writer’s experience, nobody likes road construction. Everybody likes better roads. Road projects happen for two reasons: 1. Paving. 2. Everything else. For the I-75/SR 70 project, we’re getting both 1 and 2. The existing roadbeds will be repaved. And, there will be more road to pave. More lanes, wider bridges. And noise barriers for some neighborhoods. Because there will be more noise. It’s the way of bigger roads in areas like ours, where more people are coming. More people are here. Infrastructure never sleeps. It’s either crumbling, being built or being rebuilt/improved.

How much traffic do we have?

A headline from a 2017 article in the Herald Tribune: **“Region ranks as 10th fastest growing in the nation.”** “The Sarasota-Manatee area saw its overall population expand



Crews working on the approaches to the new interstate bridges over SR 70



Installing noise barriers



The final configuration of the new I-75 at SR 70 interchange

from 768,013 to 788,457 — a boost of 20,444 residents, more than enough to populate a small city. Sarasota and Manatee counties rank as the 10th fastest-growing metropolitan area in the United States, new census data shows. On the bureau’s latest list of the “top 25 fastest-growing metro areas,” 10 are in Florida, including Sarasota and Manatee counties, anchored by the cities of Sarasota, Bradenton and North Port.”

Population growth is a good news-bad news scenario. Growth means a strong economy, jobs, opportunity. Growth also means, as stated by Christine Robinson, Executive Director of the Argus

Foundation and former Sarasota County Commissioner, “They’re [newcomers to the area] coming whether you like it or not,” she commented in 2017. “We can’t throw up gates at the end of the county. We can either prepare for it and accommodate the growth and keep our high quality of life or we could stick our head in the sand and pretend.” The article points out that “of course, others contend that the growth is taking a toll on the area’s quality of life by increasing traffic, polluting the environment and crowding beaches, among other ways. **Traffic congestion, in particular, is an overriding complaint.**” No doubt it still is.



SR70 East of I-75

...

To anyone living in this area more than a few months, the comment that “traffic congestion is an overriding complaint” comes as no surprise. The politicians are listening (they drive too) and long-term planning at the FDOT is an ongoing and major aspect of life at the agency.

Real Producers recently spoke with Brian Bollas, Community Outreach Manager, Florida Department of Transportation, I-75 Satellite Transportation Management Center, about the purposes and progress of the I-75/SR 70 Interchange Improvement Project. He reviewed the basics of the project:

“Project at a Glance: Construction start date, October 2018. The completion date is Fall of 2021, and so far it looks as if that will be met, barring major storms (“this is Florida...so...” cautions Bollas. He noted that last July the area was hit with over 30 inches of rain). Cost of the project is \$80.7 million. The improvements will span 6.75 miles on I-75 from north of University Parkway to south of SR 64, including the reconstruction of the I-75/SR 70 interchange in Manatee County.”

(Note: According to Wikipedia, “The portion of I-75 from Tampa northward was a part of the original 1955 Interstate Highway plans, with I-75’s southern terminus at I-4’s current western terminus.

Planning to extend the Interstate south to Miami began in 1968 after massive growth in Southwest Florida, which resulted in I-75 being realigned to travel on the eastern fringes of the Tampa Bay area, and the last portion of the highway was opened in 1993.” So the newest section of I-75 is going on 30 years old.)

Bollas went on to explain “Earlier in the 2000s, the Department did a comprehensive study of the whole Interstate through Sarasota and Manatee County and identified various capacity and safety improvements that could be made along the corridor, including all of the interchanges. So a couple of years ago the first interchange improvement from that study was construction of new University Parkway-Interstate 75 interchange at the Manatee-Sarasota line 2015. That was the first “diverging diamond” interchange in the State of Florida (and the largest in the country), where traffic crosses over to the left (opposite) side of the road guided by traffic signals at each crossover.” Although at first seemingly counter-intuitive, the configuration is faster and safer than traditional intersections, Bollas points out.

So the I-75/SR 70 interchange project is the “next in line” going north on the Interstate. The main goals of the current project are to improve capacity and safety, which Bollas points out are urgent needs for the rapidly growing area. As part of the project, the Interstate is being widened by one new lane in each direction. Additionally, noise walls (you wouldn’t believe how complex the federal guidelines are for the inclusion of noise walls in a project such as this) are being built along the neighborhoods of: Creekside Tara Preserve River Place Willowbrook

Stormwater ponds are also being added to the median area and the bridge over the Braden River is being replaced. Also, SR 70 from Tara Boulevard to 87th Street E is being resurfaced. Five-foot sidewalks with high emphasis crosswalks on SR 70 and 6.5-foot bike buffered lanes



on SR 70 are also included in the project. Yes, people actually walk and ride bikes! It’s Florida, after all.

Suffice it to say that a project like this is complex and take years to plan and fund. And more projects like it are on the way. For instance, about six miles to the north of the one we’re talking about in this article is the I-75/US 301 interchange improvement project which is expected to start early 2021.

So, if you love big construction projects (because heavy equipment like bulldozers and cranes float your boat), you’ll be a happy camper! Just don’t tell anyone (for your own safety). If you love better roads and traffic that actually moves, stay tuned. The wheels at the Florida Department of Transportation are turning. Here’s hoping that the wheels of whatever we’re riding in keep turning as well!



Aerial view showing the I-75 at SR 70 interchange prior to the start of construction.

Meet Brian Bollas

Brian Bollas, GISP (Certified Geographic Information Systems Professional), has over 20 years of experience in managing numerous transportation, transit, GIS, planning, and public involvement projects across the US for multi-national engineering firms. Brian currently serves as FDOT District One’s Strategic Education and Outreach Manager/Community Outreach Manager for Interstate Residency and Design-Build Push-Button projects, where some of his duties include ensuring consistent information and messaging, governmental relations, and general public information. His planning expertise includes corridor feasibility and alternatives analysis, transit plan development, and master planning. Brian’s public information experiences ranges from branding, creating meeting collateral, developing/hosting charrettes (a meeting in which all stakeholders in a project attempt to resolve conflicts and map solutions) for the public and regulatory agencies all the while employing the latest in technologies to efficiently interact with stakeholders in a meaningful and engaging manner. Brian has a Bachelors in Urban and Regional Development from Pennsylvania State University and a Masters in Environmental Planning from Towson University/Johns Hopkins.





By Robert O'Brien

What **IS** It?



“OLD SCHOOL” SARASOTA ATTRACTION FOCUSES ON TROPICAL FLORA, FAUNA AND FUN!



Established in 1939, Sarasota Jungle Gardens is one of the oldest continuously operated attractions in Florida. Since that time 81 years ago, the South Florida attraction changed hands several times. In 1971, the attraction was purchased by Arthur C. Allyn. His daughter, Dorothy Tinney and her family operate the Gardens today. The stated mission of this “old Florida” venue is: “to educate and inspire our community through interactive experiences with animals and nature supported by unmatched customer service.”

The attraction celebrates its history as one of the first Florida-centric family-friendly venues. Among the exhibits to visit while at the venue, you will find free-roaming flamingos, alligator feeding pool, Alligator, crocodiles, giant tortoises, snakes and

many other reptiles, parrots, birds of prey, Lemurs, African porcupine, Coati Mundi, Muntjac deer and a petting zoo.

The attraction notes: “Education and entertainment are key to every show in the Gardens. Presentations by our knowledgeable animal keepers are designed to thrill and amaze, while educating spectators on animals in general, as well as exotic pet ownership. Shows are intended for audiences of all ages and often include audience participation. Each show runs approximately 20 minutes with many of our animals performing. Keep in mind that “all shows are included in the price of admission but fill up quickly, so please arrive about 15 minutes early to guarantee seating in our outdoor pavilion or bleachers. Donations are accepted and go toward the care of the animals and their habitats.”



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Love “old school” Florida? *Real Producers* found this list of “10 Classic Old Florida Attractions (That You Can Still Visit),” put together by Gary McKechnie on the website www.visitflorida.com:

Silver Springs (1888), Ocala. Famous for its glass-bottom boats. “The 4,000-acre Silver Springs State Park encompasses not only the springs, but the entire 5-mile Silver River and surrounding sandhill forest.” silversprings.com

Bok Tower (1929), Lake Wales. Famous for its “205-foot Gothic Revival and Art Deco masterpiece of pink Etowah marble, gray Creole marble, and coquina stone and its 200-bell carillon. www.boktowergardens.org

Monkey Jungle (1933), Redland. Famous for...well...monkeys (various primates), and its original slogan, “Where humans are caged and monkeys run wild,” referring to the walk through an animal viewing tunnel. Today it is a protected habitat. www.monkeyjungle.com

Jungle Island (1936 - formerly Parrot Jungle), Watson Island, Miami. Famous for its tropical bird viewing. “Guests still see colorful parrots and macaws (some of which perform in bird shows) as well as Miami’s iconic pink flamingos along with snakes, vultures, condors, alligators, kangaroos, tigers, and orangutans.” www.jungleisland.com

Weeki Wachee Springs (1947), Weeki Wachee. Famous for its underwater shows starring honest-to-goodness mermaids.” Honest. www.floridastateparks.org/WeekiWachee

Gatorland (1949), Kissimmee. “One of the few Old Florida attractions still owned by the founding family, Gatorland continues to attract visitors who visit the 110-acre “Alligator Capital of the World” to see hundreds of alligators and crocodiles, ride a miniature railroad, speed down a zip line, and take in reptile shows, an aviary, petting zoo, and the ever-popular Gator Jumparoo Show.” www.gatorland.com



...

Gulfarium (1955), Destin. Famous as “Florida’s oldest continuously operating marine park,” For more than 60 years, “the park continues to focus on sea-life-themed shows and exhibits including performances by trained porpoises and sea lions.” <https://www.gulfarium.com/>

Miami Seaquarium (1955), Miami. Famous for, among other things, “in the 1960s the park got a big boost by being one of the prime shooting locations for the hit TV show ‘Flipper’. At the time, it was the world’s largest marine life attraction. Today,



“the park still celebrates bottlenose dolphins as well as sharks, sea turtles, penguins, dolphins, seals, orcas, manatees and thousands of colorful reef fishes that inhabit a 750,000-gallon saltwater aquarium. www.miamiseaquarium.com

Citrus Tower (1956), Clermont. Famous for being “Florida’s highest observation point,” originally looking out over Florida’s historic orange groves, the 22-story structure features a glass-enclosed observation deck. www.citrustower.com

Lion Country Safari (1967), Loxhatchee. Famous for being “The world’s first “drive-through zoo.” Today it is “640 acres of South Florida plains where you can still drive along to see tapirs, llamas, storks, kudus, impalas, white rhinos, gemsboks, water buffalo, lions, wildebeests, chimpanzees, and giraffes.” www.lioncountrysafari.com

Special thanks to Tim Cincotta of Sarasota Jungle Gardens. Photos are the copyrighted property of Sarasota Jungle Gardens.





By Sherri McNeely,
Marketing Director,
Barnes Walker Title, Inc.

FEBRUARY 2020 MARKET UPDATE

Here's a look at the Sarasota & Manatee Counties'
Real Estate Market for February 2020.



According to monthly reports from Florida Realtors®, the Sarasota and Manatee housing market experienced another robust month of sales in January and February. Compared to the same month in 2019 when there was a decrease in sales and an increase in inventory, the opposite can be said for February 2020; an increase of 4.8% in sales and a decrease in inventory.

Closed Sales

Closed sales in Sarasota and Manatee totaled 1,766 in February 2020, a 43 percent increase from the same month

last year. In Sarasota, single-family closed sales increased to 1027 sales and Manatee sales increased to 739. Condo sales decreased to 273 sales in Sarasota to 194 in Manatee.

“We typically see a lot of market activity this time of year, and when compared to a slower month the same time last year, 2020 is off to a great start,” said David Clapp, 2020 President of the Realtor® Association

of Sarasota and Manatee. “The current volume of sales is outpacing inventory and properties are selling fast, with a decrease in median time to contract as low as 34 days in some markets.”

What does this mean for home sellers?

With the housing inventory low, if the seller lists now and prices their home right, according to its location and condition, it should sell fast.

What does this mean for home buyers?

With the interest rates still low, Buyers have more buying power so they can get more home for their money. However, with low inventory it may take some time to find the perfect house.

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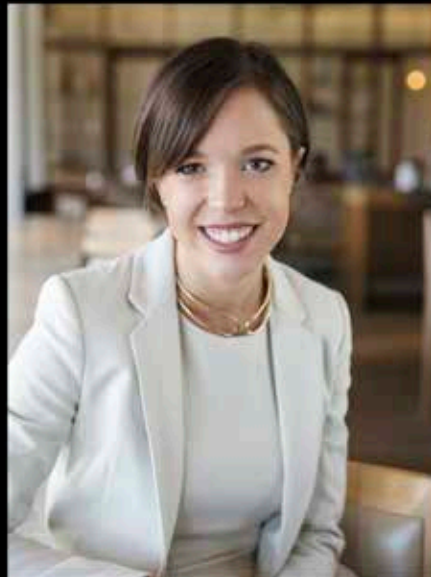


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