

JACKSONVILLE

# REAL PRODUCERS

INFORMING AND INSPIRING REAL ESTATE AGENTS

Top 100  
STANDINGS

*Jacksonville's Own*

**MISSY  
DEKAY**

**RISING STAR**

Jon Brooks of The Brooks  
Group at Keller Williams

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EverBank Home Mortgage

Photo by Renee Parenteau

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Written By Chris Menezes  
Photos By Renee Parenteau

# MISSY DEKAY

## Leading Jax Real Estate by Leaps and Bounds

With production of nearly \$48 million over an 18-month period and an average annual closed sales volume of \$25-\$30 million, Missy DeKay has been ranked the #2 top producing real estate agent in the Jacksonville region, and recognized by several organizations as one of the leading residential agents in North America. The combination of her energetic, “people person” disposition and her very strong work ethic is what got her to the top. The fact she genuinely enjoys building her own business to her own high standards of customer service is what keeps her there.

“When you’re in real estate you build your own business. No one does it for you!” says Missy, a lifelong Jacksonville resident. “I have found both the emotional and financial rewards to be directly related to my personal investment of time, heart and energy.”

Missy was known for her bubbly personality as a teenager at Jacksonville’s The Bolles School. “I always enjoyed engaging in conversation with all sorts of people,” she says, noting that her parents also were high-energy and outgoing. “Having been a cheerleader in high school with the last name “Bounds”, my friends nicknamed me “Leaps and Bounds.”

After earning a Bachelor’s degree in Education and a Master’s degree in Special Education from Florida State University, Missy became a special education teacher. About six years in she started getting curious about other careers. “I was young, enthusiastic and full of energy. I loved connecting with other folks,” she says. “I was feeling stifled in the classroom. People who knew me well suggested that I look into a sales related career.”

Missy was impressed by a newspaper story about a teacher who became a highly successful real estate agent with Watson Realty. After obtaining her real estate license by going to classes at night, she interviewed with Watson Realty’s Ponte Vedra office. “I arrived for my interview dusty, sweaty and wearing Bermuda shorts after a field trip to the zoo,” she says, laughing. “But they offered me a job anyway.”

Missy started with Watson in the summer of 1988, figuring she could return to teaching in the fall if things did not work out. In fact, it worked out so well that she was named the company’s Rookie of the Year after her first year in the business.

Missy carefully plotted her approach to her new profession. “When you get up in the morning you have to have a plan for your day and put your plan in motion.”

Missy’s initial plan was to learn her market area and its neighborhoods inside out. That knowledge required hours of driving from one side of town to the other to familiarize herself with other agents’ new listings. “I also remember laying out the newspaper, sitting on the floor in my office, and highlighting the FSBOs,” she notes. “Then I’d pull out my map, organize the addresses from north to south, for example, stop in one by one and leave a tiny, handwritten note in the mailbox or on the door. My intention was not so much to turn FSBOs into customers, but rather to learn the neighborhoods and educate myself as to area values.”

Another component of Missy’s plan as a neophyte was to expand her potential customer base through Open Houses. “I knew I probably wouldn’t sell a house that way, since a very small percentage of homes sell as a result of an Open House, but it gave me the chance to talk to every person who visited the property,” Missy notes. “Then I would follow up by mailing a handwritten thank you note. Sometimes, even months later, I would get a call from someone expressing how much they appreciated my follow-up and who invited me to be their realtor.” While acknowledging that it may seem a bit old-fashioned, Missy says she still sends handwritten notes today because it demonstrates that she cares.

Missy devoted full-time efforts to her burgeoning business. “For me, working part-time was never an option. I feel as though I must have a keen understanding of the market climate, the inventory, and all the factors driving the market dynamics in order to best advise my customers and clients. Buyers and sellers expect that from the real estate agent they hire to assist them with the sale or purchase of one of the most important investments of their lives.”

She also notes that although the profession offers some flexibility, agents must be available nearly all the time. “You may have dinner plans, but when you when a contract is delivered at 6 pm you owe it to your customer to be available to present it.” In fact, Missy, who enjoys traveling with her husband of 31 years and their two dogs, admits to working on vacations, despite friends and family cajoling her to disconnect. “It’s honestly not that I think my customers can’t survive without me... I just take it very seriously,” she explains. “It’s likely others could handle things in my absence, but when my sellers and buyers hire me and as we work through the process, I gain valuable insight into their objectives and negotiating styles. For these reasons, in part, I feel that I am able to most effectively get the job done on behalf of my clients.

Missy prides herself on her relatability, a quality she revered in one of the first friendships she formed at Watson. “Judy and I met when I joined the brokerage and became friends,” Missy says, speaking of the late top producing agent Judy Nicholson. “Judy had recently moved from Virginia to Atlantic Beach and built a huge business here. I watched her intently and admired her style; I emulated her.”

Uniquely, Missy has never utilized a lead generation system, and instead built her business primarily through her extensive, lifelong connections in the Jacksonville and Ponte Vedra communities. She estimates 95-98% of her clients are now past customers or their referrals. She welcomes all price points and invests similar dollars of her own money to market every listing.

Throughout her 29 years in real estate, Missy has remained an individual agent, never earnestly considering joining a team or changing brokerages. “The support Watson has given me has been steadfast and it works for me,” she says. “The bottom line is that I want to sell real estate and I’m happy to let Watson take care of the rest of the business.” Missy, who calls herself “a little bit of a control freak,” prefers to be hands-on with all aspects of her clients’ transactions, but expressed her immense gratitude for the help of her assistant, Lorie.



Missy does not exude a “high pressure” sales style. Rather, she maintains the idea that a cutthroat approach to a successful real estate business is unnecessary and unfounded. “There is enough business out there for everyone once you establish yourself with a presence of contribution and expertise,” she says. “We have to work together as responsible agents to strike a win-win for the buyer and seller by obtaining a successful sale. There is no reason to approach that as adversarial.”

Missy strongly believes that an agent’s reputation is crucial to their success. “Sometimes it’s not all about hard marketing, but also the reputation of the agent; the energy that’s under the project,” she notes. “You have to work with a cooperating agent toward the same goal, so customers need to know what other agents think when they come across your name in the MLS. Do you have a solid reputation not only with customers, but with other agents? Can they count on your listing to be accessible and in top condition to show? Will communication be a struggle or a breeze?”

On the flip side, Missy cautions that agents should be selective in choosing their clients. “You are hiring each other. Identifying the realistic buyers and sellers with whom you can work well and accomplish the goal set is critical.”

“There is enough business out there for everyone once you establish yourself with a presence of contribution and expertise”



“When you live what you love, it all comes together.”

“I also believe strongly that although agents should know the facts as best they can, there are times we are presented with rare and specific situations. When we cannot be completely certain of the solution, we shouldn’t pretend,” she adds. “People respond when you admit you need to double check something, when we demonstrate some humility. Part of our value as Realtors is to provide a vast network of industry professionals and find the best resolutions quickly.”

Missy has earned numerous recognitions for her work, including Watson’s Pinnacle Award, but one of her favorites is being voted Jacksonville’s top real estate agent for several years in a row. “It’s incredibly rewarding to get that recognition from my local community, my friends and peers,” she says. “It’s very humbling.”

Looking ahead, Missy plans to maintain her high levels of service and production, and to continue earning her customers’ referrals. “If you put the needs of your customer first, take the time to listen and understand their goals and objectives, the job is easy,” she notes. “I truly feel a connection to the people with whom I’m working; it’s so rewarding to find them their perfect match. When you live what you love, it all comes together.”



# The Build[her] Foundation

## Exit Real Estate Gallery Teams with HabiJax to Provide the Dream of Home Ownership

Safe, decent, affordable shelter breaks the cycle of poverty

Habitat's 2017 Women's Build will provide struggling female head-of-household families in Jacksonville with the strong foundation of homeownership. Upon this foundation, these women can build a stable and self-reliant future for their families.

**THE GOAL**  
A world where everyone has a decent place to live

**The ongoing need in Duval County**

- 25% of households are headed by a single mother
- 27% of women are living at the federal poverty level (\$23,050 income for a family of four)
- The Florida Household Survival Budget of \$47,684 is an estimate of the income needed for financial stability for a family of four
- When households can't make their budgets work, they cut their expenses in risky ways

There are 100,000 women in the U.S. who are struggling to make ends meet. Habitat's Women's Build campaign is helping them build a better future for themselves and their families.

Since its inception in 1988, Habi-Jax has provided home ownership opportunities and other housing services to over 2000 families. While this program is near and dear to the hearts of all local Realtors, Exit Real Estate Gallery has taken a leading role in assisting two special single mothers in their dreams of home ownership.



Chris Byers, Michelle Harrell, Heather Tucker, Ray Rivera, and Lydia Sutton of Exit Real Estate Gallery

Women’s Build – build[her], a campaign of Habitat for Humanity of Jacksonville (HabiJax), is a project tasked with assisting female head-of-households in providing a stable home life for their families. Nominated by community members, families in need are selected for the program and provided much more

than just shelter. They receive financial education and training, and must demonstrate an ability to responsibly pay an affordable monthly mortgage. Additionally, all homeowners must complete a minimum of 300 hours of “sweat equity” helping to build habitat homes. The build[her] foundation has currently chosen two deserving families to receive this life changing opportunity.

built in New Town, a community in revitalization just Northwest of downtown Jacksonville. HabiJax and the New Town Success Zone have been committed to the enhancement of this neighborhood since 2011, and remain dedicated to making it a safe environment for families to grow and prosper. Numerous women’s organizations and local corporations have donated thousands to the mission thus far. Exit International will match the amount raised by fundraising efforts through the local Exit Real Estate Gallery website.

“The build[her] campaign is about helping Jacksonville female head-of-household build a home and obtain empowerment and respect. With homeownership and financial stability, women gain the self-respect and confidence to succeed in life and the commitment to serve as positive role models for their children and their neighborhoods,” said Mary Kay O’Rourke, HabiJax President & CEO in the June JaxChamber article by Ginny Walthour.

While HabiJax and others involved are grateful for those putting in the elbow grease to physically construct these homes next month, the builds will not be possible without the financial resources necessary to provide a “home sweet home” for some of the most persevering women and children in our community.

### A few interesting statistics

- Over 1/4 of Jacksonville households are headed up by a single mother
- 1/5 of these women are living below the federal poverty level
- The federal poverty line equates to less than 1/2 of the estimated income needed to support a safe and stable household, according to the Florida Household Survival Budget by United Way

To donate, please visit <http://habijax.org/gallerygives/>, or learn more about the build[her] foundation by visiting <http://www.buildherjax.com/>.

Exit Real Estate Gallery and Exit International have joined the effort to change these statistics in our local community. They have set a goal of raising \$5,000 in donation to the two homes being