

REVIEW

Omaha Area Board of REALTORS®



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

SPRINGING INTO SPRING

Every year around this time, the first signs of spring start to appear. The first Robin sighting. The first signs of life after the dreary winter. It is a time of renewal and rebirth.

One event that always makes me feel renewed is **REcharge**, our own annual one-day convention. This year was another success. Dr. Jessica Lautz, one of the top economists in the nation, was the first keynote speaker. Always, my favorite slide is the one that shown with the Median Net Worth of the Homeowner vs. the Renter, 2024 estimate is \$415,000.00 vs. \$10,000.00. If that isn't a megaphone message to start your homeownership journey now, then I just don't know what stat is. There were multiple panels throughout the day, including a Superintendent panel and a managing broker panel, AI class and several other great sessions. The grand finale was motivational speaker and self-proclaimed Patron Saint of Crazy Ideas, Kyle Scheele. The day was uplifting and educational.

Upcoming opportunities to bolster your industry knowledge through classes at the Omaha Area Board of REALTORS®. Everything from GRI Technology, to Contracts, to Mastering Pricing Strategies are all on the calendar for March. Go to omaharealtors.com/calendar to get the latest information.

There are also some great committees that would welcome your participation. Whether you want to attend a **Professional Development Committee** meeting to exchange ideas with colleagues or attend a **Governmental Affairs Committee** meeting and learn the latest about current events that could impact the real estate world, get involved with **Social Events** and help plan all the great events, there's so many great options to learn and network.

Speaking of great events, WCR-sponsored the yearly **RPAC breakfast at Champions Run**. Thank you to all who attended. It's important to support RPAC, which fights the good fight to protect our industry every day. RPAC has played a pivotal role in blocking disastrous legislation and standing up for real estate professionals and our clients.

It seems fitting to celebrate WCR, an amazing organization that empowers women in leadership, during March, which is Women's History month. It's an important month when we acknowledge women who helped pave the way. Not that long ago, the business community was not very welcoming to women. Many women, like Arlyne Geschwender, Ellie Bane, and Diana Saylor, to name a few, had to overcome great obstacles to leave their mark on the real estate industry.

As we embrace the first days of spring, may our thoughts and hopes be renewed with the change of the season, as we move towards warmer weather and a warmer market. Let's honor those who paved a path before us, as we make our own mark on the world.

May you always walk in the sunshine, my friend!

Jessica Sawyer,
2025 OABR President



REVIEW

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27
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HOME WARRANTY DISCLOSURE (#1428)

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2025 RECHARGE

Written by **Melissa McElroy**



NAR ECONOMIST REVEALS HOUSING TRENDS

REcharge 2025 exploded onto the LaVista Convention Center like a lightning bolt, electrifying attendees.

The first keynote speaker to take the stage was **Dr. Jessica Lautz**, NAR's Deputy Chief Economist and Vice President of Research. She captivated the audience with her housing market predictions.

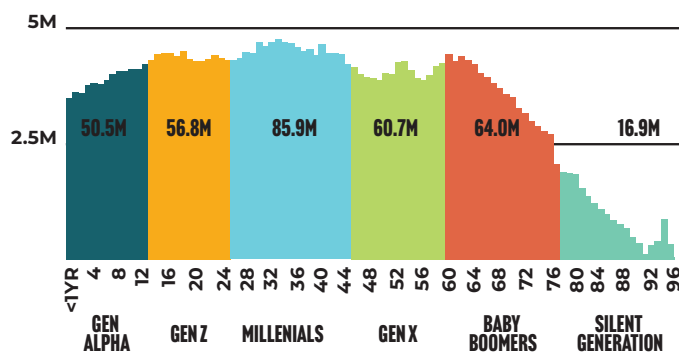
The renowned economist is a high-in-demand speaker often quoted by major media outlets for her expert insights about the real estate industry. She has also testified before Congress on behalf of REALTORS® across the country.

At REcharge, she provided fascinating insights about the ongoing housing shortage and the challenges of addressing that shortage with rising costs and a growing population. Since 1995, the U.S. population has jumped nearly 28 percent, from 266.6 million to 341.1 million. The median annual existing home sale price in the U.S. jumped over 250 percent, from \$114,600 to \$407,500.

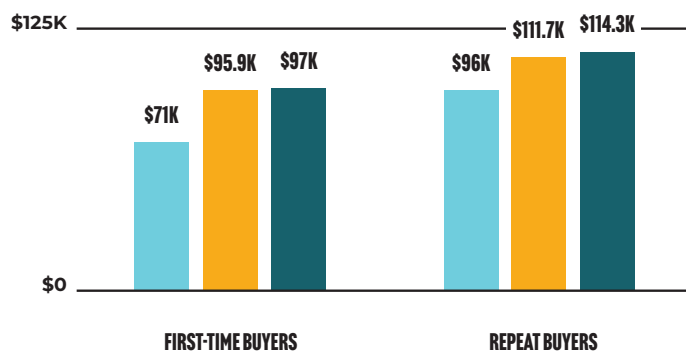
It's not surprising that people are staying in their homes longer as interest rates have crept up, many would-be sellers struggle with the "locked-in" issue where they don't want to give up their lower rates for a higher rate. While this phenomenon is gradually decreasing, it still slows the rate of home sales. When the majority of homeowners have a rate under four percent, they have to ask themselves if it makes sense to move. If a homeowner can offset the increased cost with equity in a home they currently own, they could opt to sell their home and buy a home that better fits their needs.

The average home size has shrunk. The McMansion

U.S. POPULATION BY AGE (IN 2023)



INCOME OF HOME BUYERS



30-YEAR FIXED MORTGAGE INTEREST RATE (HISTORICAL NORM IN RED)



phase seems to have faded away. Currently, there are more all-cash buyers than ever before, dipping into their savings, the bank of mom and dad, their 401Ks, crypto accounts, and stock market holdings. More buyers are using inheritance to purchase a home or to reduce the loan amount by placing a more significant down payment on the transaction – highlighting a generational transfer of wealth.

The demographic of first-time buyers has also changed. The median age is 38, which jumped from the late 20s a generation ago. The median age of a repeat buyer is 36. Multigenerational households are at an all-time high as young adults save for their first homes while others care for aging parents.

According to Dr. Lautz, successful home buyers make an average of \$26,000 more per year than just a few years ago, which limits opportunities for people like school teachers and first responders to achieve the American Dream of homeownership.

One interesting fact is that 66 percent of households have pets, influencing prospective buyers' decisions. Another trend is a rebound in city centers as baby boomers retire and move to more urban areas with desirable amenities.

According to NAR, the total economic impact of a typical home sale in Nebraska was \$100,400. The real estate industry accounted for \$24.3 billion or 13.6 percent of the gross state product in 2024.

The for-sale-by-owner market is at an all-time low. With more people moving from out-of-state, they want a local expert who knows the area. A home is the most significant investment most people make in their lives. One thing remains clear: consumers still need REALTORS® to navigate the process.

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS: LOCAL OPERATIONS IMPACT REAL ESTATE

Three local school superintendents showcased their collective knowledge about successfully managing schools to serve students best while navigating budget constraints in an informative power panel moderated by **Sarina McNeel**.

Papillion Superintendent **Andrew Rikli** urged homebuyers to do their due diligence. A client might incorrectly think a home is in a specific school district, only to find out later they did not have accurate information. Information online can be outdated or incorrect. School districts shift, especially in high-growth areas. New district lines are redrawn periodically. Rikli cautioned REALTORS® never to promise that a home will always remain in the same district.

Millard Superintendent **John Schwartz** said prospective homebuyers have many options and opportunities, with different advantages to each school and each district. Rikli urged everyone to visit a school in person to gain a better understanding of a particular school.

About 57 percent of local property taxes go towards funding schools. Westside Superintendent **Mike Lucas** said personnel makes up 80 to 85 percent of the budget, leaving little leeway. Furthermore, there are state guidelines, spending lids, and limits to the amount of cash reserves permitted.

It presents challenges when providing building maintenance, requiring an intricate balancing act. School bonds are one avenue to financing expensive maintenance when budgets can't cover costs. Schwartz said since there are limits on levies, a bond referendum is usually the most efficient approach.

One thing is evident to real estate professionals: better school districts lead to higher home values. Schools not only significantly influence homebuyers' purchasing decisions but also continue to impact the property values of homes within that district. Prospective buyers can look at the Nebraska Department of Education Data Reports: www.education.ne.gov/dataservices/data-reports/.



The panel cautioned against measuring a school strictly off a review or test scores. They said poor test scores are negatively impacted by poverty when a student doesn't have access to specific resources.

School superintendents strive to keep the public educated about the challenges they face and the impact those challenges can have on the students they serve. Lucas said the children are always their top priority.

Rikli delivered a stirring comment about the importance of investing in education and how our forefathers understood it was paramount to our way of life and for the good of society.



OMAHA BROKER PANEL

REcharge 2025 boasted fantastic keynote speakers, excellent breakout sessions, and outstanding panels. The main stage *Top Broker Panel* featured four brokers from the Omaha area, including **Andy Alloway** of Nebraska Realty; **Jill Anderson** of NP Dodge Real Estate; **Vince Leisey** of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Ambassador Real Estate; and **Tom Simmons** of Better Homes and Gardens Real Estate The Good Life Group.

The panel had over 100 years of combined real estate experience, and in the wake of the NAR lawsuits and a sluggish market, the consensus was that real estate needed to get back to the basics.

Leisey pointed out that signing the necessary new paperwork raises transparency and public opinion of our profession. Anderson echoed the importance of being more transparent and that using the process to build connections was crucial. Alloway added that working your craft and doing it well demonstrates your value.

Emerging AI technology is revolutionizing the industry, but maybe not entirely. Simmons said AI was a tool to enhance communication and said tech can't replace agents, just like the internet didn't. Alloway said it improved efficiency and freed up time for other things. Anderson said AI can be applied to do the mundane so agents can focus on cultivating relationships. Leisey told the audience they would be left behind if they didn't embrace it and that AI was growing into a tool to communicate and market yourself more effectively.

The demographics of the Omaha area suggest that 35 percent of local REALTORS® have worked in the industry for fewer than five years. Anderson advises newer agents to connect with family and friends and meet new people. Know your market stats, know yourself, and practice good time management.

Alloway said that in a service business, it's about empowering your people so they have the confidence to create great business. Simmons said it was harder to enter the industry when you're young because you have a smaller sphere of influence; he said the most significant way to build your business is to help other professionals build their business and create an alliance with like-minded pros. Leisey said you should have a system in place and establish good habits; there's no substitute for face-to-face time to get people to trust you and create raving fans.

The industry is continuously changing, whether it's technology, MLS policy, or the law. Alloway said it was essential to constantly change with the industry. REALTORS® are at the center of the transaction; they have to be willing to change and roll with the punches. Simmons added that real estate is not a zero-sum game; we work together for the good of the consumer.

Interest rates impact the market, though many people still need to buy and sell real estate even when rates go up. The panel concluded that people are becoming less sensitive to rates, but REALTORS® still needed to educate consumers about the market.

As large corporations buy more single-family homes as rentals, first-time homebuyers are forced to compete with their cash offers. Anderson suggested the government needs to get more involved. All agreed that reducing capital gains tax rates might be the incentive required to draw more properties back to the market.

Anderson concluded the 50-minute session by stating

why real estate was a terrific business if you have that burn in your belly. Simmons capped it, commenting that Omaha was a great city and a great place to do business.



DEVELOPMENT: THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT

Jason Thiellen is passionate about everything involving real estate development. The CEO of E & A Consulting Group, a Planning and Engineering firm, and President of The Welcome Home Coalition, a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating unnecessary governmental costs, is the go-to expert in development and planning. He understands how government policies directly impact the entire process.

Thiellen was a featured speaker at REcharge 2025, where he delivered an information-packed presentation about the ins and outs of the government's role in development. He described the government as taking a reactive role in planning rather than a proactive approach, providing the example of the post-World War II population explosion and urban sprawl of 20th-century American suburbs.

It's little wonder that the seasoned expert was selected to lead the Welcome Home Coalition, a non-profit organization committed to keeping housing more affordable without relying on taxpayers' money. It utilizes education, research, and advocacy to advance housing policies and proactively communicates the real estate industry's concerns with elected officials while promoting

pro-real estate legislation.

According to Thiellen, some key initiatives must be carefully considered over the next 25 to 50 years to reduce housing costs: adding density and reevaluating building codes. He said there needs to be a commonsense approach when examining codes. If a code no longer has the desired outcome, it should be modified or eliminated. He noted that building codes are intricate webs strung together, and it will take careful consideration to appropriately modify such a complex system.

One question he is often asked when considering if a code is necessary is how much a human life is worth. When a new code is promoted for public safety, it is crucial to consider the potential safety issues versus the costs associated with additional regulation. Thiellen said that codes protect public safety, but not all codes are necessary.

More codes are being introduced in response to the

environment. Thiellen said it was essential to take a balanced approach when adding green codes. While he agrees that protecting the environment is necessary, affordable housing is equally important.

The expert said there wasn't one quick fix to affordable housing. Keeping governmental costs contained is an integral part of an extraordinarily complex issue. The government decides policies and regulations, which impacts infrastructure, housing costs, and economic growth. These decisions are why the real estate industry needs to continue to advocate for commonsense and fiscal responsibility in an uncertain political environment.

Organizations like the Welcome Home Coalition and the Omaha Area Board of REALTORS® advocacy efforts closely monitors regulatory decisions to help protect the industry from unnecessary building codes and wasteful spending.



2025 RECHARGE



OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

For those looking to feed their mind, there was a charcuterie board of mental goodies to devour at RECharge 2025. With so many thought-provoking breakout sessions, attendees were spoiled for choice. It was an all-you-can-eat buffet of knowledge.

Paragon MLS expert **Jaycee Miller** shared the Secret Sauce to MLS Success, revealing pro tips for navigating the MLS software.

REALTOR® **Nico Marasco** moderated the panel: *Agents Who Work With Coaches*. **Tim Reeder**, **Chris Bober**, and **Jessica Sawyer** explored how coaches can help agents take their business to the next level, what to expect from a coach, and how to find the right coach for you.

Commercial practitioner **Regi Powel** presented *Transforming Omaha Thru Real Estate*.

Brad Fricke, aka The Casual Instructor, taught the course *You Are Your Brand*, focusing on how agents can set themselves apart from the competition.

Sherri Griggs presented an interesting session, *Future-Proof Your Business: Exit Strategies for Real Estate Pros*.

Frequent real estate speaker **Andrea Lane** taught *From Data to Deals... Using Everyday AI for Success*.

Humberto Ramos-Cazares from REALTORS Property Resource® taught *Market Yourself Like a Pro with RPR*.

Charles Chadwick moderated a powerful panel called *Managing Brokers Who Sell*. The thought leaders for the session included **Susan Clark**, **Don Keeton**, and **Deda Myhre**, who shared their industry expertise.

The final keynote session, the cherry on the sundae,

was author, innovator, influencer, and champion of crazy ideas **Kyle Scheele**. He left the audience uplifted after sharing his hilarious and touching stories of how life changes when you dare to embrace creativity.

Scheele says ideas are like tossing a pebble in a pond, creating a ripple effect that can impact others' lives in ways you may never know. Embrace those crazy ideas. They might just change the world.



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One event lures real estate professionals from across the state to Lincoln every winter – NRA Political Action Days – a legislative bill review session, leadership training, committee meetings, and face-to-face meetings with elected officials all rolled into a few days.

2025 NRA President Susan Clark said, “Day one is leadership training. This is an opportunity for the 2025 team to all come together and get prepared for the year ahead. The rest is spent discussing and planning our advocacy efforts for the year.”

“State Senator Rob Dover, a longtime REALTOR® from Norfolk, was present at our bill review session, and we hosted an event where we invited senators to meet and discuss important issues affecting homeownership,” Clark said. “The programming is designed for all members to get up to speed on bills affecting housing, provide valuable feedback, gather information, and ask questions.”

Ashlee Hendrickson, Governmental Affairs Director at Nebraska REALTORS® Association, said, “Political Action Days is the year’s kickoff event. It allows members an opportunity to engage with us on policies that impact their business.” She said that switching this year to a new venue at Innovation Campus on the former State Fairgrounds in Lincoln allowed for more participation as a hybrid event, now including individual members unable to attend in person.

According to Hendrickson, there were three main legislative areas of focus: funding for housing, bills containing

a document stamp tax increase, and bills threatening property rights. Advocating for the real estate industry’s interests requires defending resources devoted to housing, including rural, middle-income, and affordable housing legislation, protecting property rights and landlord property rights, and opposing all increases to document stamps.

She said a document stamp tax increase is one area that consistently comes up because when legislation is proposed, it needs a plan for funding. A document stamp increase is a simple formula. If you increase the amount by a set amount, it will generate a predictable amount. The downside of constant document stamp increases is that it continually increases housing costs, exacerbating the affordable housing crisis.

2025 OABR President Jessica Sawyer was impressed with the information presented at this year’s Political Action Days, she specifically found the information presented by Nebraska Real Estate Commission Director Joe Gehrki to be of particular interest.

“I personally found the information mind blowing for two reasons, how long real estate went on before any requirements or regulations were put in place, and how much we have been involved as an industry to continue to improve license requirements,” Sawyer said, and added, “This further solidifies the power of what we do with our efforts. Amazing!”

2025 NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE BILLS OF INTEREST

BILLS OF INTEREST:**LB78**

Increases Doc Stamp Tax to \$2.32 and remits the seven-cent increase to the Domestic Violence and Sex Trafficking Survivor Housing Assistance Fund.

LB81

Missing Year Property Tax Fix: Changes tax credit provisions under the Nebraska Property Tax Incentive Act. Missing Year Property Tax Fix: Allowable growth percentage means the percentage increase, if any, in the total assessed value of all real property in the state from the prior year to the current year, as determined by the department.

LB151

First-Time Homebuyers Savings Account Act. Allows tax income tax deduction as follows: for married taxpayers who file a joint return and maintain a joint first-time homebuyer savings account, \$4,000, for any other account holder, \$2,000. The income eligibility amounts shall not exceed the following lifetime limit: for married taxpayers who file a joint return and maintain a joint account, \$40,000. For any other account holder, \$20,000. If used for other purposes, amounts added back in for taxation. Have to use/ withdraw after 10 years.

LB187

Changes provisions of the Nebraska Real Estate License Act. A designated broker acting as a single agent for a buyer for real property being used primarily for residential purposes where no fewer than one or more than four dwelling units are located shall enter into a written agency agreement with the party to be represented. Acting as a real estate broker, associate broker, or real estate salesperson includes publicly marketing for sale an equitable interest in a contract for the purchase of real property, other than a vacant lot, between a property owner and a prospective purchaser.

Unfair trade practices includes providing any form of compensation or consideration to any person for performing the services of a broker, associate broker, or salesperson who has not first secured his or her license under the Nebraska Real Estate License Act, unless compensation or consideration is a referral fee; and such person is a nonresident who is licensed in his or her resident regulatory jurisdiction; citizen and resident of a

foreign country which does not license persons conducting the activities of a broker and such person provides reasonable written evidence to the Nebraska broker that he or she is a resident citizen of that foreign country, is not a resident of this country, and conducts the activities of a broker in that foreign country.

LB194

Changes provisions relating to a documentary stamp exemption; clarifies exemptions from paying a documentary stamp tax for certain types of real estate transactions that occur between and among family members when actual consideration is not exchanged to include step relationships; deeds transferring property to a corporation that is wholly owned by a single shareholder, spouse, or family members.

LB583

Changes provisions relating to the rate and disbursement of the documentary stamp tax, the Child Care Grant Fund, childcare grants, the Military Installation Development and Support Fund, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the Innovation Hub Cash Fund, the Economic Recovery Contingency Fund, and the Health Care Homes for the Medically Underserved Fund. Increases documentary stamp tax from \$2.25 to \$3.30.

LB611

Adopts updates to building and energy codes, update to 2021 code. Would add significant costs to building.

LB622

Provides for Statewide Housing Assistance Program and change provisions relating to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, recipients of assistance, and selection of recipients under the Nebraska Affordable Housing Act and the rate and disbursement of the documentary stamp tax. Would provide for downpayment assistance under the Statewide Housing Assistance Program for owner occupied homebuyers up to \$30,000. Funded by 30 cent increase in the documentary stamp tax (\$2.25 to \$2.55)

LB626

Authorizes redevelopment projects involving affordable housing under the Community Development Law.

WALT PEFFER

(1946 - 2025)

He was a friendly, familiar face at the OABR Governmental Affairs Committee meetings and OABR Face the REALTORS® forums. Walt Pepper was a quiet, unassuming man who was highly revered by local community, especially by the real estate community.

He passed away on January 20 after a short battle with cancer.

Despite his impressive career, which included over 30 years of high-profile experience in business and government and over 20 years in the real estate industry, he always remained a humble servant to his

country and community. He served as Chief of Staff to four Omaha mayors, was endorsed by many elected officials, and was a proud United States Army veteran.

OABR Governmental Affairs Director Perre Neilan said, "Walt was the consummate gentleman. No matter how accomplished and high-ranking his position in the Mayor's office, or as an elected official, he always made time for everyone. He led by the philosophy that you can get a lot done if you don't care who gets the credit. Walt made an impact on the entire Omaha community, and he will be missed."

Joe Gehrki, Director of the Nebraska Real Estate Commission and former OABR Governmental

Affairs Committee Chair, said, "Walt Pepper was an amazing asset to the Omaha real estate community and the city overall. His knowledge of the local political climate was very comprehensive and spanned decades. As the Douglas County Assessor, he brought a willingness to think outside the box to work every day. Walt will be dearly missed."



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AIMEE MELTON: A COMMONSENSE APPROACH FOR **ALL**

WRITTEN BY MELISSA MCELROY

Aimee Melton supporters braved frigid December temps as they entered The Miracle Hill Golf & Tennis Center to cheer on the District 7 Omaha City Councilwoman when she formally announced she'd seek reelection in 2025.

Melton, the lone attorney on the council, approaches her role the way an attorney would represent a client, always considering what best serves the people she represents. She is an advocate who not only fights for District 7, but the entire city of Omaha. One of her core values when representing her constituents is her fiscally conservative approach and strong belief in a limited, small government.

"I believe in being fiscally responsible while still producing the necessary services that the city expects," she said and added, "I believe in local control in government." One of her primary objectives is to amend or eliminate unnecessary codes or ordinances to help reduce regulatory costs and lower the cost of new residential construction.

Rather than seeing the government as an entity that solves every problem with taxpayers' money, she sees the local government as partnering with the residents to solve problems in the community together. "You can't spend your way out of every problem," she said.

Keeping the residents of Omaha safe will always be one of her top priorities. Making sure that essential city services such as police and fire departments are fully staffed and have the necessary equipment is an integral part of that. She wants to support first responders, keep crime rates and call times low, and ensure police, EMTs, and firefighters have what they need to stay safe on the job.

She takes a proactive approach to safety, which requires planning. It's why she advocated for a new



fire station near 182nd & Fort. As the city continues to grow, Omaha will need to keep investing in emergency services to keep call times down and residents safe.

“Being a former prosecutor, I’ve gone on ride-alongs with police.” She felt it was important to understand the issues that first responders face on the job and the needs of the community firsthand to make sure citizens are getting the best response and that police have what they need to do their jobs effectively and safely.

Her commitment to protecting the public goes beyond preventing violent crimes. When a new crypto scam emerged, she partnered with local law enforcement to address it. The scammers called individuals in the Omaha area, claiming to be with the Sheriff’s department, threatening to arrest them if they didn’t pay their past due taxes. The scammer would then direct them to an ATM that accepted cryptocurrency and have them send money. Melton worked with law enforcement to have placards placed on the crypto ATMs with a warning about scams.

“Roads are also a part of public safety,” she said. Listening to concerns about issues, including potholes, helps the city better plan.

As Omaha City Councilwoman Melton looks to the future, she wants to continue to foster the record growth that Omaha has witnessed in recent years by continuing to grow it in a sustainable way.

“Omaha is growing its inner core and outer limits. Whether it’s suburban or urban, we want a city where no matter what you want, we got it.” She explained if you want to live downtown in the urban core and enjoy all the great restaurants and nightlife, there is a place for that. Or if you prefer a quiet home in the suburbs, that’s available too. Omaha is evolving in a holistic way, adding more density. She said that the urban core is growing organically. It used to be east of 42nd Street but is growing to 72nd Street.

The streetcar project is one key component of growing Omaha’s Urban Core. Originally, Melton was against the streetcar project. She didn’t want the taxpayers to have to finance something that only a portion of the city would use. She said she would



Photo Credit: facebook.com/MeltonforOmaha

support it if they could fund it without increasing taxes. When they developed a plan to finance it without raising taxes, she turned to support it.

It appears to be the right decision. Not only would it not be a burden to taxpayers, it would save them money. Developers are paying for necessary infrastructure costs that the taxpayers would have had to pay without a streetcar project. In addition to that, the project generated money before it was even installed. The City of Omaha Finance Department estimated that \$3.9 billion would be generated by the project over the next 15 years.

The City Councilwoman’s conservative principles guide her to support more growth without burdening the taxpayers. Her commonsense approach is to utilize other means to finance development projects, such as grant money, federal and state funding, collaborating with the philanthropic community, and using tax increment financing, Omaha’s only real development incentive.

Melton’s law background gives her a clear advantage when making policy decisions. Her extensive legal experience and expertise is her superpower. She once was a prosecutor who advocated for clients. She is seeking another term on city council to continue to be an advocate for the city of Omaha by making fiscally responsible decisions that will continue to spur economic growth, while keeping Omaha safe.

THE TRENCHES

Written by **Melissa McElroy**

Springtime weather is like working in real estate. Sometimes, it is temperate and mild. Sometimes, there's a torrential downpour. Other times, a storm rolls in out of nowhere. Being able to detect shifting winds will help you weather the storm better.

BAD HARE DAY

What started like a typical showing on a typical day soon took a dark turn for REALTOR® Brandon Johnson.

He was showing a home to prospective buyers, describing all the great amenities and advantages the property had to offer. The would-be buyers wanted to check out the primary bedroom but soon abruptly left the room a little rattled.

"Do the sellers have a dog or a cat?" they asked.

"No," Brandon answered, confused by the question.

They then asked the REALTOR® to look in the closet. He was shocked when he opened the closet door. A baby bunny was lying lifeless on the floor. It was baffling. How did a dead bunny end up in the closet?

The mystery was solved after a bit of sleuthing. It turned out the little rabbit climbed through an exterior dryer vent and entered the home through the laundry room, where he met his untimely demise.

You never know what you might discover.

49 YEARS AGO, ON 49TH STREET

It's been almost half a century, but REALTOR® Don Keeton remembers that fateful showing like yesterday.

His client was a newly divorced, single mother looking for her next home for the next chapter of her life. She and her ten-year-old child rode with Don to the first house he would show her. It was an unforgettable house on 49th Street.

Don had scheduled a showing ahead of time and confirmed the appointment. When he walked up to the door, he knocked first, then loudly announced his presence, as he typically did, even with empty homes.

As they entered the home, the buyer's child darted ahead, excited to check out the place, flung the bedroom door open. That was met with audible gasps as the sellers were stark naked on the other side of the door.

The sellers clearly forgot about the showing that day. Don and his buyer-client were there for a showing, but not that kind of showing! Don quickly escorted the mother and child out the front door, apologizing for the mishap on their way out.

After showing the woman many other homes, Don was surprised when she decided on that first house on 49th Street. She loved the home and the area, but joked "if I have even half as much fun as those sellers were having, I'll be doing pretty good." She still lives in that house to this day.

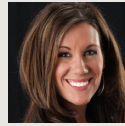
Showing a home can be as unpredictable as the weather. It's best to be prepared for just about anything when you're toiling away in the trenches of real estate.



Matthew Cookson



Kara Guinto



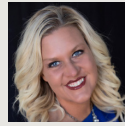
Ericka Heidvogel



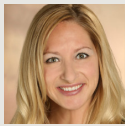
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Don Igo



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David Lee



Luke Lofgren



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Gary Price



Karen Stansberry



Tiffany Stanton

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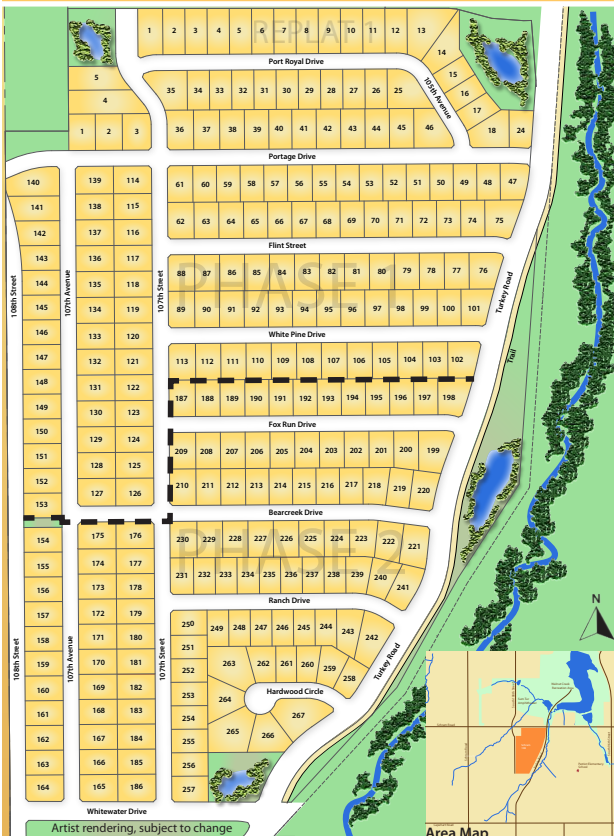
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TRAIL BLAZING WOMEN

OMAHA REAL ESTATE HISTORY

Written by **Melissa McElroy**

March ushers in Women's History Month, a month dedicated to celebrating women's accomplishments throughout history. It provides a perfect opportunity to honor female leaders who bravely blazed trails in Omaha real estate.

Arlyne Geschwender was one of the most consequential women in the local real estate world and someone who was determined to level the playing field in an industry that was openly hostile towards women trying to enter it.

With the help of State Senator Ernie Chambers, the 1986 Omaha Area Board of REALTORS® President was able to form the Randall School of Real Estate in 1973 after some Senators laughed at the idea. All the more determined to succeed in her quest, she opened her real estate school and wrote the book on real estate – Real Estate Principles and Practices – still taught as basic pre-license training classes to this day.

Arlyne pushed for a local WCR chapter and was reluctantly granted permission on a trial basis as many



**ARLYNE
GESCHWENDER**

expected the new organization to fail. History says Arlyne was grossly underestimated, as she later became National President of the Women's Council of REALTORS®.

Diana Sayler-Martin earned her real estate license in 1974, the same year the Federal Equal Credit Opportunity Act took effect, empowering women with homeownership opportunities. Before the law was enacted, women could



**DIANA
SAYLER-MARTIN**

not use their income to qualify for a mortgage or other credit.

The 1989 OABR President remembers real estate being a boys' club. "Sorry, we don't hire women," was a line she heard repeatedly when a broker had to sponsor you for you to become an agent. She said that WCR was a game changer. It offered practical education, leadership training, and emotional support. She worked in the real estate industry for nearly 50 years.

Ellie Bane never missed a national convention in 42 years! Ellie served on many REALTOR® Association local and state committees. Her favorite was the Professional



**ELLIE
BANE**

Standards Committee, which, for her, had more meat to it.

All together, Ellie worked for 50 years in real estate, serving as the 1993 OABR President, where she brought a wealth of knowledge. She always encouraged agents to get involved and get lots of education. She was affectionately nicknamed

“Grandma Ellie” and mentored many agents over the years. She firmly believed that you should always put the client first.



**JOANN
GRENNAN**

JoAnn Grennan, 2000 OABR President, is a seasoned real estate veteran with 33 years of experience. She remembered entering the industry in 1979 – before technology changed everything.

After relocating to Omaha from Columbus, Nebraska, she had to establish herself at a new brokerage in a new city in 1982, at a time of 17 percent interest rates. She recalls not having a sale all summer until one fateful August day when



**CATHY
BLACKMAN**

she was on phone duty. She received a call that put a chain of events into motion, resulting in multiple transactions, which reignited her career. “Real estate got in my blood. I really loved it,” she said.

Cathy Blackman took a part-time real estate assistant gig over three decades ago and fell in love with all things real estate; she went on to become the 2007 OABR President.



**CAROL
LEISEY**

She credits **Carol Leisey** for mentoring her and being an amazing example of leadership, as well as Carol's son, Vince Leisey. She spoke highly of her former mentors and said it was important to surround yourself with successful agents who were willing to take a new agent under their wing.

Many other women have positively impacted the Omaha real estate market; today, 62 percent of all REALTORS® nationwide are women. There are a total of 18 women who ascended to the ranks of OABR President:

MORE OABR PRESIDENTS WHO IMPACTED THE LOCAL REAL ESTATE COMMUNITY WITH THEIR LEADERSHIP:



FRAN RICE
1977



GWEN LEMKE
1981



KAREN GRAY
1997



MARILYN JOHNSON
2006



LISA RITTER
2012



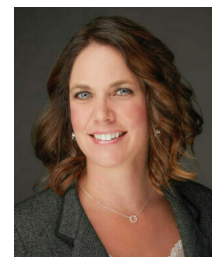
DEDA MYHRE
2014



MONICA LANG
2017



SUSAN CLARK
2020



MEGAN BENGTSON
2022



CRYSTAL ARCHER
2023



DENISE POPPEN
2024



JESSICA SAWYER
2025

DESIGNATIONS

Accredited Buyer Representative® (ABR®)

- Clayton Mulford, Platinum Realty
- Katharine Higgins, RE/MAX Results
- Lindsay Camero, Nebraska Realty

Certified Real Estate Negotiator (CREN)

- Cheryl Gerace, Nebraska Realty

NHCP (New Home Certified Professional)

- Cheryl Gerace, Nebraska Realty

Seniors Real Estate Specialists (SRES)

- Clayton Mulford, Platinum Realty

CERTIFICATIONS

Resort & Second-Home Property Specialist (RSPS)

- Weihong "Lucy" Schlafman, BHHS Ambassador R.E

At Home With Diversity (AHWD)

- Katharine Higgins, RE/MAX Results

Home Finance Resource (HFR)

- Yvonne Blankenship, BHHS Ambassador RE
- Lindsay Camero, Nebraska Realty

PERSONALS

Our Condolences

- To Bernie Kenney, NP Dodge R.E, on the passing of his mother
- To Mike and Cokie Riedmann, and Nicole and Phillip Riddle, on the passing of their brother, brother-in-law, and uncle, respectively
- To Stacey Blue, Nebraska Realty, on the passing of her father
- Bruce Wilke on the recent passing of his parents – former REALTOR® Pat Wilke and REALTOR® Emeritus Don Wilke, who passed away on January 18 and February 18, respectively.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

January Activity	MO	YTD
New REALTOR® Members	25	25
Resignations	97	97

Membership (As of February 1)	2025	2024
Designated REALTORS®	190	209
REALTOR®	2926	3060
REALTOR® Emeritus	93	83
TOTAL REALTORS®	3209	3352
Institute Affiliate	79	74
Affiliate Members	131	142
Key-Only Affiliates	118	126

Full membership report at OmahaREALTORS.com/membership-report



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MARCH MADNESS

March ushers in a slew of events: March Madness, Irish American heritage Month, Saint Patrick's Day, and Women's History Month, a month when we celebrate contributions of women, like Arlyne Geschwender, who fought to get a WCR Chapter started in Omaha.

It was great to see so many leaders in the real estate community attend the WCR-sponsored RPAC Breakfast. It's important for leaders in our community to support an important organization that fights for us. There's no shortage of bad ideas, bad legislation, or new ways to tax us. Just like "Star Players" in Basketball, they're the "Star Players" in our industry who play defense and offense.

Another great event that's right around the corner is our annual Spring Fling. It is always such a blast! People get all decked out in fun costumes, listen to great music, and help the WCR raise funds for a worthy charity. This year, our charity focus is the 50 Mile March Foundation, which improves the lives of veterans. It's such a worthy cause. Check out www.50milmarch.org to learn more about their mission.

As we welcome spring, we look forward to sunnier days and all the beauty of nature. We also look forward to all the great possibilities that the future holds. We at

WCR are hard at work planning some great events in the near future. We will host great guest speakers and are planning our summer golf event. Stay tuned for more details! Be sure to check out wcromaha.com to get the latest information.

Our organization operates best when all of our members attend events and participate. Members get more out of their membership when they take advantage of the networking opportunities and get the chance to get to know all the amazing people who make up WCR. We look forward to seeing you at our next gathering.

I just wanted to take a minute to give a shoutout to all the amazing professionals, fellow REALTORS®, Strategic Partners, and most especially the volunteers, who help propel us forward. It truly takes a village. I'm grateful for each and every one of you. A special shout out to our February Spotlight Double Diamond Sponsor, Peterson Bros.

Wishing you all an amazing new season. May this be the year that you break barriers and push yourself to the next level.

May you make this spring a season to remember!

Best Wishes!
TRAC BURKHARDT
2025 President

OMAHA CHAPTER WCR

2025 Board of Directors



TRAC BURKHARDT
President



ANGIE THIEL
President-Elect



ANGELA HUNTER
First Vice President



HOLLY LOMBARDO
Treasurer



AMY DRITLEY
Membership Director



CALI RETHWISCH
Events Director

REALTORS® Make the Market

Omaha Area Residential Snapshot

JANUARY 30	2025	2024	%
NUMBER ON MARKET	2,084	1,761	18.3% ▲
NUMBER UNDER CONTRACT (MONTHS)	866	805	+7.6% ▲
NUMBER OF SALES CLOSED (YEAR TO DATE)	679	653	+4.0% ▲
EXISTING SALE PRICE (MEDIAN YEAR TO DATE)	\$287,000	\$270,000	+6.3% ▲
NEW SALES PRICE (MEDIAN YEAR TO DATE)	\$424,075	\$409,990	+3.4% ▲

AFFILIATES Add Value!



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ALL OABR MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND YPN EVENTS!

Find the next YPN Committee meeting on the OABR calendar!



PAST PRESIDENT'S CORNER

GWEN LEMKE 1981 PRESIDENT

Gwen Lemke embarked upon her real estate career after first working in the insurance industry; she eventually became the second woman to serve as OABR President. Ever the enterprising maverick, she would have multiple careers before she retired.

She started Action Real Estate in Papillion, where she served as the President. She became a Nebraska REALTORS® Association Director and served as a Nebraska Real Estate Commissioner. After she left real estate, she worked at Omaha Publications.

Gwen always thought women

could work alongside the men anytime, anywhere. "I was a REALTOR® first and a woman second," she said.

Her approach to the industry was one of collaboration and of camaraderie. In her estimation, being a good salesperson came down to how many people you knew. It is a business centered on people; people want to do business with someone they know and trust.

She shared that entrepreneurial spirit with her family, including her husband Raymond, and her son Todd. Todd started working in the family real estate business while he was still in high school, running to different offices to pick up and drop off documents.

Gwen always believed in education, which is why she attended many NAR conferences. Strong ethics were also important to

her. "You're not just a real estate agent. You're a REALTOR®" she said. It means holding yourself and others to the highest ethical standards and having an impeccable work ethic. After being in the workforce for nearly seven decades and earning many accolades, it's clear that she practiced what she preached.



Differences Between Residential & Commercial Property Inspections

What Sets Commercial Inspections Apart?

Commercial property inspections differ significantly from residential ones and require specialized expertise. Inspectors must understand complex systems, regulations, and structural requirements.

Capital Expenses & Maintenance Planning

Buyers need details about HVAC systems, water heaters, and roofing components to budget for future expenses. Commercial properties often require advanced assessments to determine potential repair or replacement costs.

Safety & Compliance Standards

Commercial buildings must meet stricter safety codes. Features like emergency exit lighting, smoke detectors, exit signs, and fire ex-

tinguishers should be serviced annually. Electrical systems over 400 amps should be inspected by licensed electricians, who use specialized safety equipment.

Roofing & Structural Concerns

Flat roofs, such as EPDM or rolled asphalt, are common in commercial properties. Inspections focus on drainage issues, structural support, and signs of material wear or deterioration. Addressing these issues early can prevent costly repairs.

Plumbing & ADA Compliance

In Omaha, PEX plumbing is prohibited in commercial properties. Inspections also evaluate compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including marked parking spaces, foam protection on pipes, and grab bars in restrooms.

Parking Lot & Exterior Checks

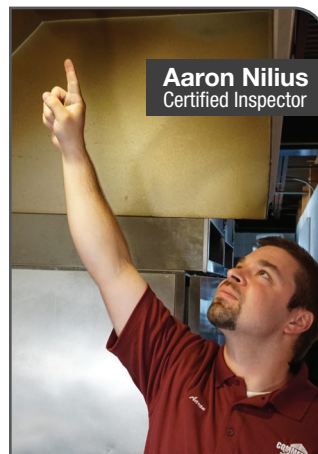
Parking lot striping, curb stops, and signage are assessed for visibility and wear. Gas meters in areas prone to vehicle impact should have protective concrete bollards.

HVAC Systems

Package HVAC units are common in commercial buildings. These combined heating and cooling systems are installed outdoors, eliminating the need for metal flues. Inspectors assess the age, efficiency, and condition of these units.

Commercial Kitchens & Grease Management

Cooking appliances in commercial kitchens, such as ovens, gas cooktops, and fryers, often require fire suppression systems and exhaust hoods. Fire suppression uses chemical agents to control flames. Grease traps are inspected to prevent drain blockages, as regular cleaning is essential.



Why It Matters

Understanding these differences helps buyers and agents evaluate inspector qualifications and make informed decisions. To learn more about the commercial property inspection process or its impact on buying and selling commercial properties, contact us today!



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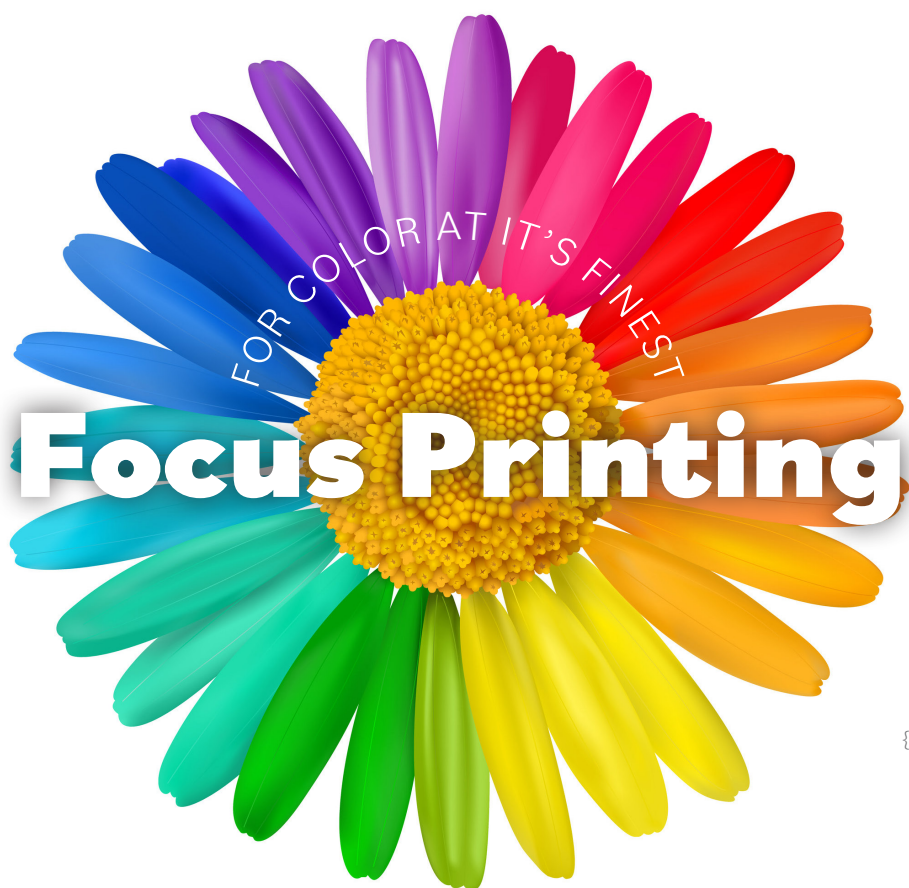
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