**NAR S2E7 -Final Transcript**

***Intro****: You're listening to Drive with NAR, the REALTOR® to REALTOR® series powered by REALTOR® Magazine. Listen as real estate pros talk tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business.*

**Marki**: REALTORS® have been busy stepping up in their communities. In June, we had REALTOR® volunteer days, which is NAR’s annual call for REALTOR® associations and members nationwide to participate in community service events. I don't know about you, but I had on my “REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors” t-shirt while volunteering with the Chicago Association of REALTORS®. We went to Garfield Park to clean the park up. Not only did we refresh the park, but we also brought our entire leadership team out and met with people in the communities in which we serve. As fun as that week was, REALTORS® are generous all year long, volunteering at nearly three times the rate of the general public, according to NAR data. But if you're trying to figure out how you can get involved or what causes to put your energy toward, there's no right or wrong answer. You may need guidance on where to find opportunities on how to identify the greatest need in your community. Let's talk with two REALTORS® who are deeply involved in community outreach. Welcome, Jenean Watson with Lyon Real Estate in Sacramento, California, and Linda Brown with Amax Real Estate in Springfield, Missouri. Linda is the 2020 Good Neighbor Award winner who transforms abandoned mobile home parks into tiny home communities to house the homeless. Linda, that’s absolutely amazing. First of all, I mentioned what I did for REALTOR® Volunteer Day, what did you ladies do?

**Linda**: In addition to the two villages we have for our homeless friends, we also have a campground, it's called “Revive 66.” It is on route 66 and it has about 55 teardrop trailers that will house and sleep one person per trailer. We did this because we could not build our villages fast enough. This is an overnight shelter. It's from 8pm to 8am, they do not live there. They then move on. It costs them $10 a night to stay. It is a safe place where they can get a good night's sleep. We furnish showers, laundry and bathroom facilities. So my REALTOR® friends, for our volunteer day, we chose the campground to work this year. We had a great turnout. We cleaned the campers, we planted shrubs and trees, we put in a stone pathway. And so we did a lot of cleaning, we hung route 66 signs on the privacy fence. So we did a lot of things which we needed done and we couldn't do it on our own. So not only did we have our REALTOR® friends come for volunteer day. But we have a competition, which brokerage had the most people present and last year, Amax won. And so that's our challenge this year, is that Amax will win two years in a row with the most REALTORS® present.

**Jenean**: That's awesome, Linda. And it's stuff like that, that I enjoy. You know, being a REALTOR® and being able to just give back and you're doing such an amazing thing because the homeless community is, it's just a sad situation. So to know that there's people such as yourself, that’s doing something is amazing. For myself on volunteer day, we volunteered at Rancho Cordova Food Bank. And so we handed out, you know, we do the inventory where we sort out the groceries and then make up the bags and hand them out and just meet the community. And it's amazing to just see that there's so many, the diversity. You know, it's not just people that's not working or you know, that are homeless, it's people that are working and paying bills and just you know, need that extra support and that extra resource.

**Linda**: That sounds exciting, Jenean, it takes all of us, doesn't it?

**Jenean**: It really does. Yes.

**Marki**: Linda, when you spoke about mobile homes and teardrop trailers, instantly I start thinking about the fact that these can also solve an affordability problem that we have that is a nationwide problem, just like homelessness is and so I just want to applaud you because that can be a solution to multiple housing issues. Clearly you are both deeply involved in your communities. I want to ask you how you get started. For those who are interested in getting involved but haven't quite figured out their path yet, your local association can actually be quite helpful, right?

**Jenean**: I mean, oh yes, absolutely, Marki. I became a REALTOR® in 2018, and so, you know, it's just a lot of information just starting in the industry, period, it was just a lot of information. So I started with the websites and with the NAR, CAR and then the Sacramento Association, so the local association, and they have a member orientation, they started with a member orientation at the local association. And there, they kind of give you a middle summary of what the association offers. And they mentioned committees, that there's different committees that you can participate in. So I went on the association's website, looked up the different committees, ways to volunteer, they have all of those options on their website, and I found a couple of different committees, but the one that was closest to me was the DEI and fair housing, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Fair Housing Committee. And so I signed up, I joined that committee. That opened up all kinds of doors, because it's directly connected with affordable housing and equality and making sure that everything is fair in the housing world. So it gave me a lot of information. And then I was elected as vice chair, which opened up additional doors, which led us into trying to find ways how can we help the community with housing, with becoming a homeowner and as a committee, we wanted to do an expo first-time homebuyer exposition. So the REALTORS® and affiliates, they just came together to help bring awareness to the community. So local people would know what is available. So we had the CAR there, golden state financial agency, Aria, as well is another organization that was there, Wells Fargo, Chase, Cal HFA, just had many different resources, we had elected officials there. And we were able to get a grant through the housing opportunity program. That's another program that NAR offers to help REALTORS® and local associations with funding and grants and training and workshops to be able to facilitate our purpose of helping the community build awareness and understand what resources are available to them. It was our CEO, actually, who is also the staff liaison, Jessica Coates. And she was able to introduce us to that grant, and she applied for the grant. And there's different levels to that grant. And there's an actual whole website on the NAR website that you can look it up and it has the qualifications. And so just going through those qualifications, our expo met the requirements, and we did actually get a grant. And it helped us out tremendously because we were able to provide an event that the community loved, we had over 200 attendees. And it was great to know that some of those people that attended will become homeowners and as REALTORS®, that’s part of what we do it for.

**Marki**: Wow. Yes, NAR does have numerous grants that are available on their website that we get to leverage in order to create or sustain community outreach. I will say one of those grants we've used here in the Chicago area. And when we actually had an event, there were numerous REALTORS® there. But we had a feeling that people did not feel comfortable really asking us questions. And so me and the president of the Chicago Association of Realtors, we decided that we would bring them the tea, so we call it the “tea” so that we could go out into different communities around the city of Chicago in order to tell people face-to-face what their volunteer opportunities are. And as a result, we're getting more people involved in volunteering, because sometimes people just don't feel comfortable asking in certain environments. So we took it to them so then they can start to step up from where they currently are. Linda, some folks may want to start a philanthropic project themselves, but they want to make sure they are addressing the true needs of their community. Your tiny home community called Eden Village, which has over 31 homes to house the homeless has been a long labor of love. Can you talk about how you determine that this was the right solution in your community?

**Linda**: Yes, Marki, we my husband I moved to downtown Springfield in 2010. And in doing that, we realized, and saw a lot of homeless people on the streets. I've always been interested to hear their stories to know why, you know, they're homeless. So we took it upon ourselves to think, you know, let's do something so that we can get to know them and find out exactly why they are homeless. So by doing that, we stepped out and opened a one night a week place for the homeless to come in, in the evening hours, that's when we saw them out the most. And by doing that, we our vision was that we would get to know them and find out their story and build relationships. And so we started that in 2010, one night a week, and that grew to five nights a week, we got ran off of several areas, because people don't like us in their backyard. So we had, we were like nomads for a while. And then we landed in a place that was perfect for us. And so we would meet with them. We would sit and play cards, sit at a table week after week after week, we sang karaoke, we listened to their stories. And what we, the feedback we got from our friends was that, you know, nobody does that. Why do you listen to us, or we've had groups that come and they'll be there for five or six months, and then they go away. And you've been here now for a long time. And they, so we built trust, not only relationships, but we built trust with them. And so we had our drop-in center for about eight years. And finally, after eight years, we were very close to our friends. And you know, when we walked out of our facility in the night and locked the door and went home to a warm bed, our friends had to go to a hiding campsite that was cold and wet. And that's when I said, you know, we have to do something. Because now they are very close to us. They have, a lot of them don't have family. So we became their family as well. So that's when we got together and just kind of brainstormed, my husband and I thought about it, talked about it, prayed about it and decided that we wanted to build a village with tiny small homes, that they would have a place of their own, to build themselves up and give them dignity and self-worth, and to give them a reason to live. So that's kind of how we got started. And we didn't really have the funding to begin that with. But we were introduced to a young man who has done something similar to this in Texas, and he became our nuts and bolts of how we get started. And at that time, we just we just, our prayer was if this isn't what you want us to do, then close the doors. And as you can see it the doors have been open wide.

**Marki**: Oh, you just warmed my heart. And I see it is a family affair. It makes volunteering a lot easier when your family is involved. I am a fourth generation Divine Nine member so I'm a part of a historic sorority, but so is my husband and my children, and they've had to volunteer with the REALTORS®, because it just makes it easier, right? A family affair? Oh, wow, that's awesome. What kind of obstacles have you faced getting your respective projects off the ground? How do you handle rejection from people who may not understand your vision and are hesitant to support your cause, Jenean?

**Jenean**: Part of the challenge is participation. You know, people have one way of thinking what the committee is. And so you know, they don't join for whatever reasons, but I find that education is the key. So just having more presence. So for our committee, we just tried to have more presence in the community as a DEI and Fair Housing Committee. And so we get involved with other committees and like the YPN committee, they had an event, and we set up a booth at their event. And we had such a huge turnout because it gave us the opportunity for REALTORS® to walk past and ask questions like, hey, what does this committee do? Because really, people don't know, you know, so we had the opportunity to talk and at the end of that day, we had maybe 40 REALTORS® sign up that they're interested, by the time this year started, we had a whole roomful of people that wanted to be on the committee. So we had a full committee of 24 members and then we had people sitting in the seats just waiting to be a part of it. And so just sharing, being involved being out there, answering questions and giving them information is the route that we're taking so far that we're seeing is effective.

**Marki**: And what about you, Linda?

**Linda**: In the beginning, it was really tough because, you know, my husband and I have been in Springfield since, and I'm not gonna tell you my age, but since the 60s, and so we've been around a lot, and so we know people. So we, we just kind of lost ourselves into talking to groups, telling about our vision, Rotary Clubs, churches, whoever would listen. And, but it was hard, you know, in the beginning to share the vision we had with somebody that didn't have our vision, and then expect them to support us monetarily. So we just kept pounding the pavement and talking about what we wanted to do. It's never been done here so they were very skeptical that it would even work. As it worked out, we had one friend who believed in us enough that they gave us a big boost of $50,000 In the beginning, which gave us a down payment on the mobile home park that we purchased for Eden Village One after we purchased that park, we had Coldwell Bankers brokerage step up, they called me and said, Hey, we want to give you the first tiny home, we're going to pay for your first tiny home. So those agents chipped in, and they purchased our first tiny home. Now we have land and we have one home. So we started touring. So everyone's visual, so once we would start touring groups, we would invite them in and give them our message about what we wanted to do. It was like the light bulb turned on. And so we had great support that started coming in to see to help us. Because we said it's a solution to our problem. It's not a band aid, we want to give these people a place to live. And so it's been amazing really.

**Marki**: Wow, you are both the face of your community service efforts, which I imagine means you need to be a hype person for your calls. Linda, I know that many Good Neighbor Award winners shy away from the spotlight because they don't want the glory, they just want to help their neighbors. How do you both deal with the challenge of having to be the hype person for your cause?

**Linda**: Well, for me, I just have to tell myself, it's not about me, it's about my passion. And so I have to step out for my friends, and do what I feel is right for them and to take myself out of it. It's been hard because you know, especially the Good Neighbor Award, you know, you get lots of attention, and I'm not good at being in the limelight, and not good at talking. Although it's hard to believe. But it's like, I just have to remind myself, what I'm doing is for my friends, not for me.

**Marki**: What about you, Jenean?

**Jenean**: I agree with Linda, totally, I enjoy people. I enjoy people and I love helping, but I'm not the most social out there just “Oh, yeah, look at me!” Like Linda, my desire and passion to help people and to be able to be a resource and make a difference in somebody's life, you know, one person at a time, that just outweighs any shyness or any uncomfortability because it's more important for me to fulfill the need, and there's a need for affordable housing, and there's a need for fair housing, and there's a need for housing in general. And that's why it's OK. I don't look at everything that I'm uncomfortable about, I look at the end result.

**Linda**: Yes.

**Marki**: Is there a story about a person you've helped that particularly touches you and symbolizes why you do what you do?

**Linda**: We have several have lots of stories, but this this young man was a meth addict for several years and he decided to become clean. He wanted to become clean and make something for himself. He was in his mid 30s. And so we offered him a tiny home and a place to live to help him get a hand up out of his hole. And so he lived with at Eden Village One and became a we hired him as our maintenance man. So he was on staff with us. He was an amazing young man. And so we saw him grow with some self-esteem and now he has purpose and a reason to get well. We have journeyed with him through this. And because of that he got his own home. Still working for us. He now has a girlfriend, he bought himself a pickup, he enrolled at college. And so now he has gone further: He has his own business, construction business, and doing very well. I have lots of stories, but he jumps out.

**Jenean**: Oh, that's awesome. So for me, I work with different people, I had someone that I was helping that I've known for a very, very long time, single mother, four children, teacher just paying bills and check to check and it just was never, they just didn't see that it was even a possibility. But then some new programs came out and just her persevering. I put her in touch with a lender and between the lender and myself, we were able to put her on a path. So within the two years she was able to go from OK, this is what my credit looks like, and just that steady, just steady moving forward to accomplish each of those steps. And now she's a homeowner. And so for her that was something that she never saw happening. And for me because I've seen the struggles that she went through and all the trials and tribulations that just keep making it happen. And then to watch as she, you know, opened the door to her house. That's a very, it's a very good feeling.

**Linda**: That's an awesome story.

**Marki**: Last week, we had our The 77 committee meeting, in the Chicago association of REALTORS®, we have one representative from each of the 77 communities that make up our Diversity Committee. And what I love is when REALTORS® bring back stories on how we've helped them through the allocation of grant programs for small businesses in each of the communities. And last week, what we were told by one of our members was that one person, we came at the right time in order to help him remain in business because he won a grant from our local association. That's who we are, in the greatest sense of the phrase, REALTORS® are good stewards of their communities, and we are the local leaders that people turn to when they need help. You can connect with a group of like-minded real estate professionals on the REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/realtorsaregoodneighbors/) and Instagram pages. I want to thank you ladies for being here with us today.

**Linda**: Thank you, Marki, for having me. It was wonderful. Thank you.

**Jenean**: Thank you so much.

**Marki**: That's a wrap.

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