

## Cover Story

# JEFF SCHNELL

## Life of Service

By Dave Danielson

In today's busy world, it's good to take a step back and see the big picture ... and the needs around us. One of those who maintains a strong focus on others is Jeff Schnell.

As an Associate Broker with Keller Williams Signature Partners, Jeff exemplifies what it means to live a life of service ... for his nation, community, team and clients.

"Faith in God and service have always been a big part of my life," Jeff recalls.

### Growing and Giving

Jeff had outstanding examples of hard work and service to follow with his parents.

"My parents were licensed foster parents since I was 5. We had a family of four for seven years and another family of three for five years. I have several foster brothers and sisters I still communicate with each week. My work ethic started with our dairy calves at the age of 7, and it continued while working for another farmer in high school. When I was 16, I took my exam and worked as a CNA through high school. I also got my EMT at 18, and was a childcare worker at a group home in college."

Jeff attended church school through high school, and then went to a faith-based college in Texas. While there, Jeff also was part of a touring acrobat team that entertained crowds across the Southwestern United States.

"Two years into college, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. So I thought, lets' go ahead and follow the family tradition of the service route. I wanted to go all the way."

He did. Jeff joined the U.S. Army and served in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Infantry.

Jeff traces his spirit of military service to his grandfather, Otis Blakely, known as "Big O".

"Big O was a multiple purple heart recipient. He was wounded on Omaha Beach in the 1st wave. As soon as he got out of the field hospital, he went back to join his brothers on the front lines," Jeff explains. "Our family's military service really started with my grandfather. I have over 30 first cousins, and about half of us served in the military. It was never an expectation to serve. But we all have that appreciation for service."

Jeff's active-duty service stretched from 1996 to 2001.

“Having served in the airborne infantry, I have brothers who I lost in Iraq and Afghanistan,” Jeff says. “I jumped out of a lot of planes, and served as our commander’s radio operator and also went to armor school. I had gotten hurt in a couple of jumps, so I went to Apache helicopter school, and became an Apache Crew Chief with the 1st AirCAV.”

### **New Ways of Contributing**

After a distinguished career and dealing with the effects of his injuries, Jeff eventually was medically separated from the service and went on to the next chapter of his life.

Right after leaving the Army, Jeff worked for the largest exterior remodeling company in Dallas/Fort Worth for nearly a year in the sales/design department. After that, Jeff and his wife moved back to Wichita, and operated a full-service interior design and full-service kitchen and bath design firm specializing in residential new construction.

“We worked together as husband and wife for almost five years, working 80 to 100 hours a week,” Jeff recalls. “Then, when our son was born, we had a nanny. As we thought more about it, my wife decided to become a stay-at-home mom so that our son could be raised by her and not strangers. That’s a big driver for me ... to provide a space where my family can not only survive, but thrive ... and also to be able to pour into others lives.”

In time, Jeff transitioned to work as a mortgage lender for nearly 10 years as a Processor, Loan Officer, Home Mortgage Consultant and Private Mortgage Banker. Eventually, the idea of real estate came along ... and seven years ago, he earned his real estate license and became a REALTOR®.

“One of the reasons I went from lending to real estate was because Trent Bannister was after me to be an agent,” Jeff smiles. “My wife had almost died during the birth of our daughter, and I was putting in 75 hours during a light week, with most weeks being more like 85 to 90 hours. We thought moving into real estate would be better ... just doing a different part of the transaction.”

### **Passion for Others**

Jeff loves what he does for many reasons. One is for his family, who is at the center of his world — his wife of 15 years, and their three children, including a 12-year-old son, 6-year-old daughter and their 4-year-old son.”

“I can work when my clients need me, but I can also serve my family when they need me. If my son has baseball practice, I can be there. I can be there for the things that matter in life... I can be there for every key event and appointment,” Jeff explains. “That’s why I do what I do and work as hard as I do. I have that flexibility and option to spend time with my family on my schedule.”

Jeff’s passion for real estate extends directly to his clients, with a big emphasis on military families.

“The military becomes a very tight-knit family for those who have served. That’s what drives me to find solutions for my military brothers and sisters,” Jeff emphasizes. “If I see a veteran in need, I want to help them and protect them through the process as they deal with the largest investment in their life.”

That sense of caring extends well beyond his career. Jeff and his family are licensed for foster care. He and his wife worked through their church to start a foster care ministry, and he has also volunteered with Habitat for Humanity on 2 committees and as a financial advisor for recipients.

In addition, Jeff and his family also work with a local non-profit to deliver Thanksgiving & Christmas meals to families, and they also shop for groceries for the week and deliver those to families for the days during Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks. At the office and through Dwell Real Estate Group, Jeff works with Veteran Based non-profits and works with the Christmas Tree Angel network.

“We take our kids along during the shopping process for the groceries and gifts,” Jeff says. “We want to show them how we can use our blessings to bless others. It’s the mindset that when you have, you give & you serve ... you bless the lives of other people.” “We are blessed to be a blessing.”

### **Family. Service. God.**

As Jeff considers his life and career, he is grateful for the gifts he has received during these challenging times.

“The center of who I am is about God, family, and service. I feel that everything about my life is blessed. One example is the fact that I will have my best year this year with COVID ... that is nothing short of God blessing my year,” he says. “April to July is typically when I see most of my business, because that’s when most of the military moves. This year with COVID, I didn’t have a single PCS transfer this summer. The only way to explain that is God has blessed me. My business still consists of just over 50 percent military buyers. I know God brought me those.”

Jeff’s ongoing passion for his work is continuing to carry out the mission of helping people — a mission that is fueled by a genuine love of others.

“I don’t do what I do just because. I do it because I have that love for people .. for wanting to protect others. In the military, we serve the country because we want to protect the nation. The same holds true with what I do now. It’s about having love for your fellow man. I don’t care what race, gender or background people represent. I raised my right hand for you and for all Americans. I love serving others.”