

# 2026 is the Year to Build Your Professional Bridge

By Mike Swaringim, 2026 President, St. Charles REALTOR® Association

As we enter 2026, a pivotal year for license renewal and a moment of undeniable change across our industry, I'm thrilled to connect with the region's top-producing REALTORS®, as the NEW President of St. Charles REALTORS®.

The real estate landscape is shifting faster than ever. Market conditions, technological advancements, and legal precedents are redefining what it means to be a professional in this business. This is not the time for complacency; it is the time for bold thinking, clear vision, and a strong sense of purpose.

My vision for this year, and for the future of our profession, is centered on a powerful, dynamic theme: Honoring our legacy while building bridges to the future.

## The Power of the Past, The Demands of the Present

Every successful agent and brokerage stands on a foundation built by the professionals who came before us. The legacy of dedication, community service, and ethical practice. We must deeply respect that foundation.

However, a good friend recently shared a piece of wisdom that challenged my thinking: "Your past supports your present, but it's your present that catapults you into your future." We cannot simply look backward. The present moment demands action, innovation, and a commitment to raising the bar. We are standing at a crossroads, and how we respond will determine who thrives.

## The Three Pillars of Futureproofing Your Business

To succeed in this evolving environment, we must proactively focus on three core areas. These are not just goals for an association; they are important for every professional serious about long-term success:

- **Elevate Professionalism:** In a competitive market, competence is the key differentiator. This goes far beyond just earning your required CE hours; it is about embracing growth. It means actively seeking the best education, mastering new technologies, and utilizing industry tools to enhance ethics, safety, and efficiency. As professionals, we must raise our collective standard, become better leaders and serve our clients with nothing less than excellence. 2026 is your year to invest heavily in yourself.
- **Uphold Advocacy:** Our business success is inextricably linked to the protection of private property rights and the preservation of fair, transparent real estate practices. Advocacy is often misunderstood as something reserved for a select few. I disagree. Advocacy is powered by all of us. It means staying informed, contributing to RPAC, and showing up when legislative issues threaten the foundation of our work. Protecting our industry is protecting your livelihood.

- Ignite Engagement: The greatest resource available to top-tier professionals is the collective wisdom of their peers. We must actively seek connection and collaboration. I urge you to look beyond your own brokerage and engage with your local association and the broader professional community. This is about building a powerful network where every member... REALTOR®, broker, and affiliate partner has a voice and a seat at the table. When you engage, you gain access to vital insights, mentorship, and a support system that ensures that, as it is said, “as the tide rises, all ships rise.”

## **The Invitation to Lead**

The changes in recent years have been challenging, and some feel they are being left behind. We, the leaders in our industry, have a duty to strengthen our professional community and bring everyone together.

I look forward to serving as a catalyst for this positive change. I challenge every reader: Don't wait for success to find you. Get involved, take that extra class, and be present. Let's honor our legacy by building bridges with boldness, with vision, and with passion.