

# A LIFE SHAPED BY THE SHORE

Rooted in Brigantine, RE/MAX Coastal Realtor **Colleen Bell** helps homebuyers and sellers achieve their goals through informed guidance backed by nearly 20 years in the market. by **BILL DONAHUE**  
photos by **ALISON DUNLAP**

**O**n a calm and quiet morning in Brigantine, New Jersey, when the island feels like it belongs only to the people who truly know it, Colleen Bell is already at work. Nearly 20 years into her real estate career, she moves through her day with the steady confidence of someone who has seen every kind of market, worked with every kind of client, and overcome nearly every kind of challenge. More importantly, she still shows up with the same purpose that drew her to the profession in the first place: helping people find their way home.

Bell, a Realtor with RE/MAX Coastal for the past 12 years, has spent close to two decades guiding homebuyers and sellers through one of the most significant decisions of their lives. In an industry often defined by numbers and negotiations, her approach is rooted in relationships, trust, and an unwavering commitment to the people she serves. It's a philosophy shaped not only by experience, but also by a life spent balancing the demands of career, community, and family.

A married mother of five, Bell entered the real estate business in 2006, when her children began attending school and she felt called to rejoin the work force. The decision was both practical and purposeful.

"I knew I wanted to go back to work and help contribute financially so we could save money to invest in our children's higher education," she says. "I also knew I wanted to do something that would allow me to help people."

Prior to embarking on her career in real estate, Bell spent four years working as a 911 police dispatcher—an intense and emotionally demanding role that required composure, empathy, and exceptional listening skills. She resigned after the birth of her second child, choosing to stay home and raise her family, in part because the rotating schedule made it difficult to maintain the life she wanted for her children.

The instinct to help others never left. When a friend mentioned real estate as a possible career, Bell was intrigued. She initially imagined real estate as a part-time pursuit. Nearly 20 years later, she laughs at the thought: “Once you get into it, you realize this is absolutely a full-time job. I work seven days a week.”

In retrospect, Bell believes she entered the industry at exactly the right moment. Starting her career in 2006 meant learning the business just as the booming market in Brigantine—a small, tightly knit island community—was beginning to soften in the years before the so-called Great Recession would reshape real estate across the country.

“I started when properties were flooding the market, and you could see the market starting to decline,” she says. “It was challenging, but it gave me an incredible foundation.”

Those early experiences helped shape the Realtor she would become. Bell has since navigated market crashes, recoveries, booms, and seismic shifts in how homes are bought and sold. She has adapted to evolving technology, new marketing strategies, and changing buyer expectations—most notably during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the industry seemed to transform overnight.

Throughout those changes, Bell’s core strengths have remained constant. Her time as a 911 dispatcher prepared her for real estate in ways she couldn’t have anticipated at the time. Both careers demand dependability, trustworthiness, and the ability to listen carefully.

“I’ve seen it all, and every market teaches you something new,” she says. “The people who hire me are making big decisions. They need to feel heard, and I’m here to listen and lead them forward.”

### ‘The Secret’s Out’

Brigantine isn’t just where Bell works; it’s where her story began. Her family moved to the island in 1976, at the onset of the casino boom, and she grew up immersed in its unique blend of seaside calm and close-knit community. She met her husband—a fellow Brigantine native—there,

and together they chose to raise their family in the place that had given them so much.

“It’s always been a hidden secret, but the secret’s out,” she says. “It’s a year-round community with kind people, great businesses, and a strong sense of belonging. It’s

What sets Bell apart is her ability to meet each client where they are. She takes the time to understand not only their budget and timeline, but also their motivations, fears, and long-term dreams. She sees them not just as a buyer and seller, but as a person.

Her role, as she sees it, is a navigator—through negotiations, home inspections, market fluctuations, and emotions—always keeping her clients’ best interests at the center. Her goal never changes: to lead each client to “the finish line” as seamlessly as possible.

Bell’s business has grown year after year, fueled largely by referrals and repeat clients. In fact, some of the people she works with today are the same ones who trusted her when she was just starting out.

“It’s been incredibly rewarding,” she says. “Many of these relationships have turned into lasting friendships.”

Bell understands why so many people feel drawn to life at the shore. For some, it’s about building a permanent home; for others, it’s about having a place to exhale on weekends or during the summer months. Her own favorite moments reflect the quiet beauty of Brigantine: walking the beach in the off-season or early evening, shell hunting with her granddaughter, and savoring the stillness that reminds her of why she fell in love with the area in the first place.

Despite the demands of a career she has nurtured for so long, Bell’s priorities remain clear. She always makes time for clients, but family comes first. She and her husband of 32 years find their greatest joy in time spent with her children, now all in their 20s.

“My children are my world,” she adds. “The simplest moments—talking about the day, shopping together, taking spontaneous trips—those are the ones that mean the most.”

As Bell enters her 20th year as a Realtor serving Brigantine and surrounding towns, she continues to show up with the same heart, dedication, and purpose that launched her career. In a business built on change, she remains a steady presence

for people who seek the homes of their dreams, building a legacy defined by service, trust, and love for her community. ■



## COLLEEN BELL: BY THE NUMBERS

**W**hile numbers never tell the whole story, they can be quite revealing. In 2024, Colleen Bell ranked in the top 20 (No. 19) in the state of New Jersey out of more than 58,000 licensed real estate agents registered with the New Jersey Association of Realtors. In the United States, she ranked in the top 1,000 (No. 894) out of approximately 2 million active licensed real estate agents. In 2024, out of more than 146,000 RE/MAX agents worldwide, Bell ranked No. 2 in New Jersey, No. 25 in the United States, and No. 88 worldwide.

safe and beautiful like all the shore towns, but to me it’s a very special place.”

That sense of place informs Bell’s work every day. While Brigantine remains her home base, her reach extends across all of South Jersey’s shore towns, serving clients with a wide range of goals and lifestyles. She enjoys helping families plant their roots in the sandy soil of the New Jersey coast, whether they are first-time buyers, growing families, or high-net-worth clients investing in multimillion-dollar waterfront properties.

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