



By Lisa A. Tyler
National Escrow Administrator

This year's National Escrow Administration's live escrow training events have been blockbusters. Attendance has exceeded expectations, and the audiences have proven to be Oscar worthy.

In Texas, attendees were on the edge of their seats for the feature presentation which affected all of them at a personal level. It was a session about their escrow license. There was a call to action, which many responded to. Read "LICENSING limerick challenge" to reveal who won the award for the challenge.

Absentee owner fraud is nothing new. It is becoming one of the preferred methods of criminal organizations that have banded together and formed syndicates to defraud U.S. citizens.

These syndicates are often located in foreign countries, working together full-time to succeed at their scams. In this story, the property was inherited by the owner almost 40 years ago, but

seemed to be a target of the fraudsters because the chain of title had a checkered past. Read "CHECKERED past" for the details.

Still learning how to spot imposters? Be sure to read "DECEASED" to discover how an astute title officer at Ticor Title picked up on the warning signs and uncovered an attempted absentee owner scam being perpetrated against a deceased property owner.

All-Star was the theme for the 2023 FNF annual escrow training events. National Escrow Administration chose this theme because of our deep belief that our colleagues are the All-Stars in the industry. Our colleagues are what differentiate our Company from the competition.

Our settlement agents, nationwide provide a top-notch customer experience, which is proven by our market share. They are the best in the industry. Read about a few of the recipients of the All-Star Award in the article titled "ALL-stars."

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LICENSING limerick challenge

In the state of Texas, if you are a licensed escrow officer you must adhere to the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) training requirements. Maintaining this license is critical and escrow transactions cannot be closed if the licensed requirements are not met.

At the 2024 Blockbuster Escrow Training events in San Antonio, Dallas and Houston, attendees learned the importance of proper maintenance of their license, regulatory guidance for charging escrow fees, and lessons learned from enforcement actions.

The audience was given the challenge to write a limerick that captures the essence of what it means to properly maintain the Texas escrow officer license.

The winner of the Licensing Limerick Challenge that sums up the compliance training materials best is **Shanna Hicks** at Alamo Title Company in New Braunfels:

My Escrow License, So precious and neat
Gives me great power, To perform such a feat
For if ever it's taken, I will be forsaken
And my children won't get to eat!

– Shanna Hicks, Alamo Title Company
(New Braunfels)



Pictured here (from left to right):

Eddie Hall, President and County Manager of Alamo Title Company

Shanna Hicks, Escrow Officer for Alamo Title Company

Todd Rasco E.V.P and Division Manager for Fidelity National Financial, Inc.

A custom letterbox with an Irish knot was presented to Shanna.

The two Honorable Mentions go to **Becky Jenkins** at Alamo Title Company in San Antonio and **Blair Nash** with Allegiance Title Company in Dallas:

There once was a girl from the city.
A Closer; smart, quick and witty.
But her license expired
And then she got fired.
Now she's out on her can – what a pity.

– Becky Jenkins, Alamo Title Company
(San Antonio)

Your escrow license is great,
So please keep it up to date.
It's not such a slog-
Like Warren G and Nate Dogg,
TDI had to regulate.

– Blair Nash, Allegiance Title Company
(Dallas)

Many thanks to Shanna, Becky and Blair for licensing limericks that will help everyone remember the importance of preserving your most valuable asset — your Texas escrow officer license.

For those of you in Texas, please continue to:

1. Confirm that your license is in good standing;
2. Ensure your contact information is current with the TDI and,
3. Schedule automated reminders in your phone to:
 - a. Complete 10 hours of continuing education 45 days before your license expiration date,
 - b. Submit your renewal application through SIRCON 30 days before your license expiration date, and
 - c. Save and then send a copy of the renewed license to your manager by email seven days before your license expiration date.

Article provided by contributing author:

Diana Hoffman, Corporate Escrow Administrator
Fidelity National Title Group
National Escrow Administration

CHECKERED past

Veronica Harrison, Senior Vice President and Escrow Officer for Austin Title, opened a sale transaction. The buyer was a real estate investor, and the sale was for a home located on two adjacent lots for \$730,000. The buyer made a cash offer and agreed to close in 13 days. The seller accepted the offer and escrow was opened with Austin Title.

The Commitment for Title Insurance (commitment) was issued. The buyer, who was in the middle of performing his due diligence, called Veronica to ask her about the uninsured deeds the title officer found in the chain of title.

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Veronica reviewed the commitment, determining this property's title had a checkered past. There were several uninsured deeds. She decided to start with the most recent ones which were executed in January 2024, but not recorded until March 2024.

Veronica did her own independent research and reached out to the grantors by obtaining their mailing address from the Central Appraisal District (CAD) records. According to CAD, the grantors lived in Fort Worth, Texas. She sent an overnight letter asking them to contact her. Then, she further reviewed the chain of title.

In 2018 there also were two different deeds; one recorded in February and one in March, transferring title back into the name of grantor named on the deed in February.

Veronica located the grantee by telephone, who explained the transaction was unwound because the grantor turned out to be an imposter. Another title insurance company insured that sale. He made a claim to that title company, who then restored title and paid their insured the policy limits.

Veronica notified the real estate agents of her findings. It was a Friday, and the closing was scheduled for the following Friday. She alerted them to the fact she would not be able to proceed until she spoke to the grantors named on the deeds executed in January. Fortunately, they reached out to her over the weekend.

The grantors were in Austin for a family matter. They drove by their properties and were shocked to see a for sale sign. They contacted the real estate agent shown on the sign. The real estate agent assured them he would immediately cancel the pending sale and cancel the listing of their property.

The real estate agent also assured them he would provide them with any information about the person he was working with who claimed to own the property. He also provided them with Veronica's contact information and urged them to contact her too. Then he notified the buyer's real estate agent and Veronica.

The transaction was canceled, Austin Title resigned as the escrow holder and the earnest money was returned to the buyer. The real owners reached out to Veronica. They told her they received her letter but thought it was just another solicitation to buy their property. They inherited the property in 1986 and had no intention of selling it.



Veronica thanked the real owners for calling, but also explained to them how prevalent this crime is. She explained their title was clouded by the deeds recorded earlier this year. She provided them with some law firms who could potentially assist them.

The criminals in this instance quietly forged a deed into the name of one of their aliases. They waited a few months to see if anyone was paying attention or not. After almost six months went by without anyone noticing, they decided to list the properties for sale, and they almost succeeded in selling it.

Veronica stopped them dead in her tracks. She realized the importance of verifying the legitimacy of the uninsured transfer which occurred earlier in the year. She tracked down the grantors herself and uncovered the forgery. The Company appreciates her efforts and has rewarded her with \$1,500.

MORAL OF THE STORY

Uninsured deeds in the chain of title pose a risk to our proposed insureds. Settlement agents nationwide are regularly charged with the duty of verifying a deed's legitimacy, much like Veronica did. Her efforts saved the Company from a potential claim.

Article provided by contributing author:

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DECEASED

On May 2, 2024, a new title order was opened and assigned to Johna Cannon, title officer extraordinaire with Ticor Title's office in Newport Beach, California. The new order was for the sale of vacant land in San Diego County for \$85,500 even though the subject property was closer to \$200,000 in value.

The escrow was being handled by an independent escrow company in Orange County. The order was opened as an all-cash transaction with a quick closing.

These are the warning signs that caused Johna to perform additional research on this transaction:

1. Non-owner occupied/vacant land sale.
2. Property was purchased by the current owner on June 24, 1963.

3. All-cash sale with a quick closing.
4. Seller insisted on using their "preferred" notary.
5. Sale price below market value.
6. Property was listed with an agent in Orange County, but the property was located in San Diego County.

Johna knew she was going to have to find out if the seller was the true owner or an imposter. She ran the seller's name through a search engine and discovered the true owner was deceased. In fact, he died in 2002!

Johna reached out to the independent escrow officer to let her know she was dealing with an imposter. Johna also alerted all

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[DECEASED — continued]

of the other title companies about the attempted fraud, so they did not accidentally end up closing a subsequent deal on the same property.

Johna trusted her instincts and as a result saved the Company from a potential claim. The Company is appreciative of her

professionalism and high degree of integrity in ferreting out a fraudulent transaction and has rewarded her \$1,500.

ALL-stars

All-Stars are highly effective and productive individuals. They are often self-starters, who are trustworthy, compassionate and demonstrate a high standard of conduct. They are tenacious and possess the ability to work with different personality traits. This month we are featuring four individuals who were recipients of the FNF All-Star award in 2023.



Tyler Svendsen

Escrow Officer
Denver, CO



Fidelity National Title nominated Escrow Officer Tyler Svendsen as their All-Star employee. Tyler is organized and efficient. He works quickly and accurately to pull off the impossible when it comes to customer demands. Tyler always lends a hand when his colleagues need one.

Tyler elevates the customer and employee experience. Fidelity National Title is grateful for his example and found him worthy of this recognition.



Win Dubose

Branch Manager and Escrow Officer
Uvalde, TX



Chicago Title nominated Win Dubose, Branch Manager and Escrow Officer at their Uvalde office, as their All-Star employee. Win has made a big difference to Chicago Title and his community with his extensive title knowledge, positive perspective and witty personality.

Chicago Title Company is grateful for Win's dedication to the operation, and we are glad to have him on the team.



Evonne Pierce

Escrow Officer
Longmont, CO



Fidelity National Title nominated Escrow Officer Evonne Pierce as their All-Star employee. Evonne approaches each workday with gratitude. She manages expectations by offering her customers a calm and welcoming experience during a very stressful time in their lives.

Evonne shares her knowledge and expertise with her colleagues mentoring and developing the next generation of All-Stars.



Kim Gould

Escrow Officer
Beaverton, OR



Chicago Title Company nominated Escrow Officer Kim Gould as their All-Star employee. Kim is a well-rounded employee who consistently steps up to help others in need, trains new employees, problem solves and takes exceptional care of customers and colleagues.

Kim has always been someone the operation can count on, has a can-do attitude and does everything with a smile. Kim goes above and beyond in everything she does. She reminds everyone around her they are valued, their input is important and she is truly happy to be working with them. Kim is one in a million.

Article provided by contributing author: Diana Hoffman, Corporate Escrow Administrator • Fidelity National Title Group • National Escrow Administration

