

# TITLENews

MAY 2020

AMERICAN LAND TITLE ASSOCIATION



**#GoodDeeds**

*Industry Responds to  
COVID-19 Pandemic  
by Serving Customers,  
Communities*

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**DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S  
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# TITLENews

The digital edition of **TITLENews** includes a webinar recording of leadership from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac as they detail policy changes that affect the use of limited powers of attorney, acceptance of remote online notarization and remote ink notarization, and requirements for gap coverage.

Go to [alta.org](http://alta.org)  
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*Digital TitleNews Today.*



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# TITLENews

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## #GoodDeeds, Indeed

### WE KNOW OUR MEMBERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY CONTINUE



**JEREMY YOHE**

ALTA vice president of communications

to serve their customers and communities during this uncertain and unprecedented time. We know how involved you are in your local markets even when there's not a pandemic, so we know you are now actively involved in helping those that might need it most. To highlight these efforts, we launched the #GoodDeeds campaign. It's been wonderful to hear of all the positive contributions our members are making.

This edition's cover article highlights some of the inspirational stories we've heard. It's a joy to see what people are doing in their towns. There's an undeniable power of human spirit coming right from your own homes. The battle cry isn't just being answered by large companies, but also by many individuals and small companies. I'm pretty sure mask making overtook Euchre as the favorite hobby. The powerful desire to help is focused on people in their own neighborhoods.

In Hilton Head Island, S.C., Rebecca Hale of Hale & Hale law firm purchased and donated six Kindles to a local elementary to allow students without access to a computer to do their assignments from home. In Indiana, Jefferson County Land Title gave back to its community heroes who are working to keep everyone safe and healthy. The company ordered lunch from a favorite local restaurant and delivered it to the hardworking folks at their county health department.

Meanwhile, Alexxa Haddock, a title agent with Douglass & Nelson Inc., said her company is finding creative ways to keep working with a sense of humor. The Indiana-based company has some splendid sidewalk chalk art on exhibit to great customers and general pedestrians in their downtown. They also print and hang funny internet memes on their office door—including a Shaun of the Dead reference and an image of Seth Rogen looking "essential."

CATIC is also bringing the fun to its staff by creating special themes to keep them connected and engaged. As an example, on Pet Day, employees submitted photos of their favorite pets.

We are only delivering the good news. You are the good news. So, keep the positive reports coming! During these bizarre times, we're missing many of the things and people we love. But we can't let that stop us moving forward.

## Nominate Someone for an ALTA Our Values Award

Don't let the extraordinary ALTA members in your life go unnoticed: Nominate someone for the ALTA Our Values Awards today! Celebrate your friends and colleagues who showcase what it means to lead, deliver and protect in the best possible ways. Up to four awards are up for grabs: three for individuals and one for an entire ALTA member office or operational team.

Some suggested ideas could be how someone on your staff delivered for a customer during the COVID-19 pandemic, how your staff contributed to a charity or gave back to your local community.

Winners will be recognized during 2020 ALTA ONE, and receive scholarships to the event and be given awards to display. The events in the story or situation must have occurred sometime



between Jan. 1, 2019 and May 31, 2020.  
The deadline to submit nominations

is June 2. To make a nomination, go to [surveymonkey.com/r/9SK6G9B](https://surveymonkey.com/r/9SK6G9B)

## IRS Agrees to ALTA Request to Extend 1031 Deadlines

On April 9, 2020, the Internal Revenue Services (IRS) issued Notice 2020-23 Providing Additional Relief for Taxpayers Affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic, which extends deadlines for 1031 like-kind exchanges.

The notice extends the 45-day identification period and the 180-day exchange period for taxpayer/exchangers whose deadlines were on or after April 1, 2020. The deadline for those taxpayers to identify replacement property and/or acquire replacement property is now July 15, 2020. It is important to note that there is no retroactive effect if the 45-day identification deadline and 180-day exchange period were before April 1, 2020.

In March, ALTA and 19 other groups requested the Treasury extend the deadlines to identify replacement property and/or complete 1031 exchanges.

Under the most common type of like-kind exchange, a taxpayer sells a relinquished property and deposits the proceeds

with a Qualified Intermediary. The taxpayer subsequently has 45 days to identify replacement property and 180 days to complete a transaction. Failure to meet the strict deadlines for identifying trade properties and then actually closing on a replacement property result in immediate recognition of capital gains income that could otherwise be deferred.

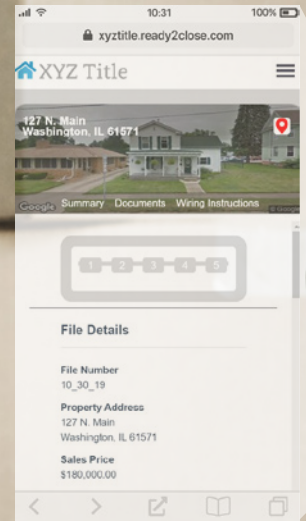


### NEWS TO SHARE?

If you have information you'd like us to consider for TITLE News, send company announcements to

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# A Different Sort of Status Update

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## ALTA Urges Congress to Provide Emergency Aid to Associations

ALTA joined 3,000 other organizations to urge Congress and the Trump Administration to provide emergency aid for associations in critical need of support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a letter to Congress, the groups asked for:

- \$25 billion in aid for associations that face financial losses from canceled conferences and events
- Eligibility for associations to access small business interruption loans that prevent layoffs and continue to pay employees
- A pandemic risk insurance program to create a federal backstop for prospective insurance claims related to a pandemic or epidemic

“More than 62,000 associations across the country play an important role to train America’s workforce, create industry and professional standards, and disseminate essential information and resources to people in need—particularly during times of crisis,” the letter said. “These organizations are already relied upon to help coordinate federal resources to combat the coronavirus pandemic, and they require staff to fulfill this duty. Associations now face, however, unprecedented financial losses from event cancellations. Most associations also anticipate further losses in dues revenues, as members address their own economically precarious circumstances by cutting expenses, including association membership.”

## Free Training Available for New Employees

Sometimes all you need are the basics—no more, no less. That’s exactly what you’ll get with our new Nuts and Bolts educational videos: the information your new hires require to get started in the land title insurance industry—no more, no less.

ALTA’s Nuts and Bolts videos are intended to train employees new to the industry on the basic concepts and terminology they’ll need to be successful. **FREE** to ALTA members, three video modules are available:

- The What of Title Insurance
- The Who of Title Insurance
- The How of Title Insurance

To register, go to [alta.org/education](https://alta.org/education).

## Membership by the Numbers

ALTA is the title insurance and settlement services industry resource for advocacy, education, communications, networking and policy standards. Here’s a look at some membership numbers from the past month.

- New Members: 88
- New Associate Members: 4
- New Attorney Members: 33
- Total Members: 5,924
- State With Most New Members: Florida with 7

For a list of the latest new and associate members, as well as real estate attorneys who recently joined, go to [alta.org/new-members](https://alta.org/new-members).

### ALTA 2020 TIPAC Donors

The Title Industry Political Action Committee (TIPAC) is ALTA’s voluntary, non-partisan political action committee (PAC). TIPAC raises money to help elect and re-elect candidates to Congress who understand and support the issues affecting the title industry. So far in 2020, TIPAC received \$139,280 from 135 donors. In addition, \$122,500 from 20 companies has been pledged to the TIPAC Education Fund. Check out who supported the industry at [alta.org/tipac](https://alta.org/tipac).





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# #GoodDeeds

*Industry Responds to COVID-19 Pandemic  
by Serving Customers, Communities*

By Jeremy Yohe



**Title Industry Responds to COVID-19:  
Our Title Is Protection**



**A**S A STATE AGENCY MANAGER for North American Title Insurance Co., Glen Stout focuses on providing agents the latest tools, techniques and services that can assist them in growing their business. Even before the current crisis, providing support was one of his passions. Stout has been able to utilize his gift by giving back to his community and bringing smiles to children.

ALTA members across the country such as Stout are stepping up and helping to deliver for people and organizations in their local communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. From making masks and purchasing readers for children to donating money to local restaurants and helping the homeless, the response to ALTA's #GoodDeeds campaign has been inspirational.

Stout and his wife started working with the Ronald McDonald House (RMH) of Cleveland more than five years ago. The couple adopted their dog, Stanley Guido, and had him trained and certified as a therapy dog. Since then, they have rescued two more dogs (Nosy Rosey and Giuseppe Luca), which are also now trained and certified. Stanley is a Yorkie Poo, Nosy is a poodle nichon mix and Giuseppe is a schnoodle.

"We have met children and their families from all over the globe when they visit the world-class healthcare we have in Cleveland," Stout said.

A conversation last fall with the executive director of RMH in Akron led to Stout launching a therapy dog program at that facility.

"We began our visits at RMH Akron with the three dogs and immediately became friends with a little boy named Peter who was going through treatment at Akron Children's Hospital," said Stout, who in February did a Polar Bear Plunge with Peter's father to benefit RMH Akron. The team was called "I Need Therapy ... Dogs!"

Two weeks ago, Peter was due back in the hospital for treatment, however the house was not accepting any new families during the COVID-19 crisis. This meant Peter and his mom would be at the hospital for the week. Stout suggested they schedule a virtual therapy dog visit with all three pups on April 1.

The first virtual therapy visit was a success after a 45-minute Facebook video chat. Other virtual visits are already planned.

"We had a wonderful time catching up and visiting with the pups," Stout said. "The most incredible part of the visit was watching the dogs interact with Peter and his mom. I think they knew they were working, and they huddled around me and the phone during the entire visit."



Glenn Stout and his dogs during a virtual therapy session with Peter and his mom.

## Providing Masks

To help during the crisis, Andrea Ewan, manager of Dearborn Title Insurance in Lawrenceburg, Ind., helped found The Dearborn County Mask Coalition Inc. The coalition will hold its third county-wide mask distribution on April 25. The masks provided are the paper surgical masks, which can be worn alone or underneath a cloth mask for extra protection.

In addition to the public distribution of masks, Ewan said the group has given over 20,000 paper masks to local health care workers and first responders. She acknowledged one of her friends helping drive the mask initiative and giving back to the community. “Kevin Wang has a heart of gold and continues to impress me with his generosity and desire to give back to the community,” she said.

Ewan said they also were able to get 500 N95 masks, which were distributed to local first responders.

Ruth Redman MTP of Black Creek Abstract and Title in Shelbyville, Mo., has also been making masks for her community. She’s made more than 20 masks for family and a group called Masks for MC. The group has distributed thousands of masks to people in Redman’s small town.

“A couple of the members are in charge of the group and we drop off masks in a collection box at one member’s home,” she said. “Another member hand-delivers the masks to whoever requests one.”

Redman’s church wants to distribute 50,000 masks.

“It is slow going for me as I am still working full time, but I try to work a little each night on them,” she added.

Lorna Koberlein, a senior abstractor with Stewart Title Insurance Company in Owego, N.Y., shared how she is making masks for a local hospital and the Mercy House, as well as for family and friends. Koberlein and her good friend, formerly of the Law Firm Coughlin & Gerhart, transitioned from making sleeping bags for the homeless to making the masks.

## Supporting the Front Lines

Christina Kass, president of Vanguard Title Co. in Michigan, shared how her company helped a nurse close on her property while working in the thick of the crisis.

“She was so tired. She was so patient. She was so kind. She was thankful for us,” Kass said. “We were in tears.”

During the closing, the nurse took frequent breaks to answer calls from patients and answer COVID-related questions.”

“We couldn’t see what was happening because she would have to put the phone down, but we could hear it. We could feel it too,” Kass wrote. “It brought the full reality of this time to heart. Our team, in this surreal reality, helped her through an incredibly difficult time.”

Wisconsin-based Guaranty Title Services is doing what it can to help its communities. Katie Schmitz, the company’s executive director, said it has donated \$3,500 to local food pantries in partnership with its sister company Info-Pro Lender Services.

Dearborn County Mask Coalition Inc. donation of \$1,000 by Ken Maddin, Susan Martin, Claudia Miller, Andrea Ewan (second from right) and Kevin Wang.







Wisconsin-based Guaranty Title Services provided 200 care packages for healthcare workers.

## Title Alliance Facilitates Closing for COVID-19 Survivor

**DESPITE EXECUTIVE ORDERS** in Pennsylvania causing confusion about the types business functions that can continue during the health pandemic, Title Alliance completed its first closing for a COVID-19 survivor last week.

Headquartered in Media, Penn., Title Alliance facilitated the closing for Keith Kline, a sheriff who was buying a new house for his primary residence.

Kline tested positive for COVID-19, but officials with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention said he was no longer contagious after seven days from being symptom free. Kline was still apprehensive coming to Title Alliance's office despite following the CDC's protocols.

Most Title Alliance's employees now work from home. Only the four-member executive team works at the office headquarters. Maria Deligiorgis, general counsel and compliance officer at Title Alliance, works in the office Sunday through Friday. She stays in a hotel and is only able to see her teenage son on Saturdays.

Deligiorgis greeted Kline at the office and provided him a croissant and coffee to help him feel comfortable.



"Are you tired of talking about your diagnosis?" Deligiorgis asked. When Kline sighed and said, "Yes, I am," Deligiorgis put him at ease by asking about his new house and what he was looking forward to now.

Title Alliance CEO Jim Campbell doesn't usually preside over closings, but he walked Kline through the process to ensure he felt comfortable and received excellent customer service.

"Jim is a great and incredibly dynamic leader," Deligiorgis said. "Leadership is something you do, not just a position of authority."

“We have also donated 200 care packages to our local healthcare workers,” she said. “The care packages include hand lotion, tissues and lip balm. Just a little something from us to say thank you.”

### RON to the Rescue

Randy Gilbert of Florida’s Title Insurance Co. shared a story how his company used remote online notarization to facilitate a transaction between a man in Georgia who was selling property to a doctor in Illinois. Gilbert said the doctor was coughing throughout the closing, but it got Gilbert thinking about how his company could help during this crisis. The title agency decided to waive the cost of RON for each transaction through April. “It’s a hard cost to us, but frankly during this time, it’s necessary,” Gilbert said. “It’s important during these times that we can march forward”

Laura Pate Rodier, the marketing director for The Title Professionals in Fredericksburg, Va., said they are supporting their local community by donating \$20 from every closing to the Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank to address the growing needs in their area. The company also set up a virtual food drive to benefit the food bank. “This allows our clients to easily help keep the shelves of the food bank stocked by using a simple link,” Rodier said. The company is also making masks to provide to Mary Washington Hospital Center.

In Orange Beach, Ala., Orange Beach Title participated in a project created by a native of the community to support local businesses during the pandemic of COVID-19. Through the Orange Beach, Alabama Photo Project, the title company donated to its “family’s” favorite restaurant, Niki’s Seafood & Thai.

“We could think of no better deserving local business,” said Mark Taupeka, owner of Orange Beach Title. “We would miss me them dearly if they closed, so we wanted to help ensure they stay open.”

Orange Beach Title also made a financial contribution to the owner of three local franchised locations of Chicken Salad Chick to provide free meals to healthcare workers in the Mobile and Baldwin County region.

“We hope and pray everyone stays safe and our local businesses survive through this and thrive when federal, state and local authorities permit,” Taupeka said.

In Athens, Ga., Fee Favor founder Jeff Edrington is helping feed the homeless. The company was sending a note and Subway gift cards to title companies across the country, asking them to distribute the cards to people in need. Edrington soon did the same thing in his area with help from his staff.



“Athens has a very large homeless population and since the city is basically shut down, the homeless have virtually no one to ask for help,” said Edrington, who attended his first ALTA ONE last year in Austin. “I recently walked downtown and there were as many homeless people on the streets as there were people walking around.” ■



**JEREMY YOHE** is ALTA’s vice president of communications. He can be reached at [jyohe@alta.org](mailto:jyohe@alta.org).

### Share Your #GoodDeeds

We would like to highlight all the great volunteerism that is happening across our industry. Whether it’s giving back to your community or creative ways you’ve modified processes to get deals closed, we want to hear your stories. Here are three ways you can share your story with us:

- Email your story to [communications@alta.org](mailto:communications@alta.org).
- Post your story in the comments section at [blog.alta.org](http://blog.alta.org).
- Share your story on Facebook or Instagram, use #GoodDeeds and tag ALTA.





# FaceTime vs. RON: Knowing the difference

**R**emote online notarization (RON) leverages audio/visual (A/V) communication technology to notarize documents in a virtual environment online. Recently, in the face of COVID-19 quarantine mandates, it has become the lifeline of real estate closings ... but not all A/V programs are compliant with relevant laws and guidelines.

While many are flocking to webcam programs like FaceTime, Skype, and Zoom to meet virtually with family, friends, and colleagues during the COVID-19 crisis, these tools do not meet the minimum technology standards established by the Mortgage Industry Standards Maintenance Organization (MISMO) and the Revised Uniform Law on Notarial Acts (RULONA), and codified by state legislation.

“Not all platforms are RON, and not all platforms are created equal,” said Danielle Kaiser, NTP, Vice President and Eastern Region Underwriting Counsel for **North American Title Insurance Company (NATIC)**. “Those platforms do not ensure that consumer data-privacy and information-security laws and regulations are satisfied. Simply put, they lack the security and safety we would want for our customers.”



SIMPLE. DONE RIGHT.

Here’s a side-by-side comparison of popular webcam programs and the minimum RON technology standards established for the title insurance industry:

Requirement / Standard	FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Etc.	Remote Online Notarization (RON)
Ability of notary and signers to communicate in real time via A/V technology	✓	✓
Ability of notary and signers to view and electronically sign a single set of documents		✓
Credential analysis and identity-proving*		✓
Secure video recording of the transaction stored in the notarial journal		✓
Audit trail of notarial actions completed in the RON transaction		✓
End-to-end encryption		✓
Tamper-evident technology to prevent changes being made to the record		✓

\*Knowledge-based authentication questions, examination of government-issued identification, biometric technology, etc.

**For more on RON in the current landscape:  
View NATIC/States Title’s white paper [HERE.](#)**







# Many Businesses Must Offer Paid Leave Under COVID-19 Relief Law

**A NEW FEDERAL LAW SIGNED BY PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP WILL PROVIDE PAID LEAVE TO employees who miss work for certain COVID-19-related reasons.**

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R. 6201), which continues through Dec. 31, 2020, provides paid emergency family leave in limited circumstances, as well as paid sick leave for people affected by COVID-19.

In general, the emergency paid-leave provisions in the legislation apply to businesses with fewer than 500 employees, but there may be some exceptions available for small businesses. Roughly two-thirds of ALTA's membership are considered small businesses.

## Expanded FMLA

The legislation temporarily expands Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protections and benefits to employees who have been employed for at least 30 calendar days and need leave as a result of a school closure or closure of a childcare provider due to the public health emergency related to COVID-19. Employees are not required to meet the usual FMLA requirements. The final legislation narrowed the available leave and removed leave protections associated with an employee's own exposure or symptoms related to COVID-19 or that of a family member. Note, however, that traditional FMLA remains available, so employees can still take unpaid leave for their own serious health conditions or that of a family members.

This new expanded FMLA leave includes both unpaid and employer paid leave. The first 10 days of the COVID-19 FMLA leave are unpaid. During this period of unpaid leave, an employee may elect to substitute any accrued vacation leave, personal leave, or medical or sick leave. After the 10-day unpaid leave period, covered employers must pay employees at two-thirds of the employee's regular rate of pay. The final legislation provides that the amount of such paid leave should not exceed \$200 per day and \$10,000 in the aggregate.

While the job restoration provisions of FMLA generally apply with respect to this new COVID-19-related leave, there is relief afforded to covered employers with fewer than 25 employees. Specifically, such employers need not restore an affected employee to his or her position if the position ceases to exist, though such an employer will be subject to other requirements, including reinstatement to an equivalent position if one becomes available within a one-year period.

## Paid Sick Leave

Under the bill, many employers will have to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick-leave benefits if an employee:

- Has been ordered by the government to quarantine or isolate because of COVID-19.
- Has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine because of COVID-19.
- Has symptoms of COVID-19 and is seeking a medical diagnosis.
- Is caring for someone who is subject to a government quarantine or isolation order or has been advised by a health care provider to quarantine or self-isolate.
- Needs to care for a son or daughter whose school or child care service is closed due to COVID-19 precautions.
- Is experiencing substantially similar conditions as specified by the secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the secretaries of Labor and Treasury.

The amount an employee is paid during this sick leave is based on the employee's required compensation and the employees' number of hours normally scheduled to work. Generally, this means paid sick time is paid at the employee's regular rate of pay (or minimum wage, whichever is greater). However, the final legislation added a special rule permitting employers to use two-thirds of the employee's required compensation with respect to sick leave associated with family members.

## Potential Tax Credits

The bill allows refundable payroll tax credits for employers providing paid family leave or paid sick leave wages required under the CRA due to COVID-19. The rule includes credit for an employer's qualified health plan expenses allocable to wages associated with the respective leaves. A refundable payroll tax credit is allowed for private employers for 100% of payments made for qualified paid sick leave wages, which, subject to further guidance, may include "qualified health plan expenses" allocable to such wages. However, this credit is limited in several ways:

- Wages taken into account are generally capped at \$511 per day per employee.
- Wages taken into account are capped at \$200 per day per employee for employees caring for a family member or for a child whose school or place of care has been closed.
- Only 10 days, in aggregate, may be taken into account.



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# The Mortgage Industry's Most Pressing Problem

Hodge-podge Approach to Loan Origination Process Introduced Security Issues and Increases Cost to Close By Paul Wetzel

**IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE LOW PROFITABILITY IS DRIVING LENDERS** to put downward pricing pressure on settlement service partners and consumers are demanding a more satisfying digital loan origination process, there are no shortage of industry challenges that must be addressed.

I would argue that there is one challenge that, if solved, would simultaneously solve many of the other issues that plague our industry. Conversely, if we do not solve this problem now, every other challenge we face will be more difficult to overcome.

So, what challenge rise above all others?

The real estate industry has never had a single, secure place where service providers can work together to efficiently close the home purchase transaction. No one working in this industry can deny this problem exists, even though the settlement process, by its very nature, demands precise collaboration, communication and data exchange. The real surprise is that the various parties involved in the mortgage origination process have worked together this long without it.

## Doesn't a Solution to This Problem Already Exist?

It's not that solutions haven't been advanced over the years. Service providers and lenders, taking a band-aid approach to the problem,

have cobbled together hodge-podge "solutions" of jury-rigged tools and technologies intended for other uses. None of these have been successful and many of them have been overly expensive and risky.

Over the years, we've seen the industry use couriers, overnight shipping, fax machines, email, messaging widgets, ill-fitting, single-process software tools and silo-inducing methodologies that have somehow become the tools of choice for closing a home loan. As a result, today's closing process is an obstacle course rather than a pipeline, leading to wasted time, unnecessary errors, lost information and high opportunity cost.

## What About Email?

Email, one of the most widespread tools used in the closing process, is a serious trap. It's very difficult to secure an email client, and the data shared via email cannot easily be transferred into the loan processor's database of record. Often phone calls are required for clarification, leaving behind notes and unstructured information that never makes it into the file. Email is the weak link

and the leading cause of wire fraud and poor data quality in our industry today.

## What's the Big Deal?

We see this problem—this lack of a single, secure place where service providers can work together—manifested in many ways:

1. **Lost Time:** We know it's possible to close a purchase money loan in 10 days, but poor methods of collaboration between settlement service partners routinely push that to more than 30 days. Every additional day the industry spends processing a loan erodes profitability. Time equals money.
2. **Rising Cost-to-Close:** Do I really need to link back to the Mortgage Bankers Association's survey data or our annual benchmarking study results to convince you that the cost of originating a loan is too high? Every lender reading this feels the pain.
3. **Data Security Concerns:** As consumers and investors drive the industry closer to entirely digital mortgage lending, the amount of data exposed to cybersecurity risks increases. As regulators lose patience, the cost of breaches increases.
4. **Consumer Privacy Regulation:** The European Union's GDPR has driven state regulators to revisit consumer privacy. California has already enacted its law and others will follow. These new requirements will involve increased costs and risk.
5. **Lack of Participant Identity:** As the security of face-to-face business transactions recedes into the past, we must find better ways to ensure that the people we interact with online are really our partners and customers and not fraudsters.

But knowing the problem is not the same thing as solving it. So, for the past 40 years or so, lenders have been working against a headwind of manual order placement, data rekeying, telephone tag, missed or lost electronic communication, and poor data quality, carrying with it a blizzard of unstructured data and paper documents.

Lenders and settlement services providers need better and more systematic ways to share information as well as communicate more effectively. They need an answer that directly solves the problem, not several quick-fixes that tangentially address it.

Right now, lenders, title agents and even borrowers will tell you that the point between sales agreement and closing, with its delays, errors, revisions and overall lack of transparency, is a source of angst for all. It's time for a better solution.

## What Does a True Solution Look Like?

Before we can identify any specific solution, we need to take a much closer look at what any real solution would have to offer lenders, title companies and mortgage borrowers.

### It must be simple.

Layering on technology isn't sustainable. The industry needs a single view into each transaction where all the data and documents live, every user is verified, and every communication is tracked.

It must work with all existing transaction management and loan origination systems, seamlessly. We must do away with jumping between tabs or applications. It must not force users to change the technology they rely on to do their work; it must make those tools more powerful and collaborative.

### It must be secure.

Data breaches and wire fraud cost the industry millions each year. A real solution would provide interactive user role configuration, ensuring that the only parties that can see the consumer's PII are authorized to do so. It must include built-in hardened infrastructure and be completely email-free to protect all parties.

### It must ensure data quality.

The framework must offer a reliable and proven structure for exchanging data and documents that is both secure and auditable. It must allow for fast, easy data mapping with no rekeying to increase data quality and produce higher quality loans.

### It must scale.

It must be built on a scalable architecture that can handle every loan the industry originates.

### It must make integration simple.

There are far too many flavors of integration in the mortgage technology industry. Many 'integrations' are simply tedious workarounds. Others go part of the way, but that's all they do. A real solution must be built-in as another feature of the LOS platform or provide functionality via APIs. The best solution should be both, integrating into a LOS while also providing the industry's best API developer's portal and support, making it easy to connect and maintain those connections over time.

### It must allow for labor savings.

It must be capable of quickly determining which documents must be reviewed and instantly identifying version changes so there's no more hunting for the latest version or comparing the wrong documents. As a result, labor costs, which make up as much as 65% of the Cost-to-Close, should fall dramatically.

### It must be affordable.

It should not contribute to the overall cost to originate, but instead create efficiencies that will lower the lender's costs.

In addition to all these things, the right solution must go beyond connecting the systems to connecting the people. Fortunately, there are solutions that are being created to solve these issues and connect people and the disparate technology platforms.

**PAUL WETZEL** is executive vice president and managing director of product management for Mortgage Cadence. He can be reached at [paul.wetzel@mortgagecadence.com](mailto:paul.wetzel@mortgagecadence.com).



# 2020 ALTA SPRINGBOARD

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## What's Your Spice?

More Than 325 Title Professionals Learn to Take Their Career and Business to the Next Level at ALTA SPRINGBOARD



**W**hat are title and settlement agents spending the most time on? What issues and trends are affecting business? How are companies turning challenges into opportunities? These were main questions addressed during the Local Scene Ideas Festival at ALTA SPRINGBOARD in Denver.

Lisa Steele of Mother Lode Holding Co. and ALTA Board member David Townsend MTP, NTP of Agents National Title Insurance Co. led the discussion before the roughly 325 attendees shared ideas at their own tables during the Knowledge Communities part of the program.



“Title agents across the country have so many differences, yet a lot of similarities,” Steele said. “It’s important to network with one another to develop great ideas.”

Differentiating from the competition in the mind of the customer is essential to gaining market share and increasing profitability. The size or location of a company doesn’t matter. Each operation is confronted with the same challenges. The chief difference is the magnitude.

The conversation touched on how companies can leverage the ability to offer different services such as digital closings, use content provided through ALTA’s Homeowner Outreach Program and build culture through the hiring process. The conversation also touched on how companies protect client funds from wire transfer fraud and how consumer data privacy laws are affecting the industry.

To drive home this point, Townsend shared the story of the great chicken war in Pittsburg, Kan., between Chicken Mary’s and Chicken Annie’s.

“How do you maintain that local touch when you expand into other markets?” Townsend asked. “It’s all about the spice. You need to let your community know about the different flavors your company offers.”

## Tech Talk

Web Raulston of Team Title Services and Samantha Budzyn of Nexsys Technologies led the discussion during the Ideas Festival focused on technology. The two helped attendees think about ways to embrace technology and use it to solve business problems and improve operations. The speakers examined the “what” and “why” of technology and discussed how to view vendors as partners. The main topics of conversation centered on the business of running the business, title production, digital closings, and how to change attitude and culture toward technology.

“Embracing technology is really about embracing change and not being fearful,” Raulston said. “Technology works like a big puzzle and how it all comes together will be different for each agent. What might be right for one agent, may not be appropriate for another.”

Cost and employee buy-in are two of the major hurdles to implementing new technology, Raulston added.

“You need to help staff understand the benefits of why you’re implementing a piece of technology,” he said.

Budzyn, who participated via video feed, agreed. She said change is hard for everyone, so companies must “work to make sure their teams understand the ‘why’ behind the changes.” At the end of the day, technology should align with a company’s goals.

“Technology is an investment—both in time and money—and you want to make sure you’re getting the best return on your investment,” Budzyn said. “Take a look at your processes before you overhaul or implement a new technology. It is so important to find those wasteful steps, so you don’t recreate the same issue or wasted step in a new environment.”



Attendees discussed the following technology ideas to drive efficiency:

### Business of Running the Business

- Use an application to track employee hours and allow them to clock in/out.
- Integrate human resources and benefits programs into one platform for employees.
- Use artificial intelligence to open the order/file.
- Take steps to become less paper-dependent.

### Title Production

- Use artificial intelligence to notify customers of file status.
- Automate scheduling of notaries.
- To Vendors: Open your APIs to allow for improved integration with other platforms.
- Remember technology does not solve the human element.
- Unresolved Issues:
  - Hyperlinking documents is a very time-consuming process on the title side (especially when you have 100+ documents).
  - Upgrade affordability continues to be a problem.
  - Software should allow for better communication between departments.

## Digital Closings

- Have conversations with lenders, real estate agents and county clerks about remote online notarizations.
- Implement and experiment with RON or hybrid closings on one type of product.
- Survey closers to find out how many documents are being e-signed.
- Vet programs and platforms.

## Changing the Attitude and Culture Towards Technology

- Set expectations to employees.
- Make staff involved in the process.
- Make sure your plan has overlap between systems and a contingency plan.
- Identify “champions” who are eager to adopt it.
- Incentivize adoption for employees/branches/etc.
- Solicit feedback and adjust.

## Talent and Diversity

Diversity can mean many things: diversity of age, gender, culture, ethnicity, ideas and more. During the Talent & Diversity Ideas Festival, Mary O'Donnell, president of Westcor Land Title Insurance Co., and Maureen Pfaff WTP, NTP, CEO of Olympic Peninsula Title Co., challenged the way attendees thought about diversity.



“Your company, management and leadership should reflect your community and the homebuying population,” said O'Donnell, who also is the current ALTA president. “With these and other workforce challenges, it's important for companies to analyze the makeup of their staff in order to remain competitive. You need to think outside the box about potential hires.”

O'Donnell pointed out that there are six million jobs unfilled in the United States, yet unemployment is at 4.3 percent (Unemployment has skyrocketed since the COVID-19 crisis). “There's a lot of companies vying for talent,” she added.

While competition is fierce for talent, finding it is another issue. Pfaff said companies need to really understand the type of culture that's desired.

“The culture of your company needs to be top-of-mind when you're hiring,” she added. “We can all teach the skills to do the jobs, but if you bring someone in who doesn't mesh with your team it can destroy morale.”

Attendees provided the following tips to hire and develop talent:

## Succession Planning/Knowledge Transfer

- Create a database of job processes within the organization.
- Crosstrain employees.
- Keep a resume pipeline and candidates you've interviewed but may have not hired.

## Recruiting and Retention

- Use Indeed, ZipRecruiter, LinkedIn.
- Utilize professional coaching.
- Develop an onboarding plan (two weeks before arrival, 30 days after, 60 days after, etc.).
- Use personality testing as a recruiting tool (Acumax, DISC, Predictive Index, Myers Briggs, etc.).
- Screen for communication skills (phone interviews and email correspondence).
- Use an internship program as a pipeline.

## Company Culture

- Give employees ownership over their goals and how they relate to the company's overall mission.
- Develop a charity/community involvement component
- Produce a weekly video message from CEO on the state of the company
- Bonus and review based on company's core values.
- Be someone a person wants to work for—less about the job, more about the leader.

## Leadership Development

- Trust employees and give them the freedom and space to rise to the top.
- Create a formal leadership development plan.
- Consider sending employees to ToastMasters.org or staff to state LTA or ALTA conferences.





During these uncertain times, it helps to know that some things never change. Like knowing who you can count on to see you through good times and bad.

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IN MEMORY

Former ALTA President  
John Cathey Passes Away

## GOLFERS KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO GET A HOLE IN ONE.

But to get two? Nearly impossible, for most. Three is monumental, but it's a feat that former ALTA President John Cathey achieved during his life.

While his individual accomplishments on the golf course were outstanding, Cathey's leadership and dedication to the title insurance industry leave an unrivaled legacy. Cathey passed away April 15 at the age of 86 after working in the title industry his entire career. He is survived by his wife, Wynona. The couple was married for more than 61 years.

Described as a man of knowledge, grace and dignity, Cathey received his Certificate of Drafting from Oklahoma State Tech. This served as the background for his long-term career as an abstractor and title insurance professional. In 1977, Cathey purchased Bryan County Abstract Company in Durant, Okla. After retiring from the company in 1997, he owned and operated Cathey Consultants. He continued working in that capacity until his death.

One of Cathey's biggest passions was advocating for the industry. He logged many hours on the phone and in person with politicians and lobbyists at the Oklahoma State Capitol and in Washington, D.C.

During his tenure as the 1986-87 ALTA president, the association worked on considering updates to the ALTA-ACSM standard minimum detail requirements for land surveys, as well as recommendations from the Policy Forms Committee for the first comprehensive update of the forms since 1970. Cathey's leadership was instrumental in the creation of the Title Insurance Assurance Company (TIAC). On issue he focused on as ALTA president was the dearth of affordable E&O insurance for the title insurance industry. Cathey considered solving this problem one of his proudest accomplishments.

Jack Rattikin Jr. of Rattikin Title in Texas served on ALTA's Board of Governors with Cathey. Rattikin, who was ALTA's 1984-85 president, said the two became good friends and worked with each other whenever they had the chance.

"John was a dedicated ALTA member, and he helped me whenever I needed his advice or thoughts, and offered many suggestions," Rattikin said. "He was not only a hard worker, he was a planner for his upcoming time as president."

At the state level, Cathey was a past president of the Oklahoma Land Title Association (OLTA) serving in that role in 1974-75. In 1989, he received OLTA's first prestigious Bill Gill Title Award, which honors those in the industry who best exemplify the high ideals, standards and dedication to the industry.

According to OLTA, if there was a problem, the first question out of anyone's mouth was "Has someone asked John?" He encouraged the association to work

together for the good of the industry.

"His wisdom, passion and integrity have fueled so many of our traditions and values that we hold dear," OLTA said in an email to its members. "Even if you haven't met John, as a member of this association, you've been influenced by him. Knowledge, grace and dignity, this is how John led the Oklahoma Land Title Association and the American Land Title Association. Let's honor him in keeping his legacy going by teaching others 'how it should be done.'"

For Herschel Beard, Cathey was more than a friend. He was a mentor. Early in his career, Beard, who served as the 1992-93 OLTA president, described Cathey as a devoted husband, father and tireless worker for the title industry. Cathey helped younger title professionals such as Beard understand the valuable service the industry provides.

"John taught me the importance of giving back to the industry that was creating a career for me," said Beard, who is owner of Marshall County Abstract Co. in Madill, Okla. "He demonstrated leadership at the state and national level."



John Cathey (center) talks with Sen. David Boren (D-Okla.) about campaign reform legislation during a TIPAC fundraising event in 1987. Others pictured include (left to right): Roger Bell of The Security Abstract and Title Co. in Wichita, Kan., D.P. Kennedy of First American Title Insurance Co.; and Joseph Burke of Commonwealth Land Title Insurance Co.

Beard recalled how Cathey and his wife were regular attendees at ALTA meetings.

"Even as past president, he never quit giving back to the association," Beard said. "I'll always be thankful for John and Wynona's friendship and the valuable lessons in leadership I learned from him."

## TitleOne Acquires Two Title Agencies

Idaho-based TitleOne, a subsidiary of Realogy Title Group LLC, recently acquired two title companies.

In Washington, TitleOne acquired Columbia Title Co., which has been in operation for more than a century. Columbia Title was first established in 1889 as Dean McClean Abstract Co. It operates offices in Walla Walla, Dayton, Kennewick and Prosser.

Ben Case, of Columbia Title, will transition from owner of the newly acquired company to managing the Walla Walla operation. That office's 20 employees will retain their positions.

"Columbia Title Company is the perfect fit for TitleOne in terms of geographic desirability, rich history and greater customer service," said Jason Vickrey, president of TitleOne. "Adding Columbia Title Company to the TitleOne family will expand our servicing capability into the state of Washington, with four new locations and the addition of an outstanding team."

Meanwhile, TitleOne also expanded coverage in northern Idaho with the purchase of Sandpoint Title Insurance. Founded in 1983, Sandpoint Title employs 14 team members serving the Bonner County market.

"We saw a strategic opportunity to increase our footprint and become the



leading title company in the region," Vickrey said. "We are excited about a collaboration of two teams centered on culture and customer service. Adding the Sandpoint Title business to the TitleOne family will expand our servicing capability into more counties in North Idaho and allow us to expand our tools and services with those customers."

Tom Williams, Sandpoint's former owner, is a 40-year veteran in the industry and will continue in an advisory role. Lonnie Williams, Sandpoint's other former principal, will manage the business' day-to-day operations as vice president and

team leader.

"We have a similar philosophy of treating our customers and employees with respect and integrity," Tom Williams said. "We're very excited and fortunate to join forces with TitleOne, and look forward to adding TitleOne's innovative technology, breadth of experience and knowledge to the services we provide to our clientele."

Columbia Title and Sandpoint Title Insurance will transition to the TitleOne brand. Financial terms of the transactions were not disclosed.

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## Bank Shot Secures Patent for Earnest Money Transfer App

Technology company Bank Shot recently received a patent for its digitized mobile application (iOS and Android) that facilitates earnest money transfers and other mobile payments.

The company's process confirms Check 21 standards, is secured through encryption and two-factor authentication and resides on Amazon's Cloud. Check images are deleted automatically from the app, and not stored on any installed picture app, Bank Shot said in a release. This recently patented process enables the user account holder to maintain control of the check, therefore it is not an automatic deposit. Bank Shot's electronic check solution enables the account holder to review each check prior to depositing, with its stoplight process of depositing on green, holding on orange and rejecting on red. According to Bank Shot, this assures that no transaction takes place until the account holder decides to move forward with the deposit.



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## AccuTitle Acquires Title Software Platform

AccuTitle, a cloud-based title management and real estate closing platform, recently acquired the title software company Closers' Choice.

The acquisition expands AccuTitle's customer base and reach into the southeastern region. Together, the companies power title agencies across the eastern seaboard with over 1,100 clients processing more than 450,000 transactions annually.

"The synergies of these two exceptional teams and technology solutions leverages decades of industry experience to offer premium Realtech software solutions," said Bill Bartzak, CEO of AccuTitle. "We are excited to offer best-in-class solutions, exceptional customer service, and the ability to quickly launch innovative products."

With the addition of Closers' Choice, AccuTitle expects to offer improved functionality and integrations, connecting essential third-party organizations for its entire client base.

The entire Closers' Choice team will join AccuTitle, according to a release.

## WAULT to Release Software Update to Assist Notarizations

To assist the real estate industry conducting remote audio/video notarizations, WAULT will release a free updated version of its patented technology to help users participating in these closings during the COVID-19 crisis.

"Many states are allowing for real estate closings to happen remotely using standard video conferencing software like Zoom, Skype or even Facebook Live," said Tom Cali, director of business development at Wymysical Inc. "Utilizing our WAULT technology will allow individuals to securely share and verify

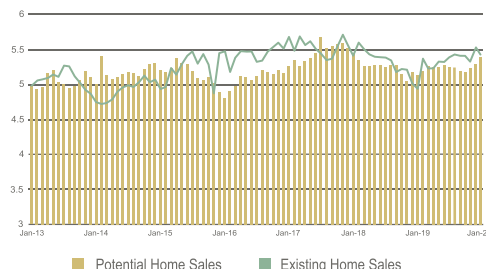
## Housing Market Potential

Existing and Potential Home Sales\* (in Millions, Seasonally Adjusted Annualized Rate)

**5.42** SAAR  
Existing Home Sales

**5.39** SAAR  
Potential Home Sales

**+0.5%**  
Market Performance Gap



\*Potential home sales measures what a healthy market level of home sales should be based on the economic, demographic and housing market environments.

## National Consumer House-Buying Power

How much home one can afford to buy given the average income and the prevailing mortgage rate

January 2020

**\$423,258** **+13.2%**  
House-Buying Power Year-Over-Year

## Where House-Buying Power is Strongest

Top States and Cities

### States

1. Maryland: **\$561,631**
2. New Jersey: **\$553,975**
3. Hawaii: **\$543,654**
4. Massachusetts: **\$538,188**
5. Connecticut: **\$537,529**

### Cities

1. San Jose, CA: **\$813,004**
2. San Francisco, CA: **\$731,035**
3. Washington, DC: **\$711,889**
4. Boston, MA: **\$622,713**
5. Seattle, WA: **\$576,151**

Source: Mark Fleming, Chief Economist at First American Financial Corporation

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their identity to the notary, meeting the stringent requirements of lenders and title underwriters.”

WAULT will help notaries verify the identity of the signers and securely store the recording of the video closing. Most importantly, WAULT says its technology give lenders and underwriters the verification and security necessary to accept this process.

The free version of WAULT will be released on April 28 and be available to individuals and independent notaries via AppStore for iPhone users or Google Play Store for Android users.

## ClosingCorp: Closing Costs Averaged \$5,779 in 2019

Last year, closing costs for a single-family property averaged \$5,749 including taxes—\$3,339 excluding taxes—according to data released by ClosingCorp.

“In 2019, the U.S. mortgage industry originated more than \$2.3 trillion in purchase and refinance loans—a significant year-over-year increase in volume,” said Bob Jennings, chief executive officer of ClosingCorp. “Unlike the cost of many products that spike when demand goes up, the costs associated with mortgage closings remained flat in 2019. This was good news for homebuyers. In fact, the difference in the average closing cost between 2018 and 2019 was only \$30, including taxes, and \$5, excluding taxes.”

ClosingCorp analyzed 1.6 million single-family purchase transactions—roughly 33 percent of all single-family existing home purchases last year.

ClosingCorp’s calculations include lender’s title, owner’s title, appraisals, settlement fees, recording fees, land surveys and transfer taxes. ClosingCorp uses home price data from CoreLogic to estimate closing costs for an average home at the state, core-based

statistical area (CBSA) and county levels. ClosingCorp uses ranges, rather than single values, because it allows them to more accurately capture fees associated with the real transactions.

Jennings attributed much of the cost control to the increased use of technology by both lenders and settlement services providers, which enabled the industry to scale up capacity while holding the line on closing costs.

“It will be interesting to see if this trend continues in 2020, as record low interest rates were accelerating refinances just before the industry began to face the national COVID-19 emergency,” he noted.

The 2019 report shows the jurisdictions with the highest average closing costs, including taxes, were:

- District of Columbia (\$25,800)
- Delaware (\$13,273)
- New York (\$12,847)
- Washington (\$12,406)
- Maryland (\$11,876)

The states with the lowest closing costs, including taxes, were:

- Indiana (\$1,909)
- Missouri (\$2,063)
- South Dakota (\$2,159)
- Iowa (\$2,194)

## RamQuest Introduces ready2close

RamQuest recently launched a new communication tool that enables title companies to more efficiently and effectively connect with their customers during the closing process.

Called ready2close, title companies that use RamQuest can offer a secure, easy-to-access portal to see at-a-glance order progress and other important file information. In addition, ready2close enables RamQuest agents to customize and brand email and/or text updates that are automatically sent as important closing milestones are reached. This new tool increases transparency during the

closing for consumers, real estate agents and lenders.

“We’re excited to have access to all of the tools it allows and to have a technology that enables us to communicate so easily with our clients,” said Stephanie Kamrath-Wright, closing department manager at Assurance Title Services.

Additionally, ready2close reduces the need for in-person communication. From enabling e-signing capability to providing a place for secure document retrieval/exchange and wiring instruction communication, ready2close enhances RamQuest’s agents’ ability to work remotely.

## Recent Integrations

- **Adeptive Software**, developer of ResWare, has partnered with **Beyond Computer Solutions** (BCS) as an IT solutions provider option for its customers. BCS offers network design and deployment, server and network management, Office 365 support and cybersecurity.
- **Stewart Title** integrated its title and escrow services with **Mortgage Cadence’s Collaboration Center**. With the integration, Mortgage Cadence customers can place title orders, receive automatic status updates and make changes to orders from Stewart.
- **ClosingLock** is now integrated with **Notarize** to provide ordering of remote online notarization (RON). ClosingLock’s current Notarize integration works exclusively for RamQuest Closing Market customers, with plans for a web interface.

## News to Share?

Have an announcement about your company, such as an acquisition, new product or new hire? Email us at [communications@alta.org](mailto:communications@alta.org).



# **NOT YOUR FATHER'S TITLE COMPANY**



**AmTrust Title**  
An AmTrust Financial Company

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## SYNRGO Taps President

California-based SYNRGO has named Ben Sherman as president and chief operating officer. In this role, Sherman is responsible for all daily operations as well as setting measurable goals for SYNRGO's growth and performance. He will be establishing new policies that build on the company's foundation and promote the company culture and vision. Sherman previously worked at Old Republic Title and ePN.

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## Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund Names CFO

Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund Inc. has named John Francoeur as senior vice president and chief financial officer for its family of companies. Francoeur is responsible for all areas of finance, including accounting, financial reporting, budgeting, cash management, profitability reporting, and the implementation and monitoring of controls across the organization. A CPA, Francoeur has worked at MB Financial Bank, KPMG and JPMorgan Chase.

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## First National Title Announces Several New Hires

First National Title Insurance Company (FNTI) continues to grow and is now operating in eight states. To accommodate the expansion into Arkansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and Tennessee, new staff has been added to service the business in currently licensed and the newly added states.

- Rustin Khavari, vice president/claims and underwriting counsel: Khavari brings experience from both the agency sector of the title industry and private practice. He has experience in surface and mineral title examination, and law firm experience, in civil litigation and transactional law.
- Tara Caballero, agency representative: Caballero has worked in the title industry since 2016 where she was a client relations manager with a large Texas title company. Her duties will include supporting the existing title agents as well as growing the business and adding additional agents.
- David Dickard, vice president/western regional underwriting counsel: Dickard will serve in this capacity for Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona

and Nevada. Over the past 23 years, he has worked for national underwriters in both Colorado and Arizona as underwriting counsel and claims counsel as well as serving as president of a direct operation in Colorado Springs.

- Lori Gardner, director of licensing and compliance: Gardner joins the company with more than 20 years of experience in the insurance industry. Starting in property and casualty and making the transition to title in 2004, she has a multi-discipline background including customer service, P&C claims, training and business analysis.

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## National Investors Title Adds to Executive Team

National Investors Title Insurance Company, a subsidiary of Investors Title Company, has named Tom Berry as executive vice president of market development. Berry will focus on business development in Texas and on strategic growth opportunities in other key markets. Prior to joining National Investors, he served as president of the central Texas region for a Texas-based title company.

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## WFG National Title Makes Several Staffing Announcements

WFG National Title Insurance Company recently made several new hires to its team.

- Heather Krablin has joined the company in a newly created role of senior vice president and chief human resources officer. Krablin will be responsible for ensuring that WFG's human resources policies, objectives and initiatives support the company's overall goals and objectives.
- Jacquie Brink was promoted to senior vice president and Great Lakes Division manager. She will work with title agencies in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Brink, who brings more than 30 years of industry experience will assist agents with sales and marketing strategies, operation management and business development.
- Suzanne Tinsley is now Southwest regional manager. She is responsible for daily agency operations in Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Tinsley began her career in the real estate industry in 2001.





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## We Are Essential

**AS WE PUSH INTO THE SECOND MONTH** of stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several traditional mainstays of this country continue to be canceled or postponed. While there may be online versions, seniors will miss the customary pomp and circumstance, while prom dresses and tuxedos will only be shown off virtually instead of on the dance floor.

Sporting events have ground to a halt. For many, baseball has significant meaning, with the opening-day pitch a symbolic day on the calendar. It's America's sport for a reason. It brings us together, but it's been shelved during a time we're supposed to stay apart.

For the industry, organizations are rescheduling events and offering online programs. ALTA has closely monitored the health crisis and started replacing in-person meetings with virtual options last month. After canceling the 2020 Advocacy Summit, ALTA quickly put together a three-part online series. The first program discussed how new guidance from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac impacts the title industry. The second program looked at the different ways title companies are closing deals. The third webinar featured a discussion between FHFA Director Mark Calabria and ALTA CEO Diane Tomb.

We will continue to provide vital information to help you through this crisis. Whether it's through our daily e-newsletter with COVID updates or by developing additional opportunities for online learning, we are here to help provide guidance.

It didn't take guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to convince us that title and settlement professionals are essential businesses. We know the services and work we provide are vital to the economic well-being of the country, helping consumers purchase homes and refinance mortgages.

It also was reassuring to see a memo issued March 22 by U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin that reinforced the fact that settlement and insurance services are considered "essential."

However, throwing a wrench into the mortgage process was the fact that many recording jurisdictions across the country closed or limited hours of operation. The inability to record and process documents in a timely manner is increasing the gap period.

Thanks to efforts by ALTA and state land title associations, the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) updated its guidance to classify government offices that assist title searches and recording services as essential, recommending that they should remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The daily grind under these circumstances may have you wondering, what is all this all for? We are not out of the woods, but there's light at the end of the tunnel. I recently saw a story out of Oregon about what is believed to be the world's oldest COVID-19 survivor: Bill Lapschies, a 104-year-old WWII veteran. When asked how he was able to get well, he simply said, "I don't know. It just went away." It's a pretty stoic response, but reminded me of the almost nonchalant way our industry has responded to keep transactions moving. It's not just the nurses and doctors on the front lines—there are many people keeping this country going and rising to the challenge. We're in this together. We're all essential.



**MARY O'DONNELL**  
ALTA president

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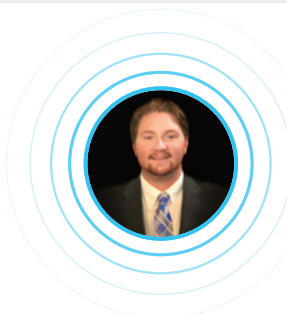
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