

CANOPY CEO GUIDING IN THE CAROLINAS AS INDUSTRY MOVES FORWARD

With her motto, 'Knowledge is power, but sharing knowledge is empowering,' Anne Marie DeCatsye leads agents fearlessly and fruitfully.

[HOME](#) [AGENTS](#)

By [Michael Catarevas](#)

[August 23, 2024](#)

Reading Time: 7 mins read



During these times of residential real estate practice changes and new legal logistics, Canopy REALTOR® Association/Canopy MLS has an ace in the hole with CEO Anne Marie DeCatsye. While advocating for the value of a REALTOR® and executing an effective consumer education campaign, she also has a law degree, which helps immeasurably as she guides thousands of agents in the Carolinas.

One of DeCatsye's core beliefs is that "conversations between the REALTOR® and the consumer may change, but the services that the REALTOR® provides to their client will not. It may be more important than ever to hire a skilled real estate professional who is able to represent the best interests of the client while helping them navigate through the already complicated real estate terrain." That message became part of a wider strategy used by Canopy's marketing team, coupled with DeCatsye's leadership and influence to dispel rumors and share correct information. She recently spearheaded a presentation titled "Legal Landscape, Practice Changes and the Value of a REALTOR®," and began visiting large and small brokerages, conducting the presentations in person and virtually, covering nearly all of Canopy MLS's 26-county footprint (23 in North Carolina and three in South Carolina) and reaching more than 6,000 REALTOR® members alone.

DeCatsye spoke with RISMedia about current market conditions, agent issues, leading Canopy forward and more.

Michael Catarevas: This is clearly one of the most fascinating and challenging times in real estate history. Can you start by giving your general thoughts, and how as a leader you guide Canopy?

Anne Marie DeCatsye: I'm known for being big on communication. My personal motto is "Knowledge is power, but sharing knowledge is empowering." So I'm very big on making sure that from the receptionist to the building facilitator and

everybody in between, that all staff are kept apprised of issues that are happening in the industry.

We talk at full-staff meetings about the issues that are either headed our way or are being discussed because I want to make sure that all the staff are comfortable knowing, not necessarily talking about it, but knowing what's happening, and that they can feel free to ask questions. So it kind of starts internally. Then externally you cannot over-communicate with members. There are too many different generations in the business and too many different means of communication, and you just have to use them all.

MC: You led the origination and presentation to members of "Legal Landscape Practice Changes and the Value of a REALTOR®." Can you talk about how it's been received and if there have been questions you hadn't anticipated?

AMD: It's actually been a fun experience to reconnect with a lot of members directly. I think they have really appreciated it. Myself and our general counsel have kind of divided and conquered. We've gone to any office that wants us to come speak. To a certain extent, some members who have not really been in touch or not active at the association are pleasantly surprised that we're willing to come and meet them where they are and not force them to come to a meeting at the association, and that we're really kind of trying to give the full picture, because the presentation starts with what led to the lawsuit, then what happened with the lawsuits and then what came out of the lawsuit. Some questions have made it clear to me that members read the national media and they're confused because the national media might be focused on a different state. So what they're hearing are things that don't necessarily apply in North Carolina or South Carolina. And for those members who haven't really been involved in their local association or the MLS that is contributing to the confusion. We've been doing a consumer advocacy campaign for probably the last 10 or 15 years. It's just a new focus this year. I think the members really appreciate that we are saying this year it's about reminding listing agents why buyer agents are important and then educating the consumer why buyer agents

are important in the process. And that's gone over pretty well. I don't know the answer to all the questions I get asked, and have no problem telling a huge audience, 'That's a great question. I don't know.'

MC: Are you singularly focused on North and South Carolina because that's where your REALTOR® associations are?

AMD: Yes. When it comes right down to it, the way it's going to play out largely is through the forms in North and South Carolina. Both state associations have modified the forms to take into account what's required in the settlement agreement. We started early intentionally. We took compensation out of the MLSs August 1 because we wanted to make sure we could get the kinks out on the tech side and then make sure the members have plenty of runway to get going in this new world.

MC: The plaintiffs' lead attorney for the Burnett case said his team is watching real estate firms and MLSs closely, and if there's anything untoward, there will be new lawsuits filed. Do you consider these scare tactics?

AMD: I do. I think the plaintiff attorney's entire approach has been to distort the reality and the truth about what and how our brokerages do business, which has been unfortunate. The whole basis of the changes is based on the distortion of truth, and therefore scare tactics for consumers. But at the same time, we are also making an effort to remind our members to really be smart about what they say on social media. There's no such thing as a private, closed social media group. And I do not allow Canopy staff to monitor private Facebook sites, but we do have members who will let us know if something is stated that's just flat wrong, and we will equip our members with the correct information to post. It's amazing what some people think they can say when they think nobody else is reading it. That will come back to hurt some members, and it's really unfortunate, but I'm one of those people that feel it's also unfortunate that the plaintiff attorneys were able to be successful in that first case because it was not a true picture of what happens in our industry.

MC: What are your thoughts on new buyer contracts and how they'll be viewed by homebuyers?

AMD: North and South Carolina were two of the 12 states that already had buyer agency by law for the last 20 years. And that's another frustration I have with some of our members reading national media thinking somehow things have changed dramatically when they haven't. Now the big change is that you have to have a buyer agreement, but not necessarily a buyer agency agreement, before a showing. But North and South Carolina law for 20-plus years has said you have to have a buyer agency agreement before you make an offer. So it's just sort of backing up the process a little bit. And both of our states' regulatory bodies and associations have what I would consider consumer-friendly forms. To compare us to a state that didn't have buyer agency and is scrambling to create a form is apples and oranges. So that's a little frustrating.

I do think that if a seller wants to compensate the buyer agent, they should have the right to do that through their listing agent or directly. But to say it's one way or the other, I think that limits consumer choice. And it is also going to limit what consumers are able to afford to buy if they also have to pay the buyer agent. I'm super sensitive to the impact this may have on minority first-time homebuyers and low-income homebuyers who all of a sudden are now faced with even more expenses between the down payment and the closing costs and now possibly paying their agent a fee.

MC: As a leader of thousands of agents, I'm sure you're aware of the potential agent exodus, that some may not want to stay in the industry and/or don't think they're going to be able to make the kind of money they have in the past. What are your thoughts?

AMD: Well, because North and South Carolina have always had buyer agency, I don't really think it's related, at least for us, it won't be related to the practice changes necessarily. I think it is possible there could be an exodus if we don't start seeing more inventory. As far as whether they won't make as much money? Well, will they not make as much money because there's not as much inventory

or is this an opportunity to really start being paid what your value is? I think it could be interesting to see over the next couple of years if there's changes in compensation structures at different brokerages.

MC: Talk about some of the features and programs within Canopy.

AMD: Sure. We have a REALTOR® education series for our members called Realtor Hot Topics. We also have broker-in-charge briefings, and we've pretty much gone all Zoom since 2020, in addition to which we're very regional. We had speakers as soon as the settlement was announced, using every possible education class for our members. Our Town Hall event had over 1,100 members on Zoom.

I am very proud of our website (brokerrelations.canopyrealtors.com) where members have access to everything about the lawsuit, the state associations and their forms, and all the resources from the National Association of REALTORS®.

MC: Anything else you'd like to express?

AMD: Yes, and it's a pet peeve of mine. Some people are like, "What's the Canopy REALTOR® Association? Why would I want to join a REALTOR® association?" Everybody knows what the American Bar Association is. It is the professional trade association for members of the bar, for attorneys. Everybody should understand that the REALTOR® Association is our professional trade association. It is important from an advocacy standpoint and education standpoint. The Canopy MLS is a tool. It's important, but it doesn't define your profession. Because I run both, I'm very passionate about both, but I also say they are both extremely different entities with extremely different purposes, and they're both important.