LOCAL EXPERTS MAGAZINE

localexpertsmagazine.com
August 2026 · Issue 5

BIG BEND, FLORIDA

JAMES MAHIEU SENIOR LOAN OFFICER, NORTHPOINTE BANK • 17 YEARS LENDING • DSCR SPECIALIST • 2025 NORTH STAR AWARD WINNER • LICENSED IN ALL 50 STATES

THE MAN WHO GETS THE EXCEPTION

How mortgage veteran James Mahieu turns “you don’t qualify” into closed loans for real estate investors — by lending on the property, not the paperwork

THE MAN WHO GETS THE EXCEPTION

How mortgage veteran James Mahieu turns “you don’t qualify” into closed loans for real estate investors — by lending on the property, not the paperwork

The deal should have died twice.

A real estate investor had inherited a property from his mother after she passed away. It carried a first mortgage at a 3% interest rate — the kind of rate nobody willingly gives up in today’s market — and more than $100,000 in trapped equity he wanted to pull out and roll into his next purchase. On paper, it looked simple. In practice, it hit a wall almost immediately.

First, his credit score came in at 678. The program required 680. Two points short.

Then, after that hurdle was cleared, a second one appeared: the loan program required a clean 12-month payment history on the existing mortgage, and the record showed multiple 30-day late payments. Except those lates hadn’t happened on his watch. They occurred in the months before he was legally added to the loan in January — back when the mortgage was still in his late mother’s name.

Most loan officers would have stopped at the first “no.” James Mahieu doesn’t work that way.

“A lot of times there’s a misconception that guidelines are really rigid,” he says. “If you don’t fit into the box perfectly, the deal’s dead. But that’s where being a great loan officer — and understanding all of your programs and where you’ve got some flexibility with underwriting — really matters.”

James closed that loan the Friday before we spoke. The investor walked away with over $100,000 in cash, kept his 3% first mortgage completely intact, and is now preparing an offer on his next property. It’s the kind of outcome that has quietly built James a 4.97-star reputation across more than 225 client reviews on Experience.com, Zillow, and Google — and a career that now spans 17 years in the mortgage business, eight of them at Northpointe Bank, where he’s a Senior Loan Officer and a 2025 North Star Award winner.

This is the story of how he does it — and why real estate investors across all 50 states have learned to call him first.

> Most loan officers would have stopped at the first "no." James Mahieu doesn't work that way.

50	17 Yrs
States	Experience

THE PROBLEM WITH BEING A REAL ESTATE INVESTOR

Here is the cruel irony most investors run into: the more successful you get at building a portfolio, the harder traditional lenders make it to grow.

Conventional mortgages are built around one number — your debt-to-income ratio. Lenders want to see a steady W-2 paycheck, tax returns that show high income, and a tidy financial picture. But serious real estate investors do the opposite of what those guidelines reward. They write off expenses. They depreciate assets. They reinvest profits into more property. On paper, a savvy investor with a growing portfolio can look like someone who barely makes any money at all.

"That's the beauty of the DSCR loan," James explains. "We're not looking at a person's debt-to-income ratio. It's simply based on: can the property pay for itself?"

DSCR stands for Debt Service Coverage Ratio — a term that sounds far more intimidating than the idea behind it. In plain English, a DSCR loan qualifies the property, not the person. The lender looks at the rent the property brings in versus the mortgage payment it has to cover. If the income covers the cost, the property qualifies. Your tax returns, your write-offs, and your day job never enter the conversation.

For an investor who's been turned down by a conventional lender despite owning real estate outright, that shift is the difference between stalling out and scaling up.

AN INVESTOR WHO HAPPENS TO LEND

Plenty of loan officers can define a DSCR loan. Very few of them own the properties they're lending against.

"I'm an investor myself," James says. "I'm not just a lender. I own short-term rentals, and I look at them as investment opportunities."

That distinction shapes everything about how he works. When a client is weighing whether a beach rental will cash flow, James isn't reading it off a worksheet — he's run the same math on his own properties in seasonal markets. When someone is nervous about a projected rent figure, he understands the anxiety because he's felt it with his own money on the line.

It also explains why he was early to DSCR lending in the first place. When the programs first appeared roughly four or five years ago, James recognized immediately what they meant for people like him.

"I feel like I was one of the first people to really start doing these DSCR loans," he says, "just because it's something that, as an investor, I understood. This program is the absolute best program for those types of investors looking to grow their portfolio who, on paper, don't show that they make a lot of money."

He started a DSCR-focused Facebook group around the same time, before most lenders were even talking about the product — a place to connect with like-minded investors using the loan to build. Years later, that early conviction has turned into a specialty most loan officers still can't match.

> A lot of times there's a misconception that guidelines are really rigid

WHY "IN-HOUSE" IS THE WHOLE GAME

To understand why James can get exceptions when others can't, you have to understand how Northpointe Bank is structured — because it's the quiet engine behind every "yes."

Many mortgage originators are brokers. They take your loan, shop it to outside investors and underwriters, and live or die by those third parties' guidelines. When a broker runs into a snag, they're often stuck: the guideline belongs to someone else, and there's no one in the building to argue with.

Northpointe does these loans in-house.

"We're not brokering out the loan and having to deal with other investors and underwriters and what their guidelines are," James says. "Because we do these loans in-house, it's our investors, it's our guidelines. And ultimately, we are very liberal in the sense that I get exceptions approved all the time for people."

That's not marketing language — it's a structural advantage. When the guidelines and the underwriters are under the same roof, a loan officer with credibility and a well-built case can pick up the phone and make the argument. Which is exactly what happened with the inherited property. The late payments technically violated the rule, but they belonged to a deceased borrower who preceded the client on the loan. James took that common-sense case to his direct underwriter, and the exception was granted.

The credit-score gap got solved with a different kind of resourcefulness. Rather than sending the client away to "come back when your score is higher," James used what-if simulation tools — software that models how specific paydowns could affect a credit profile — to map a path forward. After running a few scenarios, the borrower moved from 678 to 686, clearing the 680 threshold. (Every credit situation is different, and no outcome is guaranteed — but modeling the path beats guessing at it.)

Two roadblocks. Two solutions. One closed loan.

THE SHORT-TERM RENTAL THAT DIDN'T PENCIL — UNTIL IT DID

The inherited-property deal isn't a one-off. It's a pattern.

James describes another investor buying a short-term rental property whose projected rental figures came in a little lower than the program wanted. On a DSCR loan, the ratio generally needs to hit at least 1:1 — meaning the property's income at least equals its debt payment — to qualify for the minimum down payment. This one landed just under.

A rigid lender declines the file right there. James did something else.

"Instead of just saying, 'sorry, can't do it,' I went to the investors and said, look, this person's got all these reserves, they've got this credit score, they're good. Can we make an exception and let them still do the minimum down payment? And I got the exception approved."

The lesson he draws from it is one every investor should tattoo on the back of their hand: "It's not just cut and dry. If the guideline says this, that is not a cut-and-dry thing. We take a common-sense approach. If it makes common sense, then we'll do it."

That instinct — to look at the whole borrower rather than a single failing metric — is why one client review reads simply: *"James saved my loan. My previous lender dropped the ball. James was able to get an exception granted for me that saved the loan, which saved me thousands of dollars I would have lost because I was past the date to back out."*

James has a more colorful way of describing that part of the job.

"I can't tell you how many times I've had to put my Superman cape on and come save the day," he laughs, "because somebody ran into an issue trying to go through a broker, and then they were stuck on these guidelines, and something came up at the last minute. I'm very used to doing that. You get some thick skin doing it, too."

> " If you don't fit into the box perfectly, the deal's dead.

THE DSCR SECOND MORTGAGE ALMOST NO ONE OFFERS

Buried inside that first story is a capability most investors don't even know exists — and most lenders don't offer.

The inherited-property client had a 3% first mortgage he had no interest in touching. In an era of dramatically higher rates, refinancing that loan to pull cash out would have meant surrendering an irreplaceable rate on the entire balance. For a lot of investors, that trade-off kills the whole idea of accessing their equity.

James didn't refinance it. He placed a DSCR loan as a *second* mortgage behind it.

"With this program, it's unique in the sense that you can just do a DSCR loan as a second mortgage on the property," he says. The first mortgage — and its 3% rate — stays exactly where it is. The DSCR second sits behind it and unlocks the trapped equity, in this case more than $100,000, without disturbing the low-rate loan at all.

For investors sitting on properties they financed when rates were low, this is a quietly powerful tool. It means equity and a great rate are no longer an either/or decision.

INTEREST-ONLY, SEASONAL MARKETS, AND CASH FLOW

Another feature investors routinely overlook: how flexible the payment structure on a DSCR loan can actually be.

“A lot of people don’t realize with DSCR that generally they’re 30-year fixed loans,” James says, “but you also have the option to do the first 10 years as interest-only.”

For an investor focused on maximizing monthly cash flow, that option changes the math. During the interest-only period, the required payment drops to its minimum — and, importantly, the borrower can still pay down principal whenever they choose. They simply aren’t obligated to.

James points to where this matters most: seasonal markets. A short-term rental in a coastal beach town or the mountains of Tennessee might be booked solid for a stretch of the year and nearly a ghost town the rest of it. The interest-only option lets an owner carry a lighter payment during the slow months, then throw extra at the loan when the property is producing.

It's the kind of structuring advice that only comes from someone who has actually owned rentals through an off-season — and it's a big reason investors in vacation markets seek James out specifically.

> "This is the story of how he does it — and why real estate investors across all 50 states have learned to call him first.

ALL 50 STATES, NO GEOGRAPHY PROBLEM

One of the practical frustrations of building a portfolio is that opportunities rarely stay in your backyard. The best cash-flowing property might be three states away, or a rental you bought two decades ago in a town you no longer live near.

For James, location is a non-issue.

"One of the great things about my situation is that I can do these loans in all 50 states," he says. "It doesn't matter where they're buying, or if they own a property somewhere they lived 20 years ago and need a DSCR loan to refinance it — and it's in the middle of nowhere, South Dakota. No problem. I can do it."

That reach also covers the property types other lenders shy away from. Northpointe offers strong products for non-warrantable condos — often a dead end elsewhere — and portfolio loans that allow investors to close with title held in an LLC, a structure many serious investors strongly prefer for liability and organizational reasons.

TOOLS THAT HELP — AND THE HUMAN WHO BEATS THEM

James and his team have built out real resources for investors at dscrloans.org, including DSCR calculators and a free property tracker. The tracker lets any investor create a free account, monitor their properties, and get notified when a property reaches a certain score. It's a genuinely useful way to keep tabs on a portfolio at a glance.

But James is the first to warn against treating any calculator as the final word.

"It's a great tool for somebody to scratch the surface and get a general idea," he says. "But I would also say, don't just rely on that. Because like I said earlier, I can get an exception on a specific scenario. Just because someone types something in and it doesn't say they're good to go, does not necessarily mean they're not good to go. There are exceptions to everything."

It's a revealing thing for a lender to say about his own website. The tools exist to start the conversation, not end it. The number a calculator spits out reflects the rigid version of the rules — and James's entire career is built on the space between the rigid rule and the common-sense exception.

That's the message every investor who's ever been told "no" needs to hear: a machine's rejection is not a verdict. It's a starting point for a conversation with someone who can actually pick up the phone and make the case.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Strip away the programs and the products, and what James is really selling is judgment — the willingness to look past a single number and see the whole person behind the file.

The 678 credit score wasn't a wall; it was a modeling problem. The late payments weren't a disqualifier; they belonged to someone who came before. The short-term rental that didn't quite pencil wasn't a dead deal; it was a case to be made with reserves and credit strength. In every instance, the difference between "no" and "closed" wasn't a loophole. It was a loan officer who understood the guidelines well enough to know exactly where they bend.

"That speaks to the human element of being a loan officer and working with investors," James says. It's the thread that connects 17 years in the business, more than 225 five-star reviews, a 2025 North Star Award, and a client base that keeps coming back to grow portfolio after portfolio.

For real estate investors who've been shut out by debt-to-income math, handed off to brokers who couldn't move a guideline, or told by a calculator that they don't qualify, the takeaway is straightforward. Before you accept a "no" on your next investment property, it's worth talking to the man who's made a career out of getting the exception.

Because the deal that looks like it should die twice might just close on Friday.

To reach James Mahieu at Northpointe Bank, call 850-499-6034 or email james.mahieu@northpointe.com. Explore DSCR calculators and the free property tracker at dscrloans.org.

ABOUT JAMES MAHIEU

James Mahieu (NMLS# 199879) is a Senior Loan Officer at Northpointe Bank with 17 years in the industry and a specialty in DSCR lending for real estate investors. A short-term rental investor himself and a 2025 North Star Award winner, he originates loans in all 50 states — first-time buyers, investors, and self-employed borrowers alike — and is known for winning the underwriting exceptions that keep tough deals alive. Equal Housing Lender.

Before you accept a 'no' on your next investment property, talk to the man who gets the exception. Call 850-499-6034 or email james.mahieu@northpointe.com.

dscrloans.org