

Mortgage broker moves to home staging

By Jean Sorensen

With real estate for sale signs spending longer on Canadian lawns, Realtors must make the most of an interested buyer, says Liz Clay, a Mission, B.C. mortgage broker and entrepreneur. The way to do that is home staging or ensuring there's more curb appeal, she says. To that end, she launched a new company, Design2Sell to assist Realtors in the Lower Mainland.

"Home staging is now a household buzz world. It used to be a Realtor's secret but there is no doubt that it motivates the buyers. It clinches the sale on a place," she says. Clay offers a basic four-hour service for \$375 where a crew will arrive to do the sweat labour. Volume discounts apply to partners – Realtors, developers and builders who send repeat business.

"We work alongside the client to physically remove the clutter and to get three major rooms ready for photos so they will attract the right buyer. So many Realtors forget that it is the photos on the MLS that first attract a buyer. Photos are the best way to lure the client in and home stag-

ing makes sure that it is as nice as what they see."

Clay fell into home staging as a "labour of love," she says. "I had a real estate mortgage business (Greenwood Estates & Mortgage Corporation) for a number of years and my passion was picking up houses and doing a full retrofit. I would do a home staging for the sale.

"At some point, my clients (on the broker side) began asking me to help them with their homes." For three years, she pitched in, helping clients set the stage to make their homes market attractive to new buyers, and gradually, through trial and error, found what works. Multiple offers on properties convinced her that the staging was actually giving properties the market edge.

Clay says the key to successful home staging is having a professional team able to offer a range of services from the basic four-hour package through to more comprehensive services such as renovations. She has assembled a team of home renovators, employees, and movers that will respond to client and Realtor needs in as little as 48 hours. Team members are sensi-

tive to the fact that the seller may be going through a personal life trauma or upheaval. Divorces and seniors downsizing are two major group candidates for the home staging. Clay says both come with special considerations.

"We always have Kleenex on hand," says Clay. These sensitive situations are best handled by a third party such as the home-staging professional. "The Realtors shouldn't be down on their hands and knees packing a client's knick-knacks," she said. Also, the advice that the home stager gives sometimes is difficult for the homeowner to hear, so it's better to have a third-party stager bring forward that information, Clay says.

"The divorces are often missing furniture," she says, after one spouse has carted off furnishing. Clay says she is fortunate to have her own mover and a warehouse of new, classic and antique pieces that can be moved to the home and to complement the existing pieces. The Realtor is consulted to ensure the home reflects the look that the Realtor believes will attract more clients to the home.

The flip-side of the divorce is

the aging couple or single, moving from a long-time family home after 30 or 40 years in the property. It's a traumatic time, as the property may need to be de-cluttered, freshened up, and re-staged. Clay says her staging professionals work with the family in a supportive role, sorting through furniture and finishing. She insists that the elderly person or a family member be on site when the work is done. As the home is restaged to attract buyers, Clay says her professionals will still try to ensure the senior does not feel displaced in the home during that sales period.

"We try to keep their personal objects – such a china collection, but we will have it really beautifully displayed with just a few pieces."

Clay has hosted seminars for developers who want to stage new properties coming onto the market. She is also available to meet with a group of clients from a Realtor to give them tips on dos and don'ts in staging. Finally, she says, she is often called in to work with buyers of a new home to provide advice on how to improve the interior design. For information: www.design2sell.ca. ■ **REM**

Good Works

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Pioneer's website at www.pioneer.ca and register a Bonus Bucks card to donate to help a family.



Gardiner Realty Royal LePage in Fredericton recently held a potluck luncheon auction to raise money for The Stan Cassidy Rehab Centre's Foundation for their new therapeutic park – the first one in Atlantic Canada. Everyone in the office brought in wrapped gifts. Kelly Murdock acted as the auctioneer and everyone bid on the still-wrapped gift. Once a successful bidder was determined, the gift was opened, revealing everything from homemade fudge to a chocolate fountain.

The team raised \$1,720 and Gardiner Realty Royal LePage matched the amount to bring the total to \$3,440.



Bob Metcalf of Sutton - Partners Realty Group is involved in a range of volunteer projects, from playing Santa at parties for children with special needs, to chairing the committee that organizes the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation's annual golf tournament.

Of playing Santa, he says, "It's a humbling experience when I see the children's joy and expectation." He says he does it every year for "the smiles, the hugs, the memories I receive and I'm sure I pass on to others, who with their physical and mental limitations may have few others in their life."

Metcalf's other volunteer projects include escorting residents from the Dr. Vernon Fanning Centre to Calgary Flames games each month and donating to the Calgary Herald Christmas Fund in lieu of mailing calendars to clients.



An International Paralympic World Cup event was held recently at Mt. Washington in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island. Athletes from 23 countries participated in the key qualification and development stage in the lead-up to the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games. Three local real estate companies, Coast Realty Group, Re/Max and Royal LePage participated in an Adopt-a-Nation program with local schools.

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Chief Executive Officer

Excellence, Innovation and Ethics in the Real Estate Profession

The Fraser Valley Real Estate Board is a non-profit association representing more than 2,900 REALTORS® who live and work in the communities of North Delta, Surrey, White Rock, Langley, Abbotsford and Mission. With a committed and experienced team of approximately 35 persons and the expert governance of a volunteer Board of Directors, the organization provides a wide and expanding array of strategic REALTOR® services.

The current CEO, who has provided exceptional leadership for more than 25 years, will retire at the end of August, 2009. The Board of Directors wishes to recruit an outstanding individual to provide sound strategic and operational oversight to this complex organization. With the wisdom to work effectively with a volunteer Board of Directors, the ideal candidate has earned respect and stature as a leader and has the capacity to develop a solid understanding of the real estate sector provincially, nationally and internationally. A politically astute pragmatist with persuasive communication skills and the finesse to move in many circles, the preferred candidate must possess the demonstrated ability to anticipate and navigate change and build solid relationships with members and staff and as well as with representatives of government and industry associations within and beyond British Columbia. The candidate we are seeking can set a vision and stretch goals and inspire others to be and do their best. An excellent listener, negotiator and member advocate with abundant common sense, financial acumen, high personal energy and integrity, the new CEO must have a successful leadership track record that speaks to the talent to ignite innovation, collaboration, efficiency and exceptional member service.