

real estate

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Find the best contractors when you sell

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Are you a wannabe home seller with enough equity to anticipate a profitable sale? Yet has your real estate agent told you your property needs substantial repair work before it goes on the market?

SMART MOVES



ELLEN JAMES MARTIN

If so, you'll want to ensure that all repair issues are fully addressed before a "For Sale" sign is pounded into your front yard, says Eric Tyson, co-author of "House Selling for Dummies."

"It's bad if homebuyers who walk through your place encounter a broken door handle or a leaky faucet. These are minor problems. But people will automatically assume your house is rundown and that you're hiding much bigger problems," he says.

In any case, all maintenance problems small and large should be dealt with before your deal is finally sealed, Tyson says, rather "than to risk a botched deal due to some shocking discovery made by the buyers' home inspector."

One reason many homeowners are reluctant to go forward with presale repairs is that they can be costly. Another is that many people are uncertain about how to find reasonably priced and reliable contractors, and it can be time-consuming, says R. Dodge Woodson, author of "Tips & Traps for Hiring a Contractor" and other remodeling books.

Still, he says it's important to spend the time it takes to search for the right contractors for your repair work, whether that involves fixing a nonfunctional garage door or replacing a leaky roof. Here are pointers for potential home sellers planning to do presale fixes:

- Engage the services of a home inspector to catalog your issues.

It should be quite easy for you and your listing agent to go through your home and identify minor repairs that should be done, such

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By CHRISTA GALA
CORRESPONDENT

In May Tennessee was hit with its largest disaster since the Civil War. Torrential rains brought the Cumberland River to more than 11 feet above flood level, which in turn brought Nashville to its knees.

Chances are, you didn't hear much about the flood on the national news. The disaster competed with the Gulf oil spill and a foiled car bombing in New York City. But local Realtor Gina Gilliam, owner of Gilliam & Associates Realty in Apex, was hearing plenty. Her brother, Dan Buckley, is a production director and disc jockey at Lightning 100, one of Nashville's most popular radio stations.

"I listen to him over the Internet," says

Gilliam. "I was hearing all of these stories of people who didn't have insurance and had 5 or 6 feet of water throughout the first floor of their house and had lost everything." Gilliam figured things would be under control shortly. But the stories kept coming even two months after the flood — both from her brother and from her parents, who also live in Nashville.

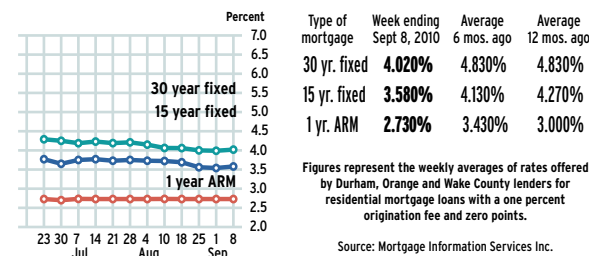
"My parents were fortunate enough just to have minor damage; they decided to donate some of their furniture to a family in need," says Gilliam. "That inspired me. I figured alone I couldn't do much but if I could gather the resources of the community, we could make a difference."

In July, Gilliam made a phone call to UPS Freight. To her surprise, the com-



Real estate professionals Al Martin, Gina Gilliam, Joanne Martin, Debbie Litsey, Christine Engelbrecht and Baxter Walker prepare to load supplies for Nashville flood victims.

MORTGAGE RATES



pulling together for a cause

LENDING A HAND

These local businesses donated items or provided services to the Gilliam & Associates Realty Nashville Flood Relief Drive:

Anthony & Company Commercial Real Estate
Apex AutoWorks
BeautiControl Cosmetics
C.H. Robinson Worldwide
Gilliam & Associates Realty
Gilliam Custom Homes
Hospitality Contract Furnishings (High Point)
Keller Williams Realty (Cary)
My Girlfriend's Closet
Realty World (Apex)
Stock Building Supply
UPS Freight

pany agreed to donate a 28-foot truck and driver to deliver supplies to Nashville. Using Facebook, Twitter and her Web site, Gilliam put out a call to the community, including fellow Realtors, to give what it could — canned food, cleaning supplies, toiletries, clothes, building supplies, sheets, towels and more.

Joanne and Al Martin, Realtors with Keller Williams in Cary, were quick to respond. "I'd seen the flood on the news," says Joanne. "I could tell there was a lot of devastation but after a couple of days the coverage kind of disappeared. We donated clothes, dishes and cosmetics; the list was helpful. I put it out to our neighborhood in Scotts Mill in Apex. I never knew who was dropping things off. People just put things by our garage door."

Baxter Walker, a commercial real estate broker with Anthony & Company in Raleigh, also jumped in to help. Walker had seen the flood damage firsthand, volunteering earlier in the summer to help a Nashville family whose home had been ruined.

"We basically went and gutted the house and took out siding and carpet," says Walker. "When the water reaches above where the toilets are, that's when it becomes a very hazardous situation. I drove through

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SERVICE

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some areas of downtown that had just opened back up. Everything was ruined. They're basically starting from scratch."

Debbie Litsy of Realty World in Apex also works part-time for Proctor & Gamble, and she was able to donate Tide products and sunscreen.

Angela Frasca, a client of Gilliam, also answered the call for donations. In her role as advisor to Girl Scout Ambassador Troop 597, she gained approval for the flood drive to be a service project for Area 23 of the Girl Scouts—North Carolina Coastal Pines. They donated personal care items, cleaning supplies and more.

The biggest coup came in August when Gilliam attended the New Home Expo, sponsored by the Home Builders Association of Raleigh-Wake County. There, she met Robin Fastenau, Stock Building Supply's director of corporate communications.

"She passionately explained the ongoing need for assistance in the Nashville area," remembers Fastenau. "When I asked how Stock Building Supply could help, she simply said, 'drywall.' With thousands of homes and businesses in need, the supply of drywall in the Middle Tennessee area was short. Our Yonkers Road location and many of our associates stepped up to help arrange this donation."

Stock donated 272 sheets of drywall—worth nearly \$2,500. When the truck UPS had donated

was not wide enough to transport the drywall, Stock Building Supply took care of that, too. C.H. Robinson Worldwide, agreed to donate the transportation from Raleigh to Nashville, approximately an \$800 value.

Gilliam was relieved. "When you live outside an area that's been affected by a flood, you're willing to help but you can't necessarily get your goods there. I knew everyone in this area had such kind hearts but it was amazing how Stock arranged to transport their own donation."

A little more than a week ago, a group of Realtors gathered at Apex AutoWorks (which donated storage) to load the truck. The UPS driver made two delivery stops: The Community Resource Center in Nashville, a clearing house that distributes to churches and non-profits and The Antioch Relief Center, that distributes goods to folks who come in off the street.

Gilliam's brother, Dan Buckley, otherwise known as "Lieutenant Dan" at Lightning 100 is grateful his big sister and his hometown have pitched in to help.

"We need all the help we can get," Buckley says, noting one of his co-workers lost her entire home to the flood. "Volunteers, money and supplies are still needed. The Grand Ole Opry, The Opry Mills Mall and the Schermerhorn Symphony are still out of commission. That means people don't have jobs so everything helps."

For Joanne Martin, giving back to the community is just part of being a Realtor. "It was great to be able to be a part of this. It doesn't matter if we're with different companies. It's about helping people."

SMART

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as a shaky stair railing or a malfunctioning doorbell. But you may lack the expertise to find all the larger problems, like those involving your home's electrical, plumbing, heating or cooling systems.

These problems are best addressed by a qualified home inspector. To avoid late-stage revelations, arrange for a pre-inspection before your property hits the market. This can cost \$300 or more. One source for inspectors' names is through the American Society of Home Inspectors (www.ashi.org).

■ Cast a wide net in search of the best contractors.

A reliable approach, Woodson says, is to seek out recommendations from friends or neighbors who've had experience with the contractors they're suggesting.

Besides those in your immediate circle, Tyson says you may wish to garner contractors'

names through your real estate agent "because they have a lot of dealings with contractors. That means they'll hear about it if a contractor does a lousy job."

■ Arrange for plenty of estimates.

Woodson, who has worked much of his career as a licensed plumber and has also run his own home improvement company, strongly recommends that homeowners obtain five estimates for any job expected to cost more than \$1,000 because consumers need a range of bids to gain perspective on pricing.

"What you usually want is a contractor in the middle of the pack on price. You can throw away an estimate from anyone who comes in 25 percent or more above or below the others in the pack. The guy at the top is charging too much and the one at the bottom is probably cutting corners," he says.

Gathering five estimates can be time consuming, but during difficult economic times

contractors may be more motivated to find work and may be more willing to come to your home before or after your work or during weekend hours.

■ Review a contractors' work by visiting other clients' homes.

After you've narrowed the field with a comparison of price estimates, you may think your next step is to ask any company you're considering for references. But, "you don't know if that reference is really someone's brother-in-law or maybe someone else the company hired to say good things about them," Woodson says, adding that it's a mistake to rely on photos the contractor has sent to you.

To get a truer sense of a contractor's work, ask to visit homes where the firm is now working or has recently completed jobs.

"The company shouldn't balk at letting you see their work. If they do, you've got to wonder what they're hiding. This is a big red flag," Woodson says.

NEW HOME COMMUNITY PROFILE

Kingston at Wakefield Plantation



Chesapeake Homes North Carolina brings its award-winning, luxury townhomes to Kingston. These beautiful, traditional townhomes feature a one car garage and three levels of exceptional living space. Choose from models featuring two to four bedroom plans, with one plan offering a first floor master suite. Features include kitchens designed for entertaining and casual dining, optional walk — up attics, private patio areas providing outdoor living and additional storage.

At Wakefield Plantation, you're close to all the necessities of modern living without sacrificing the peace and serenity of a quiet neighborhood. The natural beauty of the area is apparent everywhere you look, from the wonderful views of the rolling hills and golf course, to the picturesque park areas offering places for children to play and families to gather. Wakefield Plantation offers a community and a lifestyle you'll treasure forever.



Builder: Chesapeake Homes of North Carolina
Directions: North on Falls of Neuse Rd., right on Wakefield Plantation Dr., follow to traffic circle, first right on Forest Pines, Right on Foxcroft.
Number of homes in community: 24 units offered by CHNC, part of the Kingston section that has more than 200 units.
Price range: From the \$140,000s
Square footage range: 1,500 to 2,100
Style of homes: One-car garage traditional-style townhomes
Contact: John Young, (919) 271-8820
Sales and marketing: Coldwell Banker HPW Builder Services
Web: www.cheshomesnc.com