

# Building Scene

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Marilyn Fitchett editor/953-2102



Thursday, December 6, 1991 O&E



## 'Tis the season for sales lags

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

**W**HEN IT COMES to selling houses, those in the business recite a timeworn maxim: "We follow you 'til you buy or die." Maybe that's an exaggeration, but persistence pays off in clinching a deal — especially during the holidays when buyers are distracted by seasonal activities.

To help overcome the holiday sales blahs, the Sales and Marketing Council of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan hosted a recent seminar co-sponsored by Standard Federal Bank in Troy.

Dennis Dickstein, president of Ralph Manuel Realtors in Birmingham and Farmington Hills, and Dave Lewenz of S.H. Jacobson Development Corp., Birmingham, joined Tom Ervin, a real estate columnist who is also a sales consultant for Standard Federal in Troy, to speak to an audience of 25. They focused on selling strategies and promotions during the holiday season as well as tips on how to follow up and close a deal.

"As soon as Thanksgiving arrives, the market dies," Lewenz said.

So last year Lewenz convinced his employer to commit \$14,000 for television advertising — a vehicle Realtors seldom use, he said.

"We sold 12 houses last year in the month of December between five subdivisions. A lot of our competitors didn't sell anything."

That's no small feat, Dickstein said, because of the country's economic involvement in the Persian Gulf then.

"There's fewer buyers in the market than last year," Lewenz said. "In tough times today, a good deal is a profitable deal."

**IDENTIFY THE** benefits clients want to buy, Dickstein said. That means a good school system,

***'Find out where the person is at in their lives. Your job there is to persuade. You're a paid persuader. Most people in real estate don't sell. They visit. They give answers. They call back sometimes.'***

— Tom Ervin

location, equity and investment.

Advertising is a must, Lewenz said. Small community papers offer lower cost advertising than the large dailies. And don't forget classified advertising, he said.

While selling the Sugar Creek detached condominiums in Rochester Hills last year, Lewenz used demographics to target, through mail, those most likely to be interested in the units.

In that case the profiles developed suggested a target market comprised of Troy and Rochester residents, folks aged 45-60 where the husband was still working, the children were grown and the pair was looking to get out of their 2,400-square-foot colonial, where they lived for the last 12 years.

"We had a 5-percent response," Lewenz said. He used the Bresser's address book as a tool.

"People buy in new developments that are in a three- to four-mile radius of where they live," Lewenz said. LEWENZ PLAYS up today's low interest rate as another aid. "Interest rates, traditionally, are lowest in the months of February or March," Lewenz said.

In selling new homes, he also suggested throwing in a free \$8,000 holiday bonus package of a whirlpool tub, high energy furnace and central air conditioning.

"Target buyers by income," Lewenz said.

The prices on new homes sometimes scare people right out the door. Show buyers how they can afford the home with different types of mortgages, Ervin said.

Although today's buyers are better educated about home purchases, they are also less decisive, Ervin said.

"This has got to be a great frustration for you," he said to the audience.

Get people to sign the register card when they come to look at the house — and hope they don't use fictitious names and phone numbers, Ervin said.

DICKSTEIN SUGGESTS that customers fill out a form with a small survey on top, followed by their personal information. Some people are uncomfortable listing their names first, Ervin said.

"There's a psychological difference."

Ervin suggested that some sales techniques are not helping sales staff meet their objectives.

"How do you perceive your role?" he asked. "To me, greeting people, escorting people through the home and answering questions is not selling," he said.

Salespeople don't ask enough questions to find out what people want, Ervin said. They also don't give buyers what they want.

"Find out where the person is at in their lives," Ervin said. "Your job there is to persuade. You're a paid persuader. Most people in real estate don't sell. They visit. They give answers. They call back sometimes."

Ervin reminded his audience to remember these 10 words: "If it is to be, it is up to me."

## Double seasonal sales efforts

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

There's some simple tricks of the trade that sales persons can use to move houses during the holidays, according to David Lewenz, of S.H. Jacobson Development Corp., Birmingham.

"Maintain the model at the best possible level," Lewenz said. "Have a list for the cleaners to make sure the windows are done and the light fixtures are dusted. It's important that the model always looks fresh and clean."

Lewenz suggests:

- Use pine air freshener.
- Keep a gas log burning in the fireplace.
- Place a floor mat with your company's name at the front entrance.
- Wash and paint the basement floor.
- Create festivity with lights, a tree and houseplants.
- Simmer a pot of nutmeg with some herbs in a pot on the stove.

"When people come into a house, what they see and what they smell leaves a lasting impression," Lewenz said.

DENNIS DICKSTEIN, president of Ralph Manuel

***'Why not have a holiday party for your past customers and ask them to bring a friend? Who's better at advertising than a bunch of satisfied customers? It's a great traffic builder in your model home.'***

— Dennis Dickstein

Realtors in Birmingham and Farmington Hills, said snow must always be cleared, especially off the walk leading to the front door. Always take people in the front door, not through the garage door and the laundry room, Dickstein said.

Use the holiday season to your advantage, he said.

"Why not have a holiday party for your past customers and ask them to bring a friend? Who's better at advertising than a bunch of satisfied customers? It's a lot less than putting an ad in the paper. For a couple grand, you can throw a great party. It's a great traffic builder in your model home."

Realtors frequently minimize the basement area, choosing to concentrate on the main area of the home and the upstairs.

"One of the greatest concerns of buyers is the fear of basement leaks," Dickstein said.

Clean, paint and repair basement cracks, he said.

"You may not get a sale because of a clean basement, but I can guarantee that you have a real good chance of losing a sale if you have problems down there in new and used homes."

Pay attention to signs, Dickstein said. Don't kill the egos of your higher priced buyers by posting a large base price sign, like "\$99,999" and up, at the subdivision entrance when the majority of your customers bought their houses in the subdivision for \$189,999, Dickstein said.

Finally, use large windows and less wallpaper in the home, he said.

