

REAL ESTATE NEWS

Open houses a sign of spring marketing efforts

BY GERALD FRAWLEY
STAFF WRITER

For sale signs are springing up like daisies — it must be spring.

No one has to tell that to William McCullen, regional director for Century 21 Great Lakes. Century 21 is planning what is being billed as the country's largest open house.

Open houses are a vital part of

the real estate business because they get people who were previously only thinking of buying a home into action, he said.

"It welcomes people into homes and makes it convenient."

At least 500 homes in the seven-county metropolitan region are scheduled for open houses on April 24 and 25. More than 10,000 homes will be part of Century 21's nationwide open house.

Valuable tool

Michael Bartlett, vice president sales management for Estate One, said his company is planning its first spring open house promotional April 25.

"We have open houses every weekend — and this isn't our first open house promotional of the year," he said, "but this is our first spring effort."

Open houses are a particularly valuable tool in the spring because that is when people are out and about, Bartlett said.

The real estate industry has become increasingly more sophisticated with the use of computers, marketing studies and sales techniques, but in some ways selling a home is the same as it's always been.

"What we find is that these

tools are a tremendous aid, but it all starts with people selecting an area and driving around," he said.

They want to see what an area is like, who lives there, what's nearby — if they don't get an initial good impression, all the tools in the world won't help sell a house there.

That's why open houses are so valuable — it is the best way to get a person's attention when they're looking over an area, Bartlett said.

Realtors have many reasons for throwing open houses, McCullen of Century 21 said. "They don't necessarily think every person who walks in intends to buy that house."

Some people do buy the house they visit on an open house, but many are interested in an area and stop in at several open houses to get a feel for the area, he said.

"A typical open house will generate as few as three and as many as 25 callers."

People who don't buy a home they visit are still important to the real estate agents because it gives the agent an opportunity to meet with potential buyers and perhaps discern what they may be looking for.

"Open houses are an easy no-obligation way for buyers to look around — it's very low pressure," Bartlett said of Real Estate One said. "It's also an easy, low-pressure way for an owner to market a home."

Perhaps some people feel uncomfortable allowing strangers to roam through their home during

an open house, but if Bartlett wanted to sell a home, he'd take advantage of the marketing tool.

"It really depends on your motivation," he said. "If I were in the market and wanted to sell a home in 60 to 90 days, I would have it open as often as possible."

Open houses are one of simpler ways to increase the pool of potential buyers, he said.

Brokers and sales associates are trained in everything from scheduling and what to look for in a preopen house walkthrough to greeting guests to working with the homeowner to prepare the house.

Homeowners are expected to do all the things that make a house inviting. A house that is clean — both inside and out — and well maintained is more likely to make an impression.

Once the house is presentable, there is another more important task for the homeowner — leave. "We ask them to graciously bow out."

When people are looking at houses, many tend to look critically at them. The last thing the real estate associate needs at an open house is a homeowner who is angry at a potential buyer because he or she inadvertently insulted a decorating scheme, he said.

"We know it's your home, but it's also a product and people are going to look at it that way," he said. "If someone doesn't like a home, they should be able to express that honestly," he said.

Suitability of property questioned

CONDO QUERIES

Is there an obligation upon a landlord in a commercial setting to disclose certain defects to the tenant?

In a recent California case, the tenant's store was burglarized. He sued the landlord for negligently failing to warn him that the premises could be easily broken into and that this failure to disclose caused the loss. The Court of Appeals of California held that while the landlord has no duty to protect the property of the tenant, the tenant could state a cause of action for failure to disclose information pertaining to the suitability of the premises for their intended use.

The court noted that commercial leases are typically of long duration, and potential lessees, therefore, need full information as potential purchasers. The rule set forth by the court is similar to that applied to landlords in cases of personal injury to tenants caused by latent defects of the property that are known to the landlord.

The tenant is liable for failure, intention or not, to disclose the potential danger. This case opens a new area of potential liability for commercial landlords. The landlord may well want a lease to contain a clear statement that the landlord has made no representations or warranties other than those explicitly set forth in the lease and is relieved of any implied warranty or representation as to the condition or suitability of the premises for the tenant's proposed use.

Recently the neighbors in the condominium above us had some work done in their kitchen. Water was spilled on their floor that seeped into our kitchen, leaving a stain on our ceiling. The man they hired was unable to remove the stain and carries no insurance. There is no clause in our association by-laws that covers this situation. Do we have any recourse?

In answer to the question, it would appear that you have recourse against the co-owner upstairs for negligence as well as the co-owner's contractor. The fact that the contractor has no insurance is unfortunate but does not relieve the contractor from liability to the extent that it caused injury to your unit through negligence.

Moreover, the association may have recourse against the co-owner or the contractor to the extent that any common elements were damaged for which the association has a responsibility. I would also double check your condominium documents with an attorney to make sure that there is not a specific provision covering this situation, which is normally the case.

Robert M. Meisner is a Birmingham attorney concentrating his practice in the areas of condominiums, real estate and corporate law. You are invited to submit topics you would like to see discussed in this column by writing Robert M. Meisner at 30200 Telegraph Road, Suite 467, Birmingham Farms 49025. This column provides general information and should not be construed as legal opinion. To leave a voice mail message for Robert Meisner, dial 953-2047, mail box 1871.

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