

The Pueblo Chieftain

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By Ellen James Martin

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Keep home in prime condition for quick sale

In some popular neighborhoods, well-priced homes are now flying off the market. Indeed, some neighborhoods are plagued with a shortage of available properties. But there are many exceptions. And for some sellers, any time on the market — however brief — is very stressful.

“It’s exhausting trying to keep your house immaculate as you wait for showings,” says Ashley Richardson, a 20-year real estate agent.

Still, she says sellers can’t afford to pass up appointments that could result in a sale.

The most serious buyers, including those relocating for a new job, are typically in a big hurry.

“Often, they fly in and have just one day to look at houses,” Richardson says, stressing the importance of adhering to prospective buyers’ schedules.

She tells the true story of a couple in their late 50s — a school administrator married to a sales manager — who are currently sabotaging their chances for a successful sale by limiting showings.

“From time to time, they go on strike, refusing to let their house be shown because their grown children are coming over or for any excuse whatsoever,” Richardson says.

The upshot of the couple’s resistance is that the property — first listed in mid-2013 — is still languishing unsold without a single offer pending.

Here are a few pointers for home sellers:

Hit the market with your place in prime condition.

As a former real estate agent turned professional organizer, Vicki Norris knows how challenging it can be to keep a house in pristine showing condition. It's especially tough when the need to move is overlaid on another family issue, like a marital breakup.

"It's doubly hard for someone coping with a life crisis to keep a property looking good," says Norris, who heads her own consulting firm, Restoring Order (www.restoringorder.com).

To contain their upkeep tasks, Norris urges would-be sellers to streamline their belongings before opening their home to visitors. That means purging excess possessions and putting the rest in storage. It also means consolidating those items you'll want or need on a day-to-day basis.

One source for referrals is the National Association of Professional Organizers (www.napo.net).

Consider renting a storage unit on a temporary basis.

Most sellers are easily able to dispense with pairs of worn-out sneakers or old magazines. But most also have collections of favorite items they want to keep. These could include gourmet kitchen devices, sports trophies and memorabilia from their kids' early years.

"Leaving all this stuff out in view, or crowding your closets, will simply distract buyers and lead them to think your place is smaller than it is," says Sid Davis, a real estate broker and author of "Home Makeovers that Sell."

To streamline your property and reduce clutter, one option is to pack your prized collections into uniform-sized boxes, stacking these neatly in your garage. But according to Davis, you'd be better off keeping these boxes in a rented storage unit until your home sells.

Hire a top-quality cleaning service.

Have you done very little in-depth cleaning of your home recently? If so, you may wish to invest in what Davis calls "a super-duper cleaning."

"Before your house hits the market, you need to get rid of all those dust balls, cobwebs and dead insects. Plus you'll want your windows and chandeliers to receive all the careful attention they deserve. Either you do every bit of this work yourself or bring in a professional cleaning service," he says.

Plan a family meeting to discuss upkeep issues.

No matter how brief their showing period, many sellers quickly tire of the process and lose focus. Dirty clothing is left in the laundry room, unpaid bills accumulate on a kitchen counter and bowls of half-eaten popcorn linger in the TV room.

If you find your clan going off-track during the home marketing period, Richardson suggests you convene a family meeting to reframe the situation and offer incentives for sticking with the program. These could include a night out at your favorite pizza place or movie theater.