

HOUSECALLS

NEWS ABOUT SELLING , BUYING AND LIVING IN A HOME BY GABE SANDERS



Gabe Sanders

Buying the sound of silence in your condo

They got the big windows, high ceilings and cool character in their new condo but they also got something they didn't ask for: noise.

Developers are rushing to solve the problem.

In some condos, residents cope with noise from elevators, spa filters, wine-cellar compressors, traffic, and neighbors.

One couple hired Manhattan-based City Soundproofing to replace the ceilings for a cost of about \$30,000.

"People spend a lot of money on an apartment.

When they get home, they don't want to hear their neighbors' techno music," said Benjamin Sachwald, director of acoustics at AKRF, a New York engineering firm.

Developers are pouring money into new buildings to combat the problem. In Florida one developer is pitching condos as having an acoustical rating above local requirements.

Another luxury builder has flooring consisting of a 10-inch concrete slab topped by a rubber mat.

When to make your move on a new home in a changing market

Real estate market experts report housing prices and interest rates are still favorable but the market may well change in the next five months.

According to experts at Equifax finance, there are five reasons why buyers, especially first-time buyers, should make their moves, even though it's difficult to face rising prices and rising interest rates at the same time.

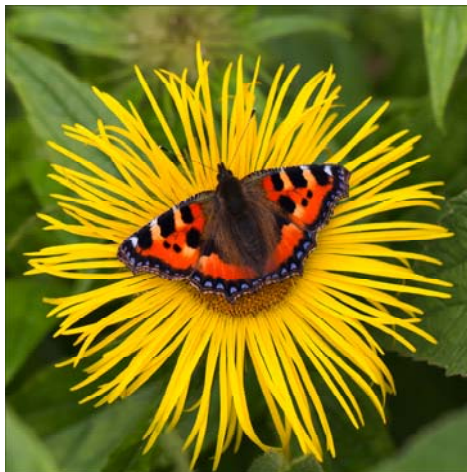
* Prices are actually 20 percent less than their mid-2006 peak. In fact, average home prices are at summer 2004 levels. That means buyers could see significant appreciation over the next few years.

* Interest rates are slowly rising. As the Federal Reserve concludes its economic stimulus plan, rates are expected to continue to rise into the first quarter of next year. Even a small bump in rates will make your payment significantly higher. So buy now if you can.

* Compare rental costs with home purchasing costs. In the

second quarter average rents have risen by close to 0.8 percent from the first quarter. If you want to put down roots in your hometown, it could be cheaper to buy.

Goodbye Summer!



Divide the list price of the home you are considering by the annual rent of a comparable property to determine the price-to-rent ratio. If it's below 20, it's a very good time to buy. Remember to consider maintenance, insurance, taxes and utilities, though you would have some of these costs when renting.

* Consider your buying power. Americans have been steadily reducing their debt load, maybe you have too. The lower your debt-to-income ratio, the more you can borrow for a home.

Mortgage companies say you can spend 28 percent to 36 percent of your gross income for debt service. That's your housing expenses plus your debt payments.

* It pays to raise your credit score. It's one of the biggest factors

lenders consider when determining the interest rate and terms on your loan.

Ask Sheila



The seller asked if we would adopt his two rabbits! Is that legal?

Yes. It's called a contingency. The owner loved his rabbits but was moving to a condo in the city. He hoped to find a buyer who would take care of them.

Though it's not illegal for the sellers to accept any offer on the home that they choose, sellers should always write what they want to include in the sales contract so there are no surprises.

Sometimes, even if it's not part of the contract, offering to adopt a dog or a pet chicken can make a buyer's offer more attractive.

The practice of tying unusual demands to home sales is more prevalent than ever, say real estate agents and attorneys.

Inserted into sales contracts, contingencies by both sellers and buyers are called irregular exclusions or inclusions. They make the sale more complicated for the agents and attorneys involved.

The stronger housing market puts sellers in a position to be fussy. Existing home sales increased in volume by 20 percent since 2011, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Some contingency examples

In Chicago, an attorney reports the sale of a home for \$900,000, but in the contract it said that the shrubs and plantings were excluded. After the house sold, the seller showed up with a truck and carted away

Grilling Safety

Nothing spoils an outdoor barbecue more than burning the house down. Here are 6 tips to stay safe when grilling this summer.

Don't think you're at risk? Over the last five years, fire departments have responded to an average of 8,200 house fires per year involving grills, hibachis, and barbecues. Most of these fires took place during June and July, the peak grilling months.

Tip 1: Barbecue only outside

Firing it up in your home, trailer, tent, or any partially enclosed area is dangerous. If the carbon monoxide doesn't kill you, your neighbors might, especially if you set off your building's sprinkler system by grilling on your covered balcony.

Tip 2: Grills heat up to 650 degrees or higher

Always place your grill or hibachi on a non-flammable surface. For additional protection, place a heat-resistant pad or splatter mat beneath the cooker. And FYI, plastic has an average melting point of 150 degrees.

Tip 3: Protect your home and family

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, you should barbecue at least 10 feet away from your house or any structure. Children and pets should stay at least 3 feet away from the grilling area. Just in case you need a little convincing, this visual should drive the point home.

Tip 4: Lighter fluid can be dangerous

hundreds of plantings.

A broker in Oregon had a deal where the seller insisted the sale included his three llamas. Luckily, according to The Wall Street Journal, they found a buyer who was thrilled to have them.

A Seattle real-estate agent represented clients who were embroiled in a bidding war over a three-bedroom home.

The agent discovered what it would take to win the bid. The sellers were moving and wouldn't be able to take their four beloved chickens who were named after presidential first ladies: Jackie O, Martha, Lady Bird and Abigale. The buyer didn't want chickens so the agent gave them to his wife. Fortunately, she was pleased.

Before starting a fire, soak coals with an accelerant made for charcoal. Never use lighter fluid on hot briquettes. Doing so causes the fluid to vaporize and become explosive. The result could be a charbroiled yard and home.

Tip 5: Proper grilling attire

Take a cue from this grill master: Don't wear loose or baggy clothing while flipping burgers. This includes aprons, especially when your back is turned.

Tip 6: Utensils are not toys

Of course you want to keep your guests entertained at your next barbecue, but remember, playing with sharp utensils can be dangerous. You could poke an eye out or skewer a feathered friend.



Bonus tip: We ran across one more prickly grilling situation. Who thought a brush could ruin a barbecue? Hints from Heloise says there's a new danger hidden away in

your grill: bristles from wire cleaning brushes. If accidentally consumed, they could cause abdominal pain and more. Make sure that after you clean your grill with a wire brush, rinse the grill and wipe it with a paper towel to make sure no pesky wires are left.



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"If the seller is willing to replace the roof, add a deck, put in a fireplace and an indoor pool, extend the livingroom fifteen feet and move the whole place to the other side of town, then we're definitely interested!"

The memories of music can build connections for people

Music, with all its charm and variety, has the power to delight, inspire, and connect people, even those whose world has slipped away.

A new film, *Alive Inside*, explores the dramatic changes in the lives of nursing home patients who get personal music on an iPod.

That's right: A simple iPod, loaded with music they like, and some headphones. Instead of being silent, lost in the past, disconnected from the present, some came back.

One dramatic example in the movie is the case of Henry, who barely spoke, but when given gospel music and Cab Calloway jazz on an iPod, he eloquently spoke of music and love and even beautifully sang a song.

The results of this iPod experiment in cases of dementia, Alzheimer's, and mental illness was dramatic enough that



a move is on to gather enough iPods for the 1.6 million elders in nursing homes and the many more in assisted living or home care.

Project leader and social worker Dan

Cohen is trying to get donations of old iPods though his website musicandmemories.org.

Cohen says music has long been an effective part of therapy in group settings but the iPod initiative offers individuals personalized music choices. If you adore Cab Calloway, who else will really do?

If you want to try an mp3 player in your own caregiving situation, here are some tips:

- 1 Try to find out the person's actual taste in music. Create a mix of 100 or so songs.
- 2 Provide headphones.

Earbuds fall out.

- 3 Be patient. You might not reach music memory instantly.

- 4 Provide a special daily music time. Don't use music constantly.

Correcting credit reports gets a little easier

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has been urging the major credit reporting companies, Equifax, Experian and TransUnion, to make correcting errors easier.

So now the three companies have changed their complaint systems to let people dispute mistakes on their credit reports in greater detail.

Previously, gripes and supporting paperwork you sent to the Big Three were assigned a code that reduced your argument to one of a handful of assertions, such as "Not his/hers."

Under the new system, when you provide documents, the agencies have to state your full case to the creditor. The creditor then has to fix any errors with all three agencies. It's no small job. The credit companies received about 8 million complaints about errors in 2011, according to Money magazine.

"The earlier system was like a brick wall," says Bill Hardekoph, CEO of comparison site LowCards.com. "This system gives you some additional clout."

You and other consumers will have a better chance of getting the errors, and your credit reports, fixed.

Roth IRAs are a great way to transfer money to heirs

Designed to help people save for retirement, the Roth has become a popular estate-planning tool.

You can open a Roth over the Internet or at a financial institution by using after-tax dollars or by converting a regular IRA to a Roth.

That money, plus all earnings including dividends, is later available to you or your heirs tax-free. You have to hold the account for five years.

You can put \$5,500 in a Roth during 2014; those over age 50 can put in an extra \$1,000. For those looking for tax diversification, the Roth is one of the few plans that can ensure they have a stream of tax-free income in retirement, according to Ken Hevert, vice president of Fidelity Investments.

To take out more than just the contributions, investors must be at least 59 1/2 years old. Some circumstances and

Want to give a house away?

The least expensive way to transfer ownership of a home to a relative or friend is to use what's called a quitclaim deed (\$14.99 at nolo.com). Have it notarized and record the transaction at the county land office. It transfers ownership but makes no guarantee the property is unencumbered. Nolo legal editor Mary Randolph says if there is a mortgage, you still have to pay it.

qualified withdrawals include a first-time home buyer, up to \$10,000; college expenses; disability, death, or unreimbursed medical expenses exceeding 10 percent of income.

With a traditional IRA, investors must stop making contributions at 70 1/2 at which point they are forced to

take distributions and begin paying taxes on that money. With a Roth, you can live to be 120 without ever tapping it. As long as you are working, you can still contribute. Your heirs, however, are required to empty the account within the five years after your death.

Featured Listing

The Pines in Jensen Beach

A newer lake front 4 bedroom, 3 bathroom pool home in the highly sought after Pines subdivision of Jensen Beach, FL. This is an immaculately maintained and updated home with private lake views. Upgrades include granite counter tops, a double convection oven and a convection microwave, Bosch dishwasher; A new Trane 18 SEER multi stage air conditioning unit; Miami/Dade approved storm shutters. New PGT tinted windows; and much more. There's an elegant formal dining room as well as both a living and family room in a desirable open free flowing configuration. The spacious master suite has a separate tub and shower as well as dual vanities. The fourth bedroom is separate and can easily be used as an in-law suite. Backup generator outlet in the lanai.

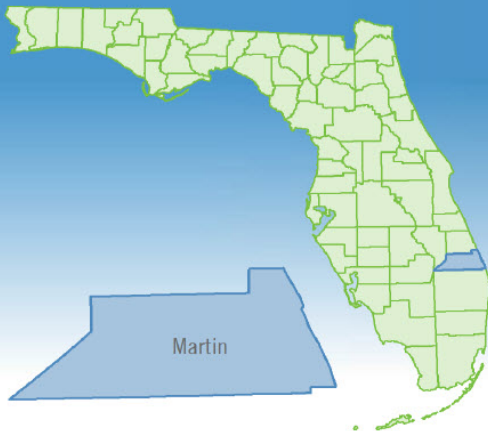
Offered for \$385,000



Martin County Condo and Townhome Report for July 2014

Click on the Image for the full report

Monthly Market Detail - July 2014
Townhouses and Condos
Martin County



Summary Statistics	July 2014	July 2013	Percent Change Year-over-Year
Closed Sales	100	100	0.0%
Paid in Cash	69	69	0.0%
New Pending Sales	120	98	22.4%
New Listings	138	132	4.5%
Median Sale Price	\$98,500	\$110,000	-10.5%
Average Sale Price	\$113,531	\$122,588	-7.4%
Median Days on Market	56	47	19.1%
Average Percent of Original List Price Received	90.4%	91.1%	-0.8%
Pending Inventory	162	210	-22.9%
Inventory (Active Listings)	534	553	-3.4%
Months Supply of Inventory	5.3	5.5	-3.4%

View all Market Reports for Martin County, Saint Lucie County, and Florida (statewide)

Click on the name of the region above to view the reports.



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