

*In a couple dozen publications, this is the
very 1st time that I've been quoted verbatim!
This truly says it... as it is! Love it!
Jerry Middewright*

Forget location, St. Joseph is key to real estate success

My wife's previous home had been on the market more than six months without an offer when her mother told her that Pinky Duesterberg said that we needed to bury St. Joseph upside down in our back yard.

She went on to say that all of Mrs. Duesterberg's children buried St. Joseph when they needed to sell their homes. And that it always worked for them.

We rolled our eyes, complimented her good intentions and got a good laugh out of



MIKE LEONARD

the story. Some weeks later, my wife, Mardi, told the St. Joseph tale to some colleagues in Indianapolis. "I think it's a Catholic thing," she explained.

"It works for little Jewish ladies, too," one of them said, knowingly.

Then Sheila Seleman recounted how St. Joseph first helped her neighbor sell a condominium and later, bailed out her son in St. Louis, who had purchased a new home but could not unload his old one.

"He wasn't crazy about the idea but we finally got him to do it," Seleman recalled. "He got two offers on his home within two weeks. We kidded him afterward that if he would have used a bigger statue, maybe he would have gotten more for his house."

About two months ago, Mardi looked at me. "What do you think?" she asked.

▶ See **LEONARD / C3**

(over)



St. Joseph statues, part of the "Authentic St. Joseph Home Sale Practice" kit, have made believers out of many homeowners trying to find a buyer for their houses. STAFF PHOTO BY HEATHER HILL

Forget location, the key to real estate success is St. Joseph

▼ Leonard / from C1

"I'd bring a witch doctor up from Africa if it would sell that house," I said.

She opened the Yellow Pages, turned to "church supplies" and called the first number she saw: Acts 16:31 Christian Bookshoppe in Ellettsville. "Do you sell statues of St. Joseph?" she asked.

"You want the real estate kit?" owner Christi Robertson responded.

Robertson admits that she was "kind of shocked" when she found "The Authentic St. Joseph Home Sale Practice" kit among the religious icons, Bibles and other, more traditional stock items when she purchased the Christian bookstore and supply shop last March.

After seeing how St. Joseph has worked for her sister-in-law, however, she's become considerably more receptive. "Everything they've put up for sale, be it motorcycles or trucks or their house, they've sold it within three days," Robertson said.

The Authentic St. Joseph Home Sale Practice kit costs \$6.95 and is put together by a semi-retired CPA and businessman in Cary, Ill., named Jerry Micklewright. He sold 1,100 during his first year of business in 1993, 8,100 the next year and 17,000 the year after that.

"This year I hit the 80,000 mark and there's every indication that next year sales will grow considerably beyond that," he said by telephone last week. "When I first started, though, I kept running into priests

"This year I hit the 80,000 mark and there's every indication that next year sales will grow considerably beyond that. When I first started, though, I kept running into priests and nuns and they'd have absolute fits about me commercializing St. Joseph."

Jerry Micklewright, the man who makes the Authentic St. Joseph Home Sale Practice kit

and nuns and they'd have absolute fits about me commercializing St. Joseph," he recalled. "They'd say, somewhat angrily, 'You're putting St. Joseph in a box!'"

Initially, Micklewright could not get church-affiliated gift and supply shops to carry his product. But once stores owned by lay people started selling the St. Joseph kit, and church officials began seeing it and reading the materials that Micklewright puts inside each box, their opposition abated.

"You ask, you believe and you trust," the Illinois entrepreneur explained. "That's all. The statue is just a symbol of your belief. You don't pray to the statue. You pray to St. Joseph and ask him to intercede.

"One of the reasons I put the kit together was because I heard so much crap. Just hocus pocus, superstitious stuff. Bury him upside down. In the back yard. In the front yard. Sideways. Facing the direction of the home you want to purchase — even

if it's 10 states away."

Probably the best story Micklewright has heard about St. Joseph's real estate activities came from a New Jersey Realtor dealing with a woman whose home had been languishing on the market for more than a year. "Don't tell me about St. Joseph," the woman barked when the real estate agent mentioned the possibility. "He's been in the ground for 12 months and it hasn't done a thing for me."

After a few months, the agent suggested digging up the statue, just to make sure it was actually St. Joseph. "So they dig it up and find out it's facing the neighbor's house and not hers," Micklewright said. "It turned out that that house had sold twice in the last year and it had never even been on the market.

"When the lady re-buried the statue facing her own house, it sold within a week," he said. "I know that sounds like an old Realtor's story or something, but that's what he told me."

Micklewright hears from dozens of satisfied customers every year. "I honestly didn't have this belief all my life, but I sure came to," he said. "I figure if God himself chose a human being, St. Joseph, to be his substitute father for the 33 years that Christ was on Earth, surely he's going to listen to St. Joseph when he intercedes for you."

The rest of my story?

After more than a year on the market, our house had not attracted a single bid. After burying our 4-inch statue of St. Joseph in the front yard facing the house, and with Mardi saying the requisite prayers, we received four bids in a six-day period roughly three weeks after sending our sainted little real estate agent to work underground.

When Mardi went out to the house to retrieve St. Joseph on the day before the real estate closing last week, she was somewhat startled to see his little head poking up out of the ground, as if to say, "Here I am. My work here is done."

Of course, we did all of the prudent things that any homeseller must do when selling a home, including dropping the price on the property. Micklewright emphasizes that sellers do everything within their power to make certain that the home is attractive and priced properly. You're asking St. Joseph for help, after all, not a full-blown miracle.

We're not saying that St. Joseph sold our home. But we're not saying he didn't, either.

Mike Leonard can be reached at leonard@herald.com via e-mail.