

# Right pricing, curb appeal help sell your home

Q-C inventory  
is at 17-year high

By Alma Gaul  
QUAD-CITY TIMES

If you're in the market to sell your home and have been reading the national stories about a cooling real estate market, you may be a little worried.

In the Quad-City area, a little worry is OK, but you shouldn't panic, Caroline Ruhl, president of Ruhl & Ruhl Realtors, says. "Homes are selling, it just takes a little more time," she says.

Two factors are at play in the Quad-Cities — sales are down 2 percent for the first half of 2006 compared with 2005 which Ruhl describes as "slight," but what gives people the feeling that conditions are tightening is that there is so much inventory. The number of homes and condominiums on the market is at a 17-year high, she says.

Couple this high inventory



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**The tradition of burying a St. Joseph statue in your yard to sell your house quickly has been around for hundreds of years.**

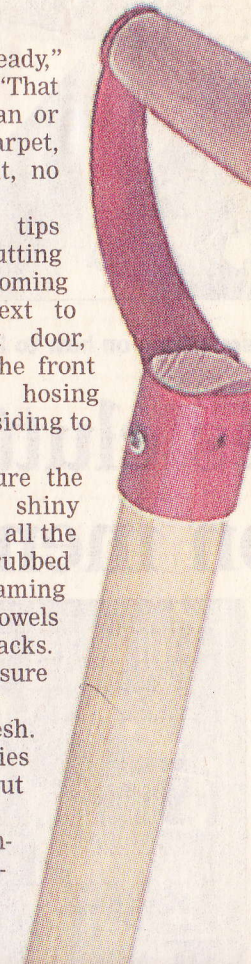
**2. Get a home inspection.** Don't wait for the potential buyer to get an inspection because you could be blind-

parade ready," Ruhl says. "That means clean or new carpet, fresh paint, no clutter."

Other tips include putting a pot of blooming flowers next to the front door, painting the front door and hosing down the siding to clean it.

Make sure the inside is shiny clean with all the sinks scrubbed and gleaming and fresh towels on the racks. Also make sure everything smells fresh. Bake cookies or put out potpourri.

**5. Consider staging.** In the past five years,



of homes and condominiums on the market is at a 17-year high, she says.

Couple this high inventory with the "doom and gloom" of the national media, and Quad-Citians might get the wrong impression of the local market, she says. Much of the decline in property values is in Florida and Arizona where investors bought homes for speculation, she says. "We aren't having a decline in value," Ruhl explains. In fact, CNN/Money Magazine predicts a 2.3 percent appreciation in the Davenport metropolitan statistical area for June 2006 to June 2007.

Still, there is a softening in the upper price range of Quad-City homes — those properties priced at \$250,000 and above, Ruhl says. Homes priced at \$125,000 and below are in high demand. Following are tips for selling your home.

**1. Right pricing.** Resist the temptation to set your price high for 30 days to "test the market," Ruhl says. "Be realistic from the start" because you could lose your potential buyer in those 30 days, she says.

Bonnie Sparks, president of the Mel Foster Co. real estate brokerage division, agrees that pricing needs emphasis. "If a home is priced right, that will balance out the other issues (such as the need for new carpet, for example). But if it's not priced right, then price becomes the issue," she says.

Your real estate agent should help you set the price by looking at similar properties and suggesting a high, low or middle ground, Sparks says.

The more expensive your home is to begin with, the more in terms of dollars you may have to reduce your price. "You have to reduce your price enough to catch the eye of a buyer in the price range lower than yours," she says.

**2. Get a home inspection.** Don't wait for the potential buyer to get an inspection because you could be blindsided by a "horrible surprise," Ruhl says. She recommends getting an inspection and posting it as a "selling point." If the inspection reveals a problem, fix it.

**3. Consider buying and offering a home warranty.** This is like an insurance policy for the buyer. If something comes up after the sale within a year, the warranty will help pay for the problem.

"This takes the fear away and offers a sense of security," Ruhl says.

Years ago only buyers bought warranties but now sellers are buying them and offering them as an incentive. Warranties generally cost between \$300 and \$400 in the Quad City area, Sparks says.

**4. Spruce up your house.** This is particularly important for that soft high-end market where existing homes are competing with new construction.

"You have to make your house look like a new house —

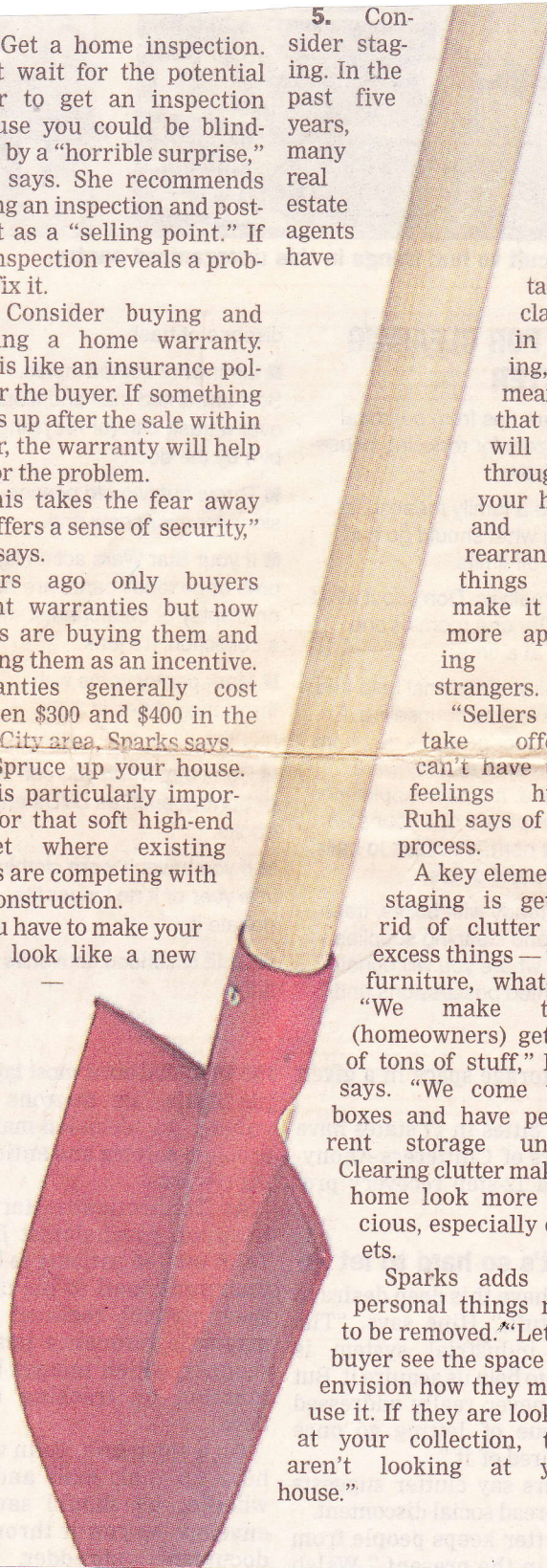
**5. Consider staging.** In the past five years, many real estate agents have

taken classes in staging, meaning that they will go through your house and rearrange things to make it look more appealing to strangers.

"Sellers can't take offense. They can't have their feelings hurt," Ruhl says of this process.

A key element of staging is getting rid of clutter and excess things — toys, furniture, whatever. "We make them (homeowners) get rid of tons of stuff," Ruhl says. "We come with boxes and have people rent storage units." Clearing clutter makes a home look more spacious, especially closets.

Sparks adds that personal things need to be removed. "Let the buyer see the space and envision how they might use it. If they are looking at your collection, they aren't looking at your house."



# Faith can move ... homes?

By Alma Gaul  
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When it comes to selling homes, many people turn to St. Joseph.

The tradition of burying a St. Joseph statue in your yard to sell your house more quickly has been around for a long time, according to a recent story in The Washington Post. Some say it dates to an order of European religious sisters in the Middle Ages who sought help in getting land for a convent. Others say it started in the late 1800s with a Montreal order of religious brothers who wanted a new chapel, the Post says.

Mark Gould, owner of the Religious Supply Center, Davenport, says he's been doing a brisk business in St. Joseph statues since he began working for the store about 20 years ago. The practice got a boost about that same time when a marketing-savvy company put together a kit containing a 3½-inch plastic statue and accom-

panying instructions, he says.

The kit sells for \$6.95, and although Gould declines to say exactly how many he sells each week, he says it is "a lot" and that demand is constant year-round, with a peak in summer when more people are trying to sell.

Sometimes homeowners will come in; sometimes a real estate agent will buy statues on behalf of customers, he says. "It's pretty amazing," he adds.

Although there are different stories about how to bury the statue — front yard, rear yard, upside down, rightside up, exactly 12 inches deep etc. — the main thing for Gould is simply to bury the statue some place and then dig it back up when you sell your house, and display it in a place of honor in your new house as thanks.

Gould said he "became a believer" when he gave a statue to a friend some years back and his friend sold his house the next day. Gould has used it for his own home, too. Did it work? "You bet," he says.

The key is not so much the burying, which might be considered hocus-pocus, but the prayer that goes with it. As a card with the statue kit says, one must *ask* St. Joseph for his help and *believe* and *trust* that he will.

Of course, for this practice to be "fully effective," as the card in the kit warns, would-be sellers must first complete all necessary fix-up, properly stage the home and adjust the price to reflect true market value.

Bonnie Sparks, of Mel Foster Co., says she buried a statue years ago at the request of a client whose home had sat on the market for a long time and was vacant.

"I had to bury it upside down in the front lefthand corner of the yard as you faced the house. But so help me, within two weeks of that, the house sold. Of course we also did some other things like reduce the price."

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Alma Gaul can be contacted at (563) 383-2324 or [agaul@qctimes.com](mailto:agaul@qctimes.com).