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## What's New in Princeton & Central New Jersey?

Reprinted from the July 2, 2008, edition of U.S. 1 newspaper

### Staging and Selling Your Home

by Roger A. Shapiro

When people use home staging — the art of sprucing up, decorating and de-cluttering a house — they sell their homes faster and for more money, according to Cindy Urken, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker on Princeton-Hightstown Road.

"Staging is all about the presentation of your home," Urken says. "It really makes a difference because the first impression a potential buyer has of your home is lasting."

Urken will present "Staging Your Home To Sell" on Tuesday, July 8, at 6:30 p.m. at Mercer County College. Cost: \$25. For more information call 609-799-8181, ext. 341, or E-mail [Cindy.Urken@cbmoves.com](mailto:Cindy.Urken@cbmoves.com).

During the two-hour program, sellers will learn what effect staging has in a difficult housing market, how to stage a home, and tips they can use to create an immediate interest in the property. "Some things are little investments in time or money, but there are things people can do to help themselves sell a home faster," says Urken. "It starts by getting the seller to disassociate herself from the personal attachment to the house and the things in it. I tell people to think of the house as a product to market. Any changes I make are not a criticism of the person's likes and preferences, but investments made to sell the house."

A recent survey by Stagedhomes.com brings the better results to light. According to survey, a staged house typically sells within 14 days after the staging. Compare that to the average time houses are on the market without being staged: 163 days. Beyond the speed factor, people get more for their homes when they are staged; the survey found sellers get an average of nearly 7 percent more for their homes after they are staged.

"Let's say we're selling a \$500,000 home in Princeton," says Urken. "Staging can bring that family an additional \$34,500, on average. That's a great return on a small investment."

Outer beauty. For the typical family needing home staging, the investment includes hiring a professional and then spending money on the repairs, updates, or other recommendations that affect the house's curb appeal. "Look at the curb appeal," Urken says. "What shape is the exterior in? Do you need to touch up paint? Do bushes need to be trimmed? Sometimes landscaping helps. The point is, make sure your home is very inviting with the very first impression."

Neutralize colors. Buyers need to visualize how they will live in a home. Seeing a living room with pink walls, for example, can create a distraction. "Sometimes this is just a matter of a fresh coat of paint," she says.

De-clutter your home. "There's always extra stuff in everyone's home," Urken says. "I can walk through a house and take away thousands of things. The home still looks like it has some personality, but it's not so cluttered."

Another bonus in this process is that the owner starts to pack for the move, which simplifies that work once a sale is completed. "People staging a home really are trying to move; that's why they are talking to me in the first place," she says. "So why not start the packing process in a way that de-clutters the rooms and helps the sale process?"

Maintain single uses for every room in the house. This problem is particularly prevalent today because many professionals have a home office. "They need to actually have office space, but a buyer doesn't want to see a room that is half office and half dining room. It creates confusion," says Urken.

While helping a homeowner, Urken stages a home so a potential buyer can visualize himself or herself living in. "Buyers don't like to think about how people lived there before," she says. "They want to imagine moving in." She questions people about knickknacks, the condition of the kitchen and bathrooms, and many more issues that improve salability.

"People have a hard time doing this for themselves because it's very emotional," she says. "They don't have an eye for their own situation because they've been living there. Now, they have to look at their home the way someone else will for the first time." She might make recommendations like changing bedspreads, moving end tables, or updating window treatments.

Staging a home comes natural to this life-long New Jersey resident. Growing up in Manalapan, she became interested in interior design and decorating at an early age. She earned a bachelor's in sociology from Miami University of Ohio, and then a certificate of interior design at Parson's School of Design in 1986.



Urken's first taste of business came back in Manalapan, where her father owned Cindy Brand Tomatoes, a company that imported and repackaged tomatoes for distribution to supermarkets. "My father started that business from scratch and I was the Cindy," she says. "I think growing up like that gave me the entrepreneurial bug." That bug also led her to go into business with her husband, Irv, with whom she owned Urken Hardware on Witherspoon Street for several years.

"In all my business experiences, I have worked to help people," Urken says. "At the hardware store, I was always giving advice on design and decor when our customers asked for help. Now all these experiences and my creative flair are helping people sell their home easier than they imagined."

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