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EcoBroker, a new branch of real estate

By: Nancy E. Oates, Correspondent



Realtor Jeanne Moyer, a 30 year resident of the Triangle, has developed a passion for taking care of the environment since the early Earth Days.

Dramatic cathedral ceilings raised the excitement level for house-hunters Matt Thompson and Charlotte Lowson. Their Realtor, Jeanne Moyer, the first EcoBroker in Wake County, brought them down to earth. The extra-tall ceilings may look cool, but come winter, she cautioned the engaged couple, you'll have to fill that space with heat.

Thompson, an energy manager for a large company in the Triangle, knew Moyer spoke the truth.

"You're excited about buying a new home, and she's the voice of reason," Thompson said. "The excitement makes you a little blind to some of the issues that exist. She does a great job of bringing those up."

Realtors are responding to the public's increasing concern for the environment by obtaining additional training in energy-efficient, healthy homes and lifestyles. Moyer chose the EcoBroker designation which though not recognized by the National Association of Realtors, has more depth, she felt, than the NAR's Green Designation. Both EcoBroker and Green Designation require 18 hours of online or in-person courses that delve into identifying and evaluating homes and communities with green attributes, understanding green financing tools and following green work practices.

Moyer, a 30 year resident of the Triangle, has developed a passion for taking care of the environment since the early Earth Days. She earned a degree in environmental

education and found a venue for her teaching skills and concern for the environment as an EcoBroker.

“I help people understand green from within a transaction,” Moyer said. “If people don’t come to me asking about green, they sure know about green by the time we’re finished.”

The local real estate market does not yet have enough inventory or demand for green homes to make it viable for Realtors to specialize solely in that product. That may change as the builders realize that ENERGY STAR homes, for instance, sell 20 percent faster and for about 17 percent more than traditional homes. Buyers usually seek a green home because they’ll save money in energy bills or because they want a healthier place to live.

With her training, Moyer helps buyers and sellers by pointing out green features in an otherwise conventional home. A 1960s ranch, for instance, would likely have solid wood cabinetry that wouldn’t outgas volatile organic chemicals as would new cabinetry made of composite wood and formaldehyde based glue. An older home might be shaded by mature hardwoods, which reduce cooling costs in the summer, or have hardwood floor instead of carpeting that might outgas. Older homes often sit on larger parcels of land, which appeals to people who want to grow their own produce in gardens, a popular feature in recent years.

Moyer also can advise on retrofitting older homes to make them greener such as extra insulation and caulking, sealing duct joints with mastic and replacing outdated appliances and HVAC system with higher SEER models. She has list of reliable vendors and subcontractors to make the transformation.

Thompson and Lawson wanted a newly built home because it was more likely to be energy-efficient and lower the cost of homeownership.

“There have been several changes in the building codes over the years,” Thompson said. “With those changes, homes have become more energy-efficient.”

They discovered that in areas they want to live – a short commute to work and within walking or biking distance of a major park or greenway – new homes were almost nonexistent. The tradeoff in buying new construction would be a long commute to places where they want to be. As time becomes a greater premium with the pressured work demands of two-income-earner families, people want to spend less time commuting. Thompson and Lawson realigned their search to focus on location, relying on Moyer to advise them on retrofitting green features.

The Triangle Multiple Listing Service, the most efficient way of searching for local homes, is one of only six MLS's in the state with the ability to search for green features. As an officer of the Triangle chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, Moyer is working to encourage other MLS's in the state to adopt green search capability.

Moyer utilizes green business practices as well. Instead of writing up contracts on paper, she uses an online document preparation and management system. She puts QR codes on her "For Sale" signs and toll-free numbers to hear recorded information about the listing to reduce the demand for paper fact sheets. When she needs to print MLS listings for clients, she often does on the back of other printed sheets. She plans her route carefully when showing homes to avoid driving more than necessary.

While her clients focus on granite countertops and windowed walk-in closets, Moyer has a different checklist. Does the landscape shunt water toward the foundation? Damp homes attract mold, mildew and bugs, including termites. What's the energy-efficiency of the windows and insulation? Is the tape on metal ducts "crispy" and thus less effective? She looks for unfinished space to reclaim and she routinely requests copies of utility bills from the sellers. High utility bills in an older home can be rectified through retrofitting, but little can be done about high utility costs in a new standard construction home until after closing.

"Jeanne's buyers know what they're getting into, not only from an environmental perspective but also from a budget perspective", Thompson said. "It's great to have Jeanne value the same things we do."

Learn more about Jeanne Moyer at www.trianglegreenhomes.com or use the Power Search for homes including green homes at www.jeannemoyer.com.

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