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The Business of Green

By Iris June Vinegar, Correspondent

It's an art gallery. No, it's a showroom. Wait, they're bringing in refreshments — it's a party! How about all of the above, plus a real estate agency.

It's the first Friday of the month, and at CityGate Real Estate Services, nestled in the heart of Raleigh's thriving Glenwood South district, people are coming and going like it's Grand Central Station. The agency (formerly Doro Taylor Realty) shares office space with Kohn Associates and the Allen Fletcher Insurance Agency. Today, they're hosting an open house to showcase photographer Lee Thompson's work.

Another attraction is CityGate's interior earth-friendly furnishings, especially the desks and walls. Many of the recycled fabrics and frames came from either the Habitat for Humanity ReStore or Taylor's basement.

"We chose to use repurposed doors as office partitions rather than new cubicles which are not eco-friendly," explained Taylor, CityGate's co-managing broker with partner John O'Neal. Instead of traditional acoustical paneling, recycled carpet was glued to the wall and to medium density fiberboard (MDF) sheets to create separations between the desks, many of which are recycled walnut doors from the now-demolished downtown First Citizens Bank building. The wood was sanded and coated with low VOC polyurethane.



But that's not all that's green at CityGate. Six of the 10 brokers hold the NAR Green designation, while four of those agents are also EcoBroker certified; the other two will soon complete the latter course which is more intensive.

Those prestigious certifications signify completion of one or both training programs on energy and the environment. NAR Green is certified by the National Association of Realtors; the EcoBroker title is conferred by the Association of Energy and Environmental Real Estate Professionals (AEEREP). An important part of the program is marketing a green home. In fact, the Multiple Listings System recently added a separate category for green, sustainable, energy-efficient homes (www.ListedGreen.com).

“Both courses are incredibly informative,” Taylor explained, pointing out the training sessions, which include marketing techniques, detail the health and financial benefits of green building. The subjects include toxic elements that affect indoor-air quality — mold, lead and radon — as well as property contaminated by gas stations, dry cleaners, etc. “That doesn’t make us authorities on the technical problems,” noted Taylor who holds the EcoBroker and NAR Green designations. “We are trained to recognize the need for professional intervention in those cases but we keep an arsenal of helpful engineers and contractors for our clients’ benefit.”

A former designer of 15 years and a Realtor since 2001, Taylor and her husband, developer Lee Norris, recently remodeled their nearby Cameron Park home with Energy Star appliances and other green features. But even though the real estate market for eco-friendly houses is small, Taylor said there are some older green homes for sale now, and more will become available as their owners decide to move.

“Green can have many different meanings,” explained CityGate broker Jeanne Moyer, one of the first EcoBroker-Certified Realtors in the Triangle. “For some buyers an energy-efficient home is most important; others connect reduced energy costs with a reduced carbon footprint.” The former inner-city environmental educator hopes to bring green to the mainstream through education, advocacy and promoting green building.

In fact, that’s what Moyer and CityGate Realtor Lyra Rakusin, a former N.C. State University Solar House employee, have in mind for their April 20th seminar “Finding your Dream Green Home.” The presentation is one of CityGate’s monthly Eco-Monday seminars usually held at its offices.

Although green home sales constitute only a tiny fraction of the Triangle real estate market, some investors are profiting from buying conventional homes and renovating them with green features. For example, CityGate EcoBroker Jason Miller just listed a 1,670-square-foot Chapel Hill home built of recycled timber on 5 acres. The property, which includes a well and spring-fed pond and uses county water, is listed for \$299,000. Miller says there’s definitely a market for green building and renovation: “There are no negatives to buying something that’s green.”

Sean Conley, another CityGate Ecobroker, agrees. He recently sold a 1,000-square-foot home with a “green” roof on Carson Street in Raleigh’s Five Points community for \$230,000. Supplied by Living Roofs Inc. of Asheville, the roof features environmentally friendly plants sprouting from shale stones over a rubber covering. “Although it costs one-third to one-half more than its conventional counterpart, the Living Roof could last two or three times as long, said Conley, a Furman liberal arts major with a masters degree from the N.C. State University School of Textiles. “Green homes generally sell for more than conventional homes,” he explained, “because in addition to helping the environment they last longer and are a good investment.”

Moyer, who is also a member of the HBA Green Home Builders of the Triangle’s education committee, believes more eco-conscious buyers than ever want to live in a green home. “They understand the financial benefits of reduced power bills and realize that many of them don’t cost more than traditional construction.”

The environmentalist/Realtor’s answer to the shortage of affordable green homes in a preferred location: Take an existing house and make it greener. “For until supply catches up with demand, more people will be looking at remodeling as a way to create their own green dream home.”

And in that process, helping to protect the planet.

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NOTES:

Jeanne Moyer was an affiliate at CityGate Real Estate for two years 2008-2010. The Triangle MLS added fields for green certified homes and green features in March 2009. In 2011 ENERGY STAR single family homes exceed 20% of the new homes market.

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