

2015
Spring Real Estate
& New Homes

With its vaulted entrance way extending to the pool, the new pavilion accommodates well-integrated activity zones while quietly reconciling existing architecture to a setting that includes planters and other outdoor features. Craftsman-style piers supporting an angular metal-clad roof present a period ambiance accented with wicker chairs and cafe tables.



PHOTO BY MITRO HOOD

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\$1,400,000



European-styled mansion offers room after room of spacious comfort and classic ambiance. Elegant French windows, stained glass ports, sunroom, formal library, first floor master suite, and more. All on one of Great Falls' most beautiful 4-acre sites with its own pond.

GREAT FALLS

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Rare opportunity to own 10 acres with potential to build up to 3 houses on part of L'Auberge Chez François' family property. Wooded building sites overlook a vast open area. Can be purchased alone or combined with 944 Walker Rd for a spectacular retreat.

GREAT FALLS

\$1,295,000



Grand 5-acre property in sought-after Southdown Farm. Excellent lot orientation with towering trees provide the perfect location for a magnificent new home. Existing home has been well maintained but is being sold "as is." Short distance to Potomac River.

POTOMAC FALLS

\$920,000



Spectacular Lowes Island home situated on a bluff with winter views of Potomac River and gorgeous golf course. Filled with glorious updates, and the ultimate in amenities from a completely new master bath with heated floor to a grand home office.

RESTON

\$324,000



Light-filled condo in "Edgewater at Town Center." Updated kitchen boasts ceramic floors, granite counters, stainless appliances including 5-burner gas stove. Two master bedrooms, private walk-out covered patio, and views of lovely lake with fountain.

GREAT FALLS

\$1,657,000



Exquisite home with over \$600,000 in updates: Saltwater pool, outdoor kitchen, new baths, vista windows, contemporary accents, wood floors, and a kitchen beyond belief. State-of-the-art "everything" inside and out, where you can enjoy life as it was meant to be.



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Spring Real Estate & New Homes

Staged to Sell

Real estate agents give the lowdown on getting your home ready for the market.

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

When a Burke family hired E. Diane Neustrand to sell their home, she did her standard walk-through of the house to assess it, but when she reached the dining room, she stopped cold.

"It was painted with three different shades of orange and accessorized with black, white and gold furniture," said Neustrand, a real estate agent with Long and Foster Real Estate, Inc. in Burke, Fairfax Station and Clifton.

First on Neustrand's chopping block: a pair of zebra print chairs. The boisterous wall colors were next.

"It wasn't harmonious at all," said Neustrand, who also works as a professional home stager. "We had to calm that down because orange is not a color that sells well. You want neutrals in paint and furniture, so potential buyers can visualize their own items in your home."

Residential real estate staging, the practice of preparing a home to go on the market for sale by making it aesthetically appealing, is credited with giving homes an advantage over the competition.

Staging can range from rearranging furniture, decluttering and painting the walls to furnishing a home in which the seller no



PHOTO BY ROBERT WHETZEL

Realtors say professionally staged homes spend less time on the market.

longer resides.

The National Association of Realtors' 2015 Investment & Home Buyers Survey showed that staging can have a positive impact on the number of days a home sits on the market and the amount of money potential buyers a willing offer for the home.

"STAGED HOMES traditionally present themselves better than the competition by being clean, clutter-free and ready to show to prospective buyers," said Mona Bekheet, a real estate agent with McEneaney Associates, Inc. in McLean. "Home staging is decluttering, depersonalizing and preparing a seller's home to look like a model

home so the potential buyers can see themselves living in the home."

The survey showed that 49 percent of agents say most buyers are affected by home staging, while a 2013 study by the Real Estate Staging Association showed staged homes sold 83 percent sooner than houses that weren't staged. Realtors also believe buyers usually offer a 1-5 percent increase on the value of a staged home.

"Staged homes take less time on the market and they sell at the best price," said Bekheet. "Buyers view them as well cared for properties and appraisers are more likely to appraise staged homes at a full or higher value."

That increase can offset the expense of

having a home professionally staged. Services, including consultations and furniture rental, can cost \$250 to \$2,000. Neustrand uses as many of the homeowners' possessions as she can to minimize out-of-pocket expenses.

"Since staging gives a home a clean, fresh, current look, it makes a home more attractive to buyers," said Betsy Schuman Dodek of Washington Fine Properties in Potomac.

Initiating conversations with homeowners about their homes and suggesting changes must be handled delicately.

"You don't want to hurt someone's feelings by telling them that they need to move items or get rid of items like the wrong artwork or too much furniture," said Maria Smith of Arlington Realty in Arlington. "But the homeowner's objective should be to sell the home."

"Even if you have a large home, if your closets are over-stuffed or if you have too much furniture, a prospective buyer can't get a sense of the space and dimension of a room or visualize themselves in the home," said E.J. Stone, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Alexandria.

REMOVING ULTRA-PERSONAL ITEMS like family pictures or bills is another part of the staging process.

"You want to get a potential buyer to envision their things in the home," said Stone. "Neutrals can help with that. Those are things that a home stager can suggest."

Less is often more in the home staging game, say Realtors. "I tell my clients to take stuff off the walls, rent a storage space and take all the stuff you don't need and put it into a storage unit, so it opens up more space," said Michael Richter, real estate agent for residential preferred properties at the Richter Group in Burke.

Realtors rank the living room as the number one room to stage, followed by the kitchen, then the master bedroom, dining room and the bathroom.

"Your home should be a model home, like no one lives there," said Neustrand. "The bathroom counters should not have products or clutter. There should not be trash in the garbage can."

Optimism for 2015 Real Estate Market

BY ANDREA WORKER
THE CONNECTION

After what seemed to be an endless winter, spring has finally come calling, signaling the start of the year's first real estate high season. Homes trade hands all year long, but spring is often for buyers, seller, agents, brokers and lenders like those weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas; buyers at full speed searching out the best bargains and sellers looking to move their wares without having to resort to price-slashing sales tactics.

So far, area real-estate experts and the data from sources like the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors (NVAR), Movoto

Real Estate, and SmartCharts (powered by RealEstate Business Intelligence with data supplied from the MLS listing service) are all aligned in their assessment of the outlook for the 2015 market in Northern Virginia. Compared to a lackluster 2014 after a strong 2013, there's reason for optimism.

Veronica Seva-Gonzalez, NVAR board member and Realtor with Compass Real Estate, noted that the spring weather and positive housing market news had arrived simultaneously. "It's great to see how all of the numbers are up from last year and also from the beginning of this year," she said.

Across the board, the numbers do look positive. Combined data collected for the counties of Fairfax and Arlington, the cities

of Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax and the towns of Vienna, Herndon and Clifton, show a first quarter increase of total units sold of just over 9 percent, with 3,657 units sold in 2015 compared to 3,352 the prior year. For the same period and for the same localities, days on the market (DOM) per unit actually rose in 2015 and the average ratio of sales price to list price showed marginal slippage, but Realtors and market analysts see the significant improvements in March 2015 numbers vs. March 2014 figures as an indicator of a healthy selling season ahead.

The March 2015 increases were seen in

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Spring Real Estate

Outlook Optimism for 2015 Market

FROM PAGE 3

all sectors of the residential market, with “attached” homes like townhouses leading the way with a 3.6 percent uptick in average sales price. Condominiums came in at second place, with a 1.8 percent increase in the month compared to 2014. Single-family homes came in last for the March 2015 totals, but still better than the prior year by 0.7 percent.

Greatly increased inventory versus last year could be one factor in the more modest single-family home price increases. In 2015, 3,165 new properties came onto the market during the month, while only 2,656 were put on the books during that month last year. A total of 3,381 units were available to buyers in March this year compared to 3,011 last year.

“In some areas and some price ranges, there is definitely more choice,” said Reston Long and Foster Realtor Anita Lasansky. “Sellers are starting to get more confident.”

Realtor Jennifer Boyce, Long and Foster Gold Team, also noted that some buyers were starting to “come out from under,” having held on during the worst of the economic downturn. “Equities are looking stronger, so they can get back in, selling or buying.”

The data does vary around the region. Not all areas experienced an increase in sales prices in the month-to-month comparison. Falls Church City, for example, posted an increase in the numbers of units sold, but a 19.12 percent decrease in median sales price.

Arlington County, on the other hand, saw the largest increase in the March 2015 vs. March 2014 side-by-side; with 24.43 percent more closed sales and a 10.68 percent increase in the median sales price.

Janet Gresh of the Gresh Group in McLean says that her experience so far this year is in line with those numbers. “Arlington is definitely hot right now, close in and enough quality properties that you see serious competition.”

Lasansky gave the numbers she is seeing for Reston a “thumbs up,” as well. “We’re up about 15 percent in the first quarter over last year and about 5 percent up in median sales price.”

In the City of Alexandria, the median sales price rose by more than 10 percent in March on an increase of 14.37 percent in closed sales. Fairfax County and Fairfax City both saw more moderate improvements in median sales prices at 2.79 percent and 2.00 percent respectively. For Fairfax City, the positive takeaway from the March figures is that the median sales price rose despite a drop in total closed sales of more than 50 percent compared to last year.

While all of the data provided is considered preliminary and still subject to revision, the numbers available to date suggest a good start to the year – and barring the unforeseen negative impact – a positive 2015 real estate market.

Plus-column numbers on the books, the collective optimism of many of the area’s top real estate professionals, and respected organizations like the Northern Virginia Association of Realtors adding that “2015 may be different because of its more sustainable, positive market direction,” all offer signs that the real estate market in the region is looking at a healthy year. Any number of factors, including the ever-present threat of the Federal Reserve raising interest rates sometime this year, could stall or even reverse the positive trends.



**PHOTO
GALLERY!**
“Me and My Mom”

To honor Mom on Mother’s Day, send us your favorite snapshots of you with your Mom and The Connection will publish them in our Mother’s Day issue. Be sure to include some information about what’s going on in the photo, plus your name and phone number and town of residence. To e-mail digital photos, send to:

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Or to mail photo prints, send to:
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For more information, call (703) 674-0350 or email ljensen@gulickgroup.com



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On Tour: Aging in Place Renovation

BY JOHN BYRD

A Vienna whole house remodel that incorporates an Aging-In-Place solution will be featured in the Parade of Homes/ Remodeled Home Tour April 25-April 26.

The circa-1970s split-level owned by Andre and Katy Hollis was substantially repurposed and renovated by Sun Design Remodeling of Burke.

"I decided that I really liked our neighborhood and that with changes we could stay in the house indefinitely," Katy Hollis said.

Mindy Mitchell, the Certified Aging-In-Place Specialist (CAPS) at Sun Design Remodeling who executed the Hollis design solution, says such inquiries have become more common in recent years.

After considering options, the Hollis family settled on several revisions: a spacious first floor bedroom; a gourmet kitchen; a better entertainment plan; and a guest suite with dedicated bath.

"I thought we probably had enough



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

A whole house aging-in-place solution by Sun Design Remodeling will be featured in the Parade of Homes' Remodeled Homes Tour, April 25 and April 26. The firm executed a top-to-bottom makeover to a circa 1970s split-level, creating a first level master suite and a gourmet kitchen.

square footage to achieve what we wanted," Katy Hollis said, "but there were lots of functional problems, and we weren't sure how to address them."

The challenge was reconfiguring adequate existing space into a better plan serving long term horizons.

Katy wanted both a guest suite and a larger, more private master bedroom suite.

The former master bedroom suite now becomes spacious guest quarters. A corner bedroom has been transformed into a second upstairs bathroom.

Mitchell and team re-deployed 300 square feet on the rear of the first level for a very private master bedroom suite that includes a master bath and generous walk-in closets.

A home office behind glass-facing French doors opens directly into the redecorated living room.

"It's a terrific solution in every detail," Hollis said. "And knowing we've already made some solid decisions about the future has really given me peace of mind."

Call 703-425-5588 or www.SunDesignInc.com.

Autumn Wood Wraps Up, New Opportunities at Fallsgate

Autumn Wood, a community of 18 homes off Georgetown Pike, is a bright spot for new homes in Great Falls over the past several years. Most homes sold between \$2 million and \$2.5 million, and during several of the last few years sales of Gulick have made up nearly half of the sales in that price range in Great Falls.

With only two homes, including our model home, remaining in Autumn Wood, we are pleased to introduce Fallsgate. Fallsgate is a community of five homes nestled within the broader community of Longwood, and offers an opportunity to live in a community setting among coordinating homes in Great Falls.

Longwood is a great neighborhood to walk through, and is near lots of shopping, including Great Falls Village Center, Reston

Town Center and Tysons. Plus, it is in the Langley School District.

Gulick has introduced two new floorplans for Fallsgate, the Ashcroft (3460-5445 square feet) and the Grayson (4040-7430 square feet).

We have the first Grayson nearly complete and ready to show in Autumn Wood. We designed these homes for the modern family, or someone interested in downsizing, as the 10,000-square-foot McMansions seem to be a thing of the past.

Both of these floorplans exemplify our attention to detail and the Gulick design sense, offer open spaces and opportunities to interact both within and between rooms, without losing the drama we are known for.

— JAMIE GULICK, GULICK GROUP



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