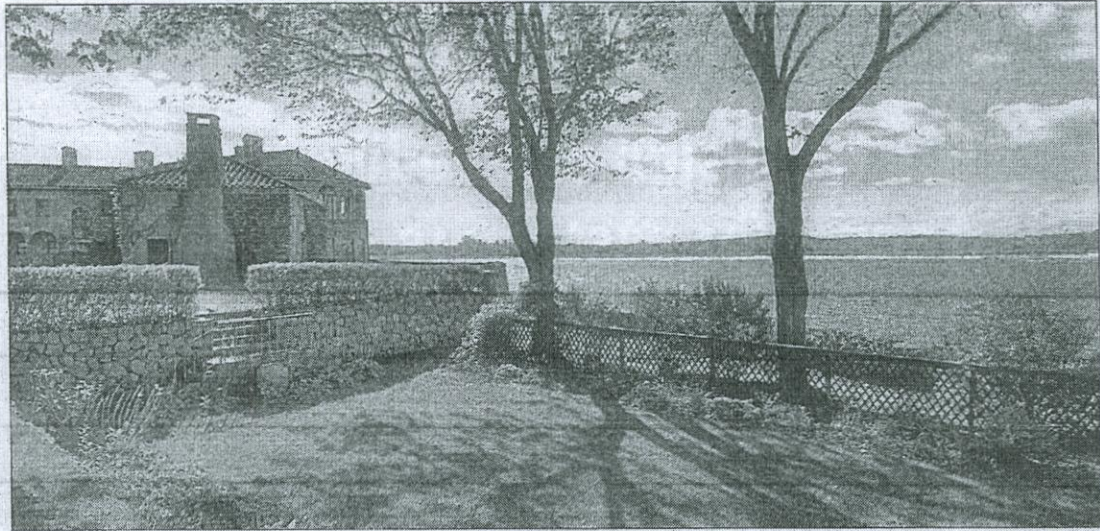


Residential Real Estate

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Representatives for Quattro Venti, above and below, threw a Tuscan wine tasting in October to drum up interest in the \$5.95 million Gloucester property. The party didn't result in a purchase offer, but Coldwell Banker's John Farrell said the event nonetheless created a lot of good will.

A savvy real estate agent should know a listing from basement to the backyard, but in this market, a sale isn't strictly a matter of a house's selling points

PROPERTY EDGE

BY MARY MOORE
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

You wouldn't expect to find the word chauffeur in the job description for real estate agent, broker or home stager. Cleaner, dog-walker, party-planner and construction supervisor probably are not in the definition either.

Yet many residential real estate professionals, especially in the current slow market, are finding themselves stretching as far as they have to, sometimes taking on entirely new roles, to close a deal. While pricing right remains the most important factor in buying and selling, getting a listing or a representing a buyer means working it.

Really working it.

Whether they're hosting high-class wine tastings or washing windows, shuttling clients to the airport or walking their dogs, agents are doing whatever it takes.

Sometimes the small things make all the difference. Sean Waters, an agent for

Gibson Sotheby's International Realty, needed his client's signature on offer papers that were due by 7 p.m. one January evening. His client was taking the commuter rail to Rhode Island in the morning, leaving her no time to meet with Waters in his office before she left and unable to make it back to Boston by the deadline.

Waters found a small window of opportunity. He met the client on the platform at South Station, and together, they rode the train one stop. Just enough time for her to look over the offer and sign — and for Waters to hop off the train at Back Bay Station with the signed papers in his hand.

Carmela Laurella, an agent with Otis & Ahearn who had \$63.2 million in sales in 2007 and named Boston's No. 2 broker by Boston Common magazine, finds sales magic in threes: putting planters on scrubbed decks, taking fabulous photographs of the property and, before

PLEASE SEE WORKING IT, PAGE 43



HOUSING ANSWERS: Q&A with some area residential real estate players. 42

WORKING IT: Yes, they do windows

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anything, getting the windows washed. "Yes, the windows. A lot of the homes are clean, but people don't always wash their windows, especially going from winter to spring market," she said.

Home stager Blair Hamaty, who owns Setting the Space in Kingston, has become something of a construction supervisor.

"We did the kitchen, put down tile, put in granite countertops, refinished hardwood floors, installed new carpeting. We fixed the plumbing problems and electrical problems," said Hamaty, referring to a Scituate home he worked on this year with a \$22,000-plus budget. "Then we staged it. We took out the old furniture, we brought in a junk person and we donated stuff. We did a complete staging from top to bottom — plants, accessories, art, lamps, furniture."

"We were like Lucy and Ethel, driving all over the city and buying everything. We ironed curtains and brought our own ironing boards from home."

Sue Collins

The Coldwell Banker agent and her colleagues went all out to stage three units in the Schoolhouse at Lower Mills.

Cocktail parties have become a standard way for Realtors to attract other brokers and potential buyers. John Farrell, sales associate for Coldwell Banker in Beverly, organized a Tuscan wine tasting with his wife, Cindy, at Quattro Venti in the Annisquam Village neighborhood of Gloucester.

The 15-room Tuscan-style villa, now on the market for \$5.95 million, was built in 1914.

The Farrells sent out upwards of 1,000 invitations and about 60 people — brokers and high-end buyers — turned out on a warm day last October to sip wine and nibble on cheeses, prosciutto, white anchovies and other cocktail-party foods.

First Republic Bank, interested in expanding its mortgage market on the North Shore, picked up the tab for the shindig. John Farrell included on the guest list a contractor with a background in mansion renovations who brought a laptop presentation with rehab ideas for potential buyers.

"No one has stepped up to the plate yet to buy the property, but the event created a lot of good will," Farrell said. "It was a good opportunity to bring forward a potential buyer or someone who might know a buyer."

In Dorchester, the Schoolhouse at Lower Mills has been hosting almost weekly cocktail parties targeting different groups of brokers and potential buyers, even naming a project-specific drink: Schoolhouse Rocks. If you're wondering, that's Grey Goose vodka, Midori, lime juice and a little club soda.

Units in the Schoolhouse project, a 62-unit condominium building constructed around and preserving an 1865 schoolhouse, have been on the market since the summer of 2007.

When Coldwell Banker got the listing in February 2006, sales agent Sue Collins and some of her colleagues launched into preparations for a March 1 opening, which kicked off the series of on-site events that have been happening ever since.

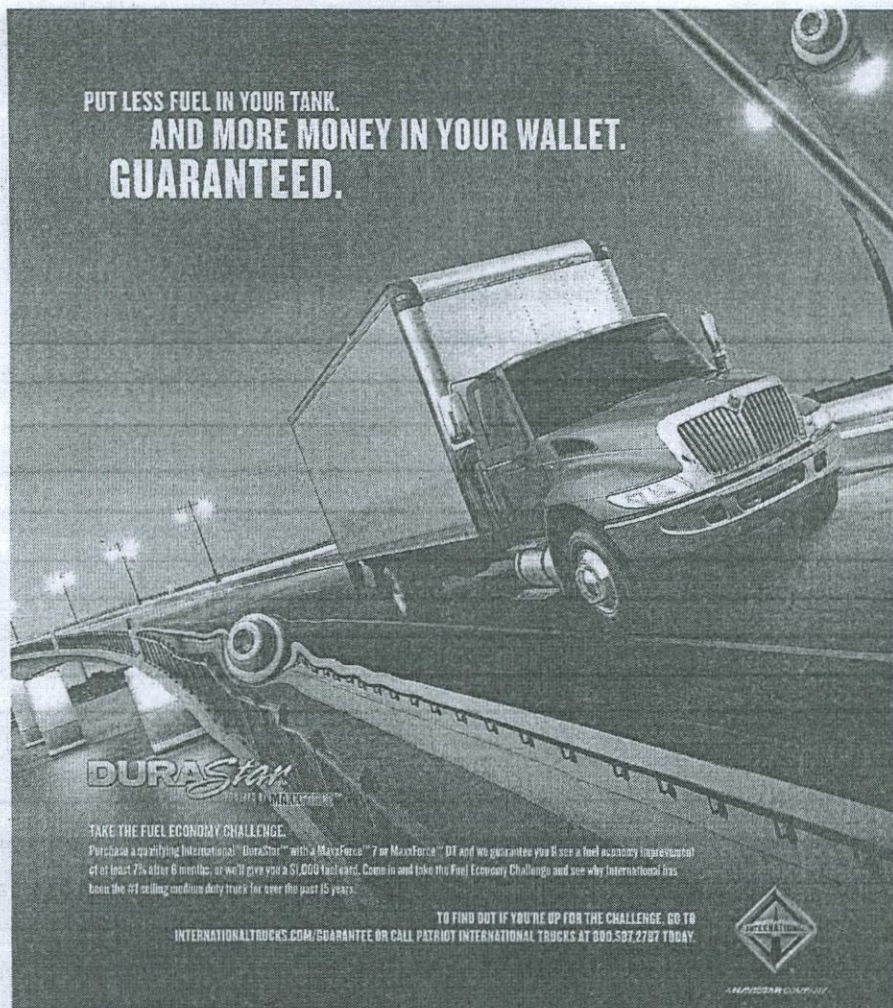
To start, they staged three of the units in three different styles: traditional, contemporary and somewhere in between.

"It was comical," Collins said. "We were like Lucy and Ethel, driving all over the city and buying everything. We ironed curtains and brought our own ironing boards from home. We brought knickknacks from home. We

had a book drive at the office to fill the bookshelves. One of the developers even brought in his drills and assembled a four-poster bed."

Collins also has arranged for a local community group to hold one of its meetings in the Schoolhouse's Residents' Club Room to draw some of the neighborhood's stakeholders. The nearby Flat Black Coffee Company named a special coffee blend after the Schoolhouse project, and half-pound bags are available at on-site events and openings.

Has the extra effort paid off? Ten percent of the units now are under agreement, Collins said.



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