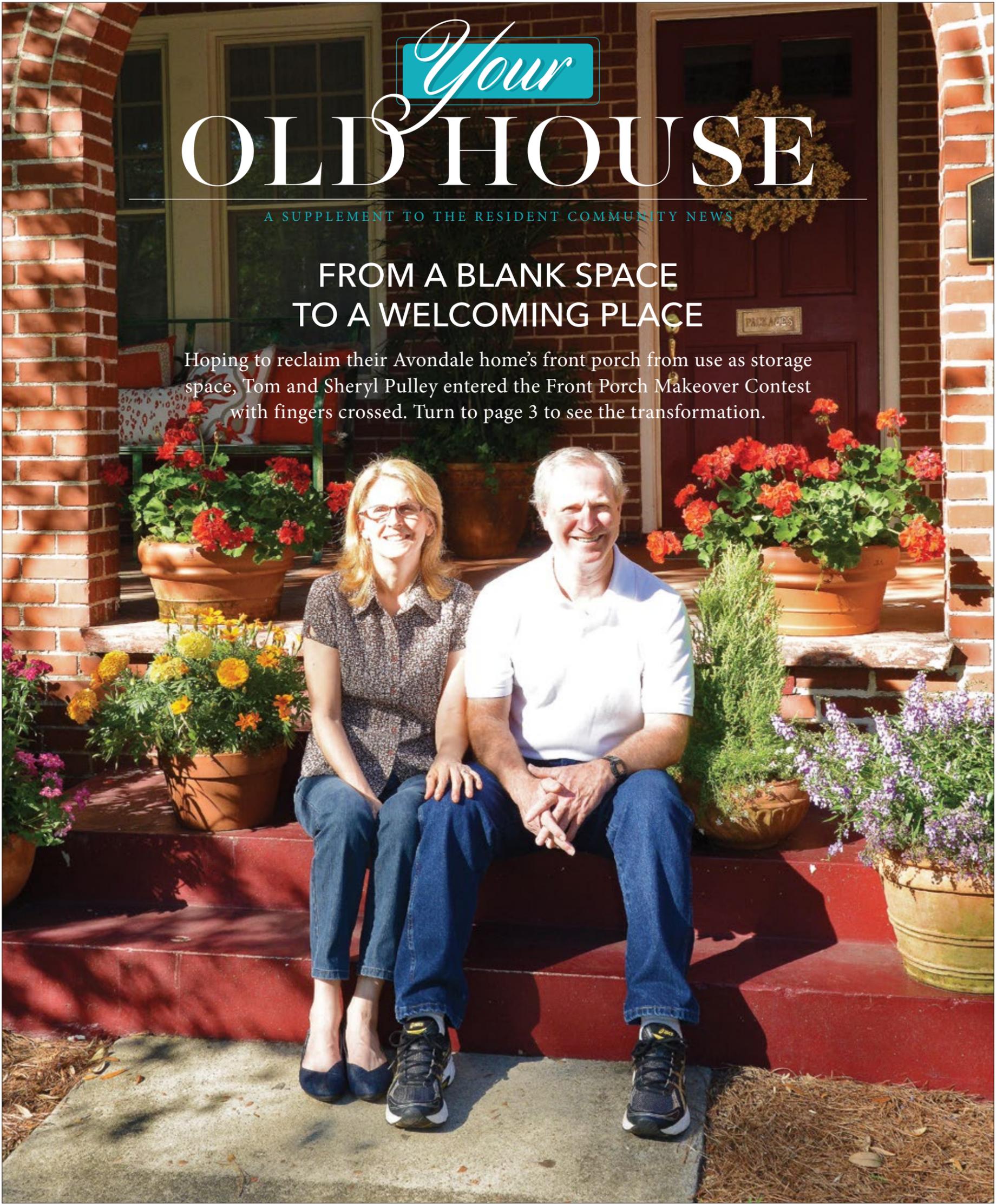


Your OLD HOUSE

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE RESIDENT COMMUNITY NEWS

FROM A BLANK SPACE TO A WELCOMING PLACE

Hoping to reclaim their Avondale home's front porch from use as storage space, Tom and Sheryl Pulley entered the Front Porch Makeover Contest with fingers crossed. Turn to page 3 to see the transformation.



Butterfly Love

Liam Leonard, Vincent Venus, Clara Venus and Colin Farhat have a close encounter with some Monarch butterflies. Read more, page 26.



Garden Opens

Brittany and Jake Herbst planted five kinds of tomatoes, and other vegetables in their half-plot. Read more, page 26.





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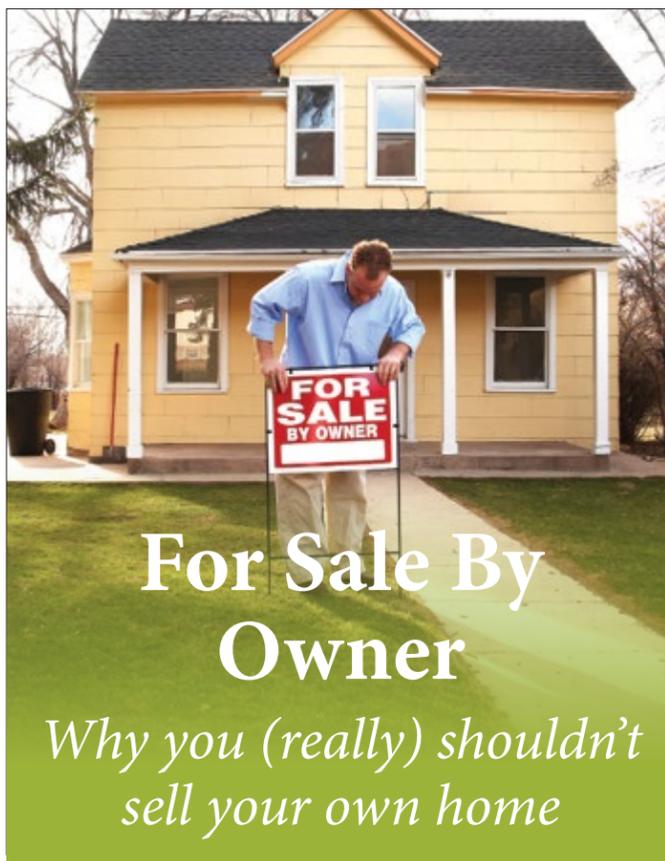
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For Sale By Owner

Why you (really) shouldn't sell your own home

By *Kate A. Hallock*
Resident Community News

You love your home, you know its pros and cons, ins and outs, and ups and downs. That's fine unless you're trying to sell it.

Even if you are the world's greatest home stylist and stager, with a flair for marketing, neither those qualities nor your in-depth knowledge about your family home are good reasons to try to sell it on your own.

In addition to coping with the emotions of leaving a home you've loved and lived in, there are financial reasons, among many others, that may convince you to avoid the temptation of going the route of For Sale By Owner (FSBO).

Financially, statistics show that using a professional real estate agent will net you a higher profit, enough to offset their commission and often put money in your bank account.

According to the National Association of Realtors® 2015 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers, the median FSBO sales price was \$210,000, while the median selling price for a home represented by an agent was \$249,000, a difference of nearly \$40,000.

In addition to the financial advantages, there are other reasons to consider when you decide to put your home on the market and are toying with the idea of selling it yourself.

The pros for a Pro

When it comes to maximizing the sale of a home, knowing what to do at the right time is a learned skill. An NAR report notes 48 percent of homeowners who attempt to sell their own home believe they'll have just a little extra work to do to avoid the cost of commissions or closing fees, but many home sellers get a rude awakening when it comes to the amount of time and the marketing expertise required to do it on their own.

In 2015, the report indicated 89 percent of all homes sold were done so with the assistance of a real estate professional. Just eight percent of those selling their homes chose FSBO in 2015 – a record low, according to an NAR survey with figures back to 1981.

1. Market data – Realtors have at their fingertips a lot of information about recent sales and homes on the market that can be used to price your home to sell more quickly and for a higher price. Studies show the longer a home is on the market, the lower the price at closing.

2. Home showings – Buyers prefer to look at a property without the seller present so they can explore the rooms and visualize themselves in the home. At an FSBO sale, you must be present and you must have a thick skin. A realtor can show your home when you aren't available, and can respond to inquiries from potential buyers and their agents, while getting valuable feedback – all things that save you time and hurt feelings.

3. Safety and legitimacy – A real estate agent can provide a measure of safety by screening visitors to your home. If you market it yourself, you run the risk of potentially opening your home to future harm. In addition, a realtor will check to see if the buyers can afford to purchase your home, helping you avoid wasting time showing your home to unrealistic buyers.

4. Wide network – As far as professional services networks go, real estate has one of the largest. In addition to their professional marketing expertise, realtors have contacts with other realtors who work with buyers, as well as the support of a brokerage, which can market your home more widely than you can as an individual. When it comes to marketing and advertising, homeowners may balk at paying for an ad choosing to focus on free avenues, but agents use all types of media – over and over.

5. Contract negotiation – Unless you have a lot of free time and enjoy looking at page after page of legal jargon, you may want to leave the legalities to the professionals. Although some realtors may have a law degree, even those without a legal background know which conditions should be part of each sale. After all, they see dozens, if not hundreds, of contracts every year. And, like an attorney, a realtor knows how to negotiate both price and settlement date to your best advantage because he or she is not emotionally invested in the deal.

6. Education and experience – The education of a real estate agent includes sales associate pre- and post-licensing courses, followed by broker pre- and post-licensing courses, and courses in ethics every two years, all of which total more than 250 hours of education. A broker's license exam includes real estate law, and real estate principles and practices, which include appraising, finance, investment and brokerage management as well as real estate mathematics.

Contrast the once, or maybe twice, in a lifetime self-effort to sell a home with an experienced realtor's annual median of 13 transactions. Even realtors with two years or less experience have a median of three transactions, according to Melanie Green, communications director for the Northeast Florida Association of Realtors (NEFAR).

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– On the Cover –

FRONT PORCH MAKE-OVER

Contest Winner

“Our beloved front porch used to strain from its heavy tinted Plexiglas enclosure. Although we would have loved to use it, the lack of light and warmth forced the front porch to be used as a storage space instead of as an extension of our living space,” said Sheryl Pulley, homeowner at 1625 Talbot Ave.

Tom and Sheryl Pulley had moved into their 1935 home in 1986 as relative newlyweds. The previous owners had put up the Plexiglas and the Pulleys lived with it for far too long, finally removing it within the past year or two.

“We had the Plexiglas removed and were astonished with the preliminary results,” said Sheryl, who works as office manager for the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. “The openness reconnected us to the street we live on and the charming atmosphere of our neighborhood.”

Sheryl said she entered the Front Porch Makeover Contest with hopes of giving the porch a new life, which would allow her and her husband, Tom, to achieve balance between a space that is both livable and lovable.

While Sheryl was at work, a crew from Anita’s Garden Shop and Design and from Blend Indoor/Outdoor transformed the porch April 21 with a wrought-iron bench, comfy full-weather outdoor down pillows, ferns, palms, potted plants and flowers, and topped it off with a bright yellow wreath on the front door.

Tom, a senior crime laboratory analyst for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, was at home at the time of the makeover and agreed to keep it a surprise for his wife. When Sheryl got home that afternoon, she couldn’t believe it. “It is just so gorgeous,” she said. “The colors are amazing, and my porch looks so beautiful.”



Lawn watering limited to twice a week

During daylight saving time, Duval County residents must set lawn and landscape irrigation to no more than two days per week to conserve the city’s water supply, per Chapter 366 of the ordinance code.

Residential properties with an address ending in an odd number or places without an address may water Wednesday and Saturday. Even-numbered addresses may water Thursday and Sunday. Watering is allowed only before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m. year-round, with some exceptions.

Lawn watering will return to once a week beginning Nov. 6, 2016.

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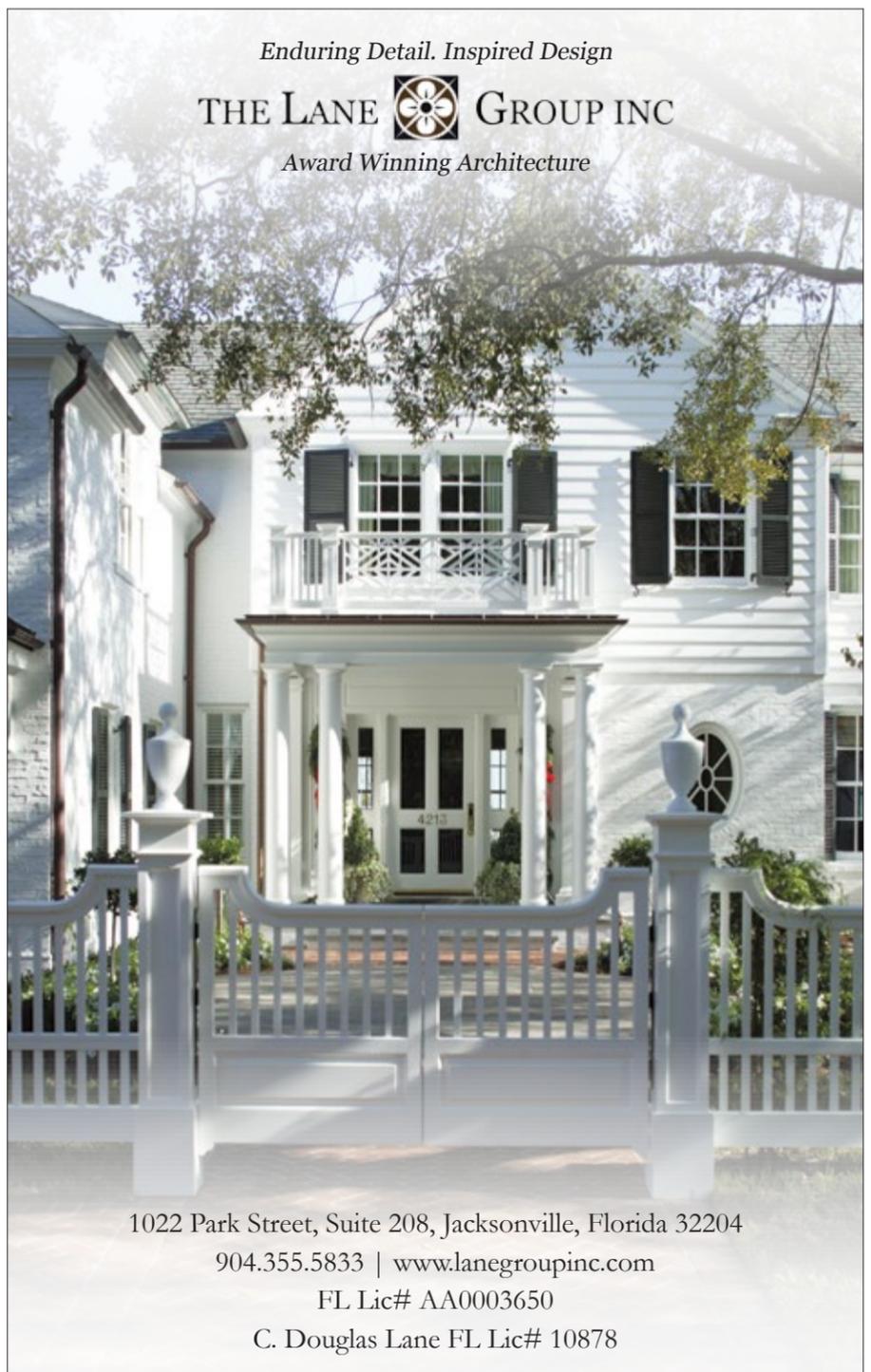
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Opt for neat and clean over expensive remodels when putting home on market

By Lorrie DeFrank
Resident Community News

Sellers considering expensive renovations to increase the resale values of their homes should first invest in sponges from a dollar store.

“To get the most bang for the buck, the biggest thing you need to do is make sure everything is squeaky and sparking clean,” said Janie Boyd, broker/owner, Janie Boyd & Associates Real Estate Services, echoing the sentiments of many real estate professionals working in Jacksonville’s Historic Districts on both sides of the St. Johns River.

Whether or not to embark on major or minor renovations depends mainly on the seller’s available funds and the price range of the property.

“In the million dollar range, the buyer is going to be much more demanding,” said Jon Singleton, Realtor, Watson Realty Corp.

“The main thing is for sellers to understand who the buyer is,” said Mat Glas, Realtor, Keller Williams Realty. “Mostly in our area it’s a professional couple that does not desire to do a lot of renovation work. They prefer a turnkey situation with updated kitchen and bathroom. Those homes are getting top dollar in the market value.”

But without impressive curb appeal, getting potential buyers in the door to see those renovations is questionable.

“Spiff up the front porch,” advised Selby Kaiser, broker, Legends of Real Estate. “The first thing the buyer sees is indicative of what they will see on inside. I can’t tell you the number of times I ring the doorbell and invite the seller to come outside and see what I am seeing. Sometimes they are horrified.”

“The best things dollar for dollar are paint and mulch,” said Singleton. “And that is fairly inexpensive.”

Because most buyers initially view property online and decide to look at it based on that, curb appeal is particularly important, according to Jane Bracken, broker associate, ERA Davis & Linn. She advised using a professional photographer for online pictures of the home’s exterior and interior.

According to local professionals, essential common sense low-cost preparations include:

- Front door, porch and windows: make sure they are clean and fresh
- Landscaping: trim bushes and branches, mow lawn, mulch
- Paint: use neutral colors
- Cabinets and woodwork: clean and polish
- Hardware: replace knobs and pulls
- Registers and vents: remove dirt and grime
- Clutter: simply put, get rid of it

SPRUCE UP AND REDUCE

Even if sellers need to rent storage space or impose on friends, boxing up clutter and personal items is crucial.

“My rule is no more than three things on a surface. So if you pick candles, pick three,” said Laura Wesson Klement, Realtor, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty’s San Marco/San Jose Office. “Put away personal pictures. Buyers love to look at them and be snoopy, and they are not looking at your house.”

“Get rid of those 14 different gadgets all over the counter,” agreed Boyd. “And clean the registers. Buyers are turned off by years of built-up dirt and grime. They want to see that someone has maintained the home.”

Realtors concur that new paint is economical and attractive.

“A fresh coat of paint—neutral, of course—makes a big difference, not just from a sight value but also from a smell value,” said Lorri Reynolds, managing broker, Watson’s Avondale/Ortega Office. “People underestimate smell. As soon as you walk

in, people think clean. Some sellers use overpowering plug-ins that make buyers wonder if they are trying to hide something.”

“It’s very important that trim is not chipped. Small cosmetics that almost anyone can do will improve a house,” said Boyd. “If you have difference colors—pink, orange, purple, blue—go to one consistent neutral paint color throughout that will blend with basic white trim. That will make a big difference and will make smaller homes appear larger.”

Realtor Susan Hopkins, Singleton’s partner at Watson, believes it’s okay to go with trendy paint colors to make a home stand out to today’s buyers. “But nothing too bold,” she cautioned. “Grays and whites are in now.”

Removing wallpaper, no longer in style, is also advisable.

REMODEL VS. UPGRADE

After making those necessary improvements, it’s a toss-up whether enhancing a kitchen or bath will bring the biggest return on investment. As gathering spots, kitchens are important. Older homes that have only one bathroom are unlikely to be attractive to buyers.

In most cases, realtors advise against major remodeling. Not only is it unlikely to recoup the cost, but buyers often redo the work to suit their tastes.

“Renovations depend on the financial situation of the sellers. Many times we have divorces or deaths in the family, especially in this area where someone



has inherited property and either doesn’t have money to fix it up or doesn’t want to spend the money,” said Reynolds, adding, it’s a big risk to spend tens of thousands of dollars on renovations that buyers will tear out. “In that case, price according to condition. The truth is, inventory is low and anything priced properly will sell.”

“When you go into a renovation it’s important to have a budget and plan, plan, plan. If not, you can easily go over your budget,” said Glas. “If your kitchen already has a good flow and design, you may be better off to do a facelift by resurfacing cabinets and installing new flooring and lighting. In some older homes with small kitchens, a complete redo probably would be in your best interest.”

According to the Remodeling 2016 Cost vs. Value report for midrange renovations in the South Atlantic region, which includes Florida and Georgia, average cost recouped for a minor kitchen renovation is 86.9 percent, as compared to 64 percent for

Continued on page 5

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— Laura Wesson Klement, Realtor, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty’s San Marco/San Jose Office.

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“A fresh coat of paint—neutral, of course—makes a big difference, not just from a sight value but also from a smell value, people underestimate smell. As soon as you walk in, people think clean. Some sellers use overpowering plug-ins that make buyers wonder if they are trying to hide something.”

— Lorri Reynolds, Managing Broker, Watson’s Avondale/Ortega Office.

a major kitchen renovation. Bath remodeling is 70.4 percent, compared to bath addition at 57.8 percent. These regional averages are slightly higher than national averages except for major kitchen remodeling, which is 64.9 percent. The annual report compares average costs of 30 popular remodeling projects with value retained at resale in 100 U.S. markets.

Singleton has found that upgrading cabinets, fixtures and appliances is often the answer. “Older homes in the historic area have great solid wood materials. Simply updating paint and pulls and knobs is great,” he said. “Typically in the historic area when a job is tasteful and well done, you’re going to get your money back. It may not be dollar for dollar, but maybe you’ll have a quicker, smoother closing.”

Like kitchens, most bathrooms require minor spruce-ups—unless there is only one.

People are looking for two full baths and at least one needs a tub,” said Glas. “If you have a small bathroom it may be a good idea to enlarge it. A lot of houses in Ortega, Avondale and Riverside have small bathrooms.”

Laney Lea Smith, owner/broker, Cowford Realty & Design, agrees that add-

ing a bathroom to homes in the district that have three and four bedrooms and only one bathroom is necessary. “Instead of renovating a kitchen, adding a second bath will offer a much better return on investment and provide additional square footage that can work better for a current family, not one from the 1920s or 1940s.”

Klement suggests using available funds for low-budget projects such as changing hardware in kitchens and baths, hanging new towels and shower curtains, replacing shower doors, installing low-flow toilets and changing faucets. She advises also matching kitchen appliances.

“I strongly recommend doing a pre-inspection because usually the cost of doing a repair under a contractor is much higher,” she said.

And don’t forget to organize garages and closets, Klement said. Get rid of things. “One person put shelf paper in a closet. Wow! That house sold!” she said. “I love sellers like that who are ahead of the game.”

“Parking is a precious commodity. Having a nice garage that is well organized and clean and finding ways to creatively maximize storage space will help a lot,” Singleton said.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

Although in Jacksonville contracts require that homes be up to code, it’s a good idea to have updated plumbing and electricity. “When buyers sees new roofs, plumbing and electricity, they are much more likely to pay top dollar,” Glas said.

“If you have wonderful new kitchen but a leak in your roof or an issue with plumbing that will turn off a buyer, and they will not be able to enjoy the renovation,” said Smith.

Bracken recommends sellers offer a home warranty. “Then, say, if it has an old hot water heater the buyer has the comfort of knowing the home warranty could kick in and will buy a house with an older system in it,” she said.

“It’s really important to have systems in good working order,” Singleton agreed. “Updates like on-demand gas water heaters or new air conditioning systems or a new roof are really attractive to buyers. They are not things you always get the same return on investment for, but they definitely help buyers feel more comfortable about buying an older home.”

“Spiff up the front porch, the first thing the buyer sees is indicative of what they will see on inside.”

— Selby Kaiser, Broker, Legends of Real Estate.

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Trials and tribulations of renovating pay off for most homeowners

By Marcia Hodgson
Resident Community News

A young couple buy a mansion for a ridiculously low price figuring they got a good deal, then struggle to repair what they discover to be a hopelessly dilapidated house. In the ensuing renovation, they wade through a labyrinth of bureaucracy to get necessary permits, and spend double or triple their budget on the renovation, which ends up taking twice as long as they anticipated.

For many who have attempted to renovate an older home, this plot for the movie "The Money Pit" may have truth to it. However, four local homeowners, who spent the past year doing extensive renovations to their historic abodes, said the trials and tribulations of refurbishing an older home are well worth the trouble.

Given the option of renovating a home over building something new, Gayle Bulls Dixon of San Jose said she'd choose renovating and preserving an existing structure every time. "It's better for our economy, our neighborhoods and our world," she said.

Dixon has restored two 1925 Marsh & Saxelby homes in San Jose and is in the process of restoring one more. She said she is motivated by her love of the architecture and her desire to restore the buildings so they will last another 100 years or more.

"I feel blessed to have renovated and lived in two of the 22 Marsh & Saxelby homes that remain from the original inventory in San Jose," she said. "I invest in commercial real estate and find it amazing so much building is taking place in housing in Florida when there is so much history and charm to be preserved instead. Older homes are often built with better materials, especially older wood beams and flooring. The kind of stuff you can't find new anymore."

For love, not money

Although they have never met Dixon, John and Yvonne Hove echo her desire to preserve a piece of Jacksonville history for at least another century by working to restore another Marsh & Saxelby design, the historic Lane-Towers home in Avondale, which they purchased in 2012.

When they closed on the property, the Hoves had no idea they were buying the ultimate fixer-upper, believing it only needed landscaping and cosmetic changes to the interior. Initially they expected to move in within three months, however, once John began to inspect things more closely, he discovered fundamental problems with the 87-year-old structure.

This led to a gutting of the interior, and to what will be an extensive six-year restoration when complete, in order to bring the historic Tudor manor back to its original 1920s splendor.

"You don't do this too quickly just to have someplace to live," said John. "It's a once in a lifetime project. You need to want to do it and like to do it or it will frustrate you no end with all its details."

For Kathy and Bill Long, who have renovated three historic homes in Jacksonville, the restoration of their third project, a 1922 two-story home on River Boulevard in Riverside, was also a labor of love. Built by noted Jacksonville architect George Olaf Holmes, the St. John's Quarter residence had plenty of issues, including rotten window sashes, cracked walls, and pigeons in the attic, but the Longs saw potential, loved the location, and thought it would be worth the effort. "We were very pleased with the workmanship, care and effort that went into the renovation," said Kathy.

Meanwhile, Jim and Susan Towler, who love the Granada neighborhood they have lived in for 28 years, decided to renovate their existing home because they had no desire to live anywhere else. Their residence was originally the real estate office for George and Lawrence Howard's Granada subdivision. Building an addition to the small box-like house was a way to convert their residence into a place they could live comfortably for 40 more years. We decided to try to take the best of the past and bring it into the future," Jim said. "If you like the neighborhood and the neighbors and like the house but want to improve it, renovation is something I recommend."

The Towlers hired William Leuthold of Avondale, an architect who specializes in historic homes, and ended up not only refurbishing the home, but added a three-car garage with connecting breezeway, a spacious, covered backyard living area and a grass courtyard out back. Their finished product resembles the original Mediterranean-style homes which populated the Granada subdivision in the early days.

After living in the finished restoration for six months, Towler said the renovation was expensive but he would do it all over again. "The renovation has increased our family time because it's made it like a vacation spot. For spring break, we ended up staying home. I really feel like I want to be home now."

When tribulation begins

"Most renovations are very easy if you do them right," said Leuthold, who has



Rear of the Lane-Towers house while in the process of being refurbished in April 2016



The rear of the Lane-Towers house many years before the renovation.



Gerald Smith, project manager, Lane-Towers House owner John Hove and Daniel Greer, with the Lane Group

"You don't do this too quickly just to have someplace to live. It's a once in a lifetime project."

— John Hove

renovated three homes of his own. "The tribulations start with houses that have been added on to poorly. The remedy for that is to remove the bad additions, renovate and repaint or add to the footprint."

Most problems stem from the condition of the house, Leuthold said. Problems are caused by the poor construction from the beginning or poor maintenance over the years. In some cases, especially with serious fundamental problems, such as sloping floors or foundation, the best bet is to tear the home down and start over.

"Renovations typically come out just fine if you plan them well," Leuthold said. "You need to know what you are going to do before a hammer hits the wall."

Dixon, Hove, Towler and the Longs agree. Taking as much as a year or two to work out the details with an architect and decide exactly what you want is essential to keeping costs down and to ensure smooth sailing through the construction phase.

"I think it is a team effort," said Towler, adding he lined up the architect, contractor, interior designer and landscape architect at the beginning of his project. "If you have an interior decorator partner with the architect in the beginning, it eliminates some issues down the road," he said. "You have the architect to focus on the exterior, but having someone focus on the interior

details is definitely worth the money. She helped us decide what to get rid of and what to keep. She helped keep integrity to the house and its character. A multitude of decisions come at you, and you're not an expert and don't have the time."

Having a landscaper in at the start is also helpful, Towler said, noting they will look at the plan and help decide which trees need to be eliminated or merely transplanted to another area of the yard.

"The architect, the interior designer, the contractor and the landscaper, they each have a different vision," Towler said. "If you are trying to improve something, you want to have another set of eyes. It's good to be uncomfortable, and they will help you get to the point where you want to go to. Without them you would fall back on what you know from the past. You hire people for a reason. You need to listen to them," he said.

Both Dixon and Hove worked with Douglas Lane, an architect from Riverside. "It's worth the time to plan first and then renovate," said Dixon. "There are design-build firms that will design and then manage construction. I partnered with an architect first, which was expensive, but the end result of my home most definitely shows the additional level of thought and design. I am proud of the fact I had very few change orders because we changed ideas and placement of designs mostly on paper during the design phase. It costs significantly less to change a room design on paper than once the project has started," she said. "There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think of Doug Lane and laugh at myself when I see one of his brilliant ideas that I ques-

Continued on page 7



Gayle Bulls Dixon and her son Cameron



Before photo of the front of Gayle Bulls Dixon's home on Madrid Avenue in San Jose.



Gayle Bulls Dixon's Madrid Avenue home after its renovation.

tioned and later found to be a treasure. The more love you have for a project, the more susceptible you are to blind spots, or so that is the case for me.”

“You need to use people who are knowledgeable, who feel pride in their work and in historic preservation,” said Bill Long. “There is always more to be done than one first recognizes. One must be prepared. Cutting corners will cost more in the long run. Do it right the first time.”

“Even before you start building, you go through the design and drawing phase and before that, demolition,” said Hove. “Before the first shovel goes to ground, you need permitting and design. You will spend 20 percent of your money before you start to build anything.”

Lowest bid not the best

The key to success is hiring quality workmen, particularly a contractor you can trust, one who is honest and honorable, said Leuthold, and all four renovators agreed.

“You want to hire people that do it right the first time,” said Hove. “If they underbid it’s not going to be the best because chances are they want to conclude the work as fast as they can,” he said, noting for some work it is better to pay by the hour. “A contractor who offers a fixed price will be closer to your budget, but if you run into obstacles, the quality of the work will suffer.”

When doing a renovation, it’s important to realize the “home is not an investment, it’s your house,” said Leuthold. “It’s expensive to do it right.” And while nearly every renovation costs more than is originally budgeted, one way to keep costs down is to make careful selections when it comes to choosing appliances and other interior details, he said. “A kitchen range can cost between \$300 and \$50,000,” Leuthold said, adding one homeowner he worked with selected tile costing \$27,000 to complete a “ho-hum” shower stall.

Towler said he put on a new roof,

rewired and repiped his house, even though there was no critical need to do so. “I didn’t want to have to tear it up in five years if something happened,” he said. “I figured, let’s eliminate issues now when we’re remodeling. I’d rather spend \$3,000 to rewire now than spend \$10,000 six years from now. If I were going to flip the house, I’d let the other person worry about it, but I knew I was going to be the other person, and I was not going to do it to myself.”

Speaking from experience, Leuthold said it is easier to live away from the property while renovating, and all four homeowners agreed.

“After having a child, I stopped living in a project, especially if it entails a kitchen redesign or is a significant renovation. The projects became very stressful and permeated my entire life,” Dixon said, although one time she did encounter vandalism while living off site. “We had one night of vandalism early during the demo phase,” she said. “It was clearly teenagers having a party, but it was disappointing. I learned we needed to add security lights and gates to lock up the project each night. I now plan this at the beginning of any new project. We also drive by our projects often and meet the neighbors early.”

Contractors often prefer owners live off site, said Leuthold. “Construction impacts your life, and if it does, it can rub the contractor the wrong way, and they are just trying to do their job,” he said.

However, it’s important to stay close to your project, checking on it daily.

“Throughout the process we met each Tuesday to review items and make decisions quickly,” said Dixon. “But looking back, there were several months workers were not on the site daily, and later I discovered the general contractor had signed on for other projects that were tapping the resources we needed. Because I wasn’t there to question, my project was moved to a lower priority, resulting in what I estimate to be four to six months of scheduling delay. Every hour is money,” she explained. “I found that when I



William and Kathy Long’s house on River Boulevard after its renovation in April 2016

began tracking my own list of project-related tasks and made myself present on-site, much more was accomplished. It is an industry issue that subcontractors commit to dates they do not fulfill. When things get behind, it causes other trades to delay and/or cause repairs, especially with finishes, which would not have been necessary otherwise. These types of time management issues increased my paint and general carpentry budget quite a bit.”

Build compelling reason for variance

Dealing with the city’s Historic Preservation Planning and Development Department, Riverside Avondale Preservation or city building inspectors can also be problematic on some renovations, and requires expertise, said Leuthold. “If you want to vary from an easy approval, you need to make a compelling argument,” he said. “You need to prepare well to convince the commission, and you need to know what the obstacle is.”

Historic preservation groups serve a purpose, said Daniel Greer, a member of the Lane Group working on Hove’s renovation. “Their purpose is to uphold the historic fabric of the neighborhood,” he said.

“We found there were no unreasonable restrictions,” said Kathy Long. “Their interest is to keep the historic homes intact as originally built and standing for the next 100 years. We share the same interest as they.”

Hove agreed. “We don’t want it to be the Wild West. We may know what is historically correct without their input, but there may be someone inexperienced, who might not know the depth of it,” he said. “You will have no problems or issues if you follow the rules.”

Building inspectors put pressure on subcontractors to do the job right, said Dixon. “Nobody likes the process of being inspected, that’s a given. But keep



Kathy Long standing on her front porch during the renovation, April 2015

in mind there are many things a sub will complete poorly if not for the knowledge that an inspector will be looking at it later,” she said. “I am careful to be on-site for the inspections, as I have examples of a worker closing a cabinet so the inspector cannot see what is behind it, and what could be missed. If you are there to hear the feedback from inspectors, then you can track the progress and make sure your project is finished to code.”

Often subcontractors will want to use items they are familiar with, even if it is not what you asked for, Towler said. It is important to do your own research and come up with creative solutions for problems which crop up. “Don’t be afraid to research the information and take it back to the experts,” he said. “It’s okay to question them. Don’t be afraid to ask, why can’t we do this?”

In the end, all the renovators agreed it is especially satisfying to live in a home which caters to their family’s unique needs. “All the design changes make such a difference when it comes to day-to-day living, and it’s pretty as well,” said Dixon.

“If you’ve done your own renovation, at least you know what is behind the walls,” said Kathy Long. “That’s when you can sleep well at night.”



Susan and Jim Towler stand in front of their newly renovated home in Granada in April 2016.

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Following city code a must for successful renovation project

By Sarah Duggan
Resident Community News

For residents in the Riverside-Avondale Historic District, gaining approval for exterior home renovations or restorations can prove to be a challenging – although not impossible – endeavor.

Because of the District's national designation as historically and architecturally significant, the City of Jacksonville enacted Chapter 307 of the Municipal Ordinance Code to create special provisions for the protection of the neighborhood's "character, economic vitality, aesthetic appeal and historical integrity."

The Code enacts exterior architectural regulations for new or renovated buildings, which deal with items such as size, setback from the road, landscaping, and garages.

A homeowner planning to renovate the exterior of property in the historic district must comply with these regulations, which could mean embarking upon a lengthy application process to receive city approval of the plans.

It is important the application is filed prior to the start of the renovation process. If the application is denied by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission (JHPC), any financial investment in the project could be lost, as the premature start of construction is not a viable reason for its continuation if the Commission deems it unacceptable.

Requests that may be denied include, for example, replacing a composition shingle roof with a metal roof, installing vinyl siding, enclosing a front porch or

installing a custom entry door if it is not in keeping with the original architectural character of the home.

"The COA [Certificate of Appropriateness] standards are very stringent. Property owners in the Historic District should not proceed with an exterior renovation without understanding how the regulations affect their project. Even a beneficial improvement like the installation of energy-efficient windows must be vetted first," said local land use and zoning expert Wyman Duggan of the Rogers Towers, P.A. law firm.

Step by lengthy step

The first step in the application undertaking is to file a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) form with the Historic Preservation Section of the City of Jacksonville Planning and Development Department.

The COA is required to maintain compliance with the zoning regulations and to ensure the historic architecture is preserved during restoration. Types of improvements that require a COA include installing or replacing an exterior fence, adding or changing a driveway, replacing windows, renovating the exterior in any way, and adding or demolishing any structure.

The City of Jacksonville website suggests homeowners undertaking large projects, such as new additions, meet with a planner before submitting an application, which must include an explanation of the features and materials to be used for intended improvements, along with information from the owner, contractor, and architect.

After submission, the Commission will

"The COA [Certificate of Appropriateness] standards are very stringent. Property owners in the Historic District should not proceed with an exterior renovation without understanding how the regulations affect their project. Even a beneficial improvement like the installation of energy-efficient windows must be vetted first."

-Wyman Duggan, Rogers Towers, P.A. law firm

set up a meeting with the homeowner to discuss the project and ensure the application has all the relevant information. Sometimes more details will be needed as an addendum, such as cost of the project.

Routine rehabilitation projects usually will be approved in about three days, as long as they comply with the regulations. However, a larger project or addition may require a site visit from the Commission to observe the property and extensively review the application. Staff will make a recommendation and draft a summary of the project for review by the Commission at a public hearing.

Hearings by the JHPC are usually held on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 3 p.m. in the Ed Ball Building, 214 N. Hogan St. The homeowner is expected to attend and respond to any questions from the Commission.

A final decision on the application is typically made at the hearing. If approved, the project will receive permission to move forward.

No one size for all

There are different standards set forth by the Ordinance Code for different types of alterations to historic property.

Rehabilitation, new construction, and demolition each necessitate a COA, but have individual criteria considered by the Preservation Commission.

Specifically, for the rehabilitation and renovation process, the Commission takes into consideration eight factors based on the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. These include retaining distinctive stylistic features, matching old and new construction materials in color and composition, and remaining consistent with the design of the historical era. Historically significant features and valuable craftsmanship should be preserved.

Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) has useful information about the Certificate of Appropriateness guidelines and the renovation process at www.riversideavondale.org (click Historic Preservation). District Do's and Don'ts and Design Guidelines are helpful pages on the site.

Staff at RAP is available to answer questions about eligibility of a project for approval, and whether a COA is likely to be required. They pledge to work with residents to ensure a successful outcome of the application process. Call (904) 389-2449 or visit the office at 2623 Herschel St., Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

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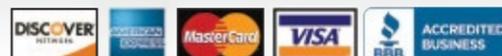
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Is your garage cluttered? Do you have a garage that feels like a wasted space that simply begs to be organized or – better yet – re-imagined? A well-planned garage, mudroom or laundry room can alleviate clutter in living spaces and afford a better way of life for your family. By freeing up spaces in the interior of your home and making room for your hobbies and favorite activities, you'll simply enjoy life a bit more.

Many of the homes in the historic areas of town have awkward rooms, a lack of storage and unusable spaces that don't function well. Often, limited space creates clutter in the home, resulting in junk drawers, disorganized living spaces, and furniture doubling as storage. This also leads to misplaced and missing items essential to your daily routine, often creating stressful situations. There is a company that wants to help change the inefficiencies in your home, and in one quick visit, change the way you live.

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Katie is serious about organization. Matter of fact, she is an organizing professional qualified by the National Association

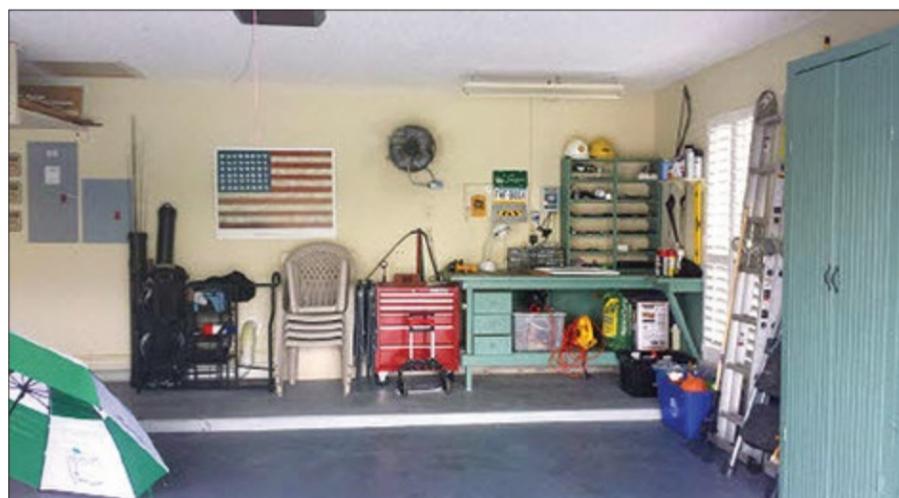
of Professional Organizers (NAPO). In a nutshell, she has experience with any size garage and difficult storage problem that could possibly avail itself. The husband and wife team have seen it all and have conquered even the most challenging projects. The best part is that they've created the concept themselves, with no push to sell and pay franchise fees. They also offer one of the best warranties in the business and their reputation means everything. Their satisfied clients and referrals continue to fuel growth for the business.

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kayaks, boating gear, bicycles and other garage items now hang out of the way, hide in cabinets and remain dust free and clean. The end game is a dream, one you've always wanted to achieve.

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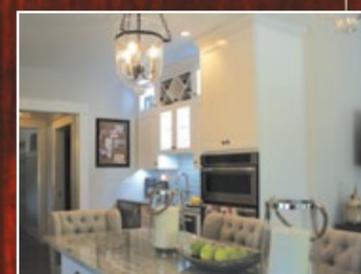


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Does Your Kitchen Make You Happy?

Annual home tour draws visitors from all over Northeast Florida

Two of the annual crowd-pleasing stops on the Riverside Avondale Preservation Home Tour are the Designer Dream House and the Art and Craftsman Showcase. The two-day show, now in its 42nd year, was organized for the fifth year in a row by Joy Walker, Realtor with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices.

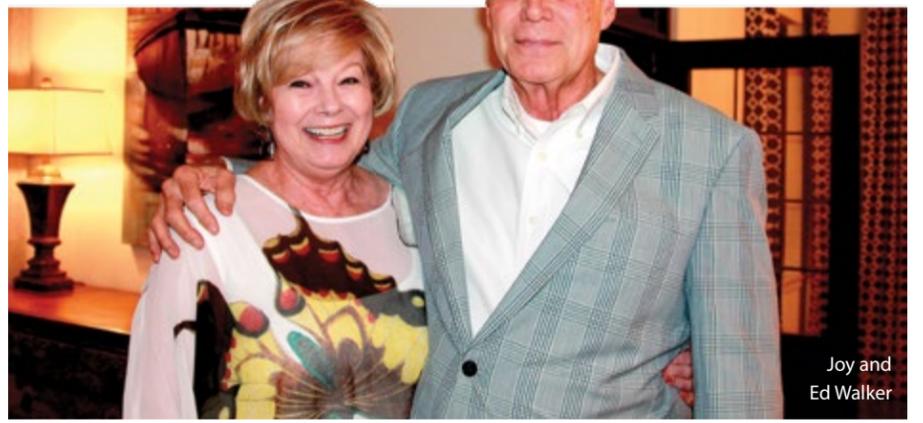
The Designer Dream House at 1918 Morningside Dr. was also the venue for the annual RAP Home Tour Preview Party on April 14, where guests received a sneak peek at the showcased designers, reserved specialty items, and mingled with owners of the tour homes. The event, themed An Evening English Garden Party, was sponsored by Joi Perkins, Bloom Realty.

Scrumptious food from Biscottis, Chef's Garden and Liz Grenamyre, along with libations, and live music by The House Cats, was served on the back lawn.

Fashion Stylist Fitz Pullins awarded the best dressed of the evening to Arjola Miruku, who received a one-night stay at The Ritz-Carlton in Amelia Island.

The Art and Craftsman Showcase home, 3867 Arden St., displayed fine art from local and regional professional and emerging artists living in our area, curated by Lynn McClow, president of the Jacksonville Artists Guild, Cookie Davis and Crystal Floyd. Local craftsmen with expertise in historic home building and renovation were on hand, including Doug Lane with The Lane Group, Speir Bryant of W.S. Builders, and Angel Corrales, owner of American Windows Preservation, among others.

For the seventh year in a row, the Antique Automobile Club of America toured the neighborhood and parked dozens of cars outside the 10 tour homes.



Joy and Ed Walker



Heather Bailey, Adrienne Burke, Carmen Godwin



Samantha Wyatt, Cindy Manouilidis, Bianca Beattie, Joanne Theale



Ann and Keith Holt



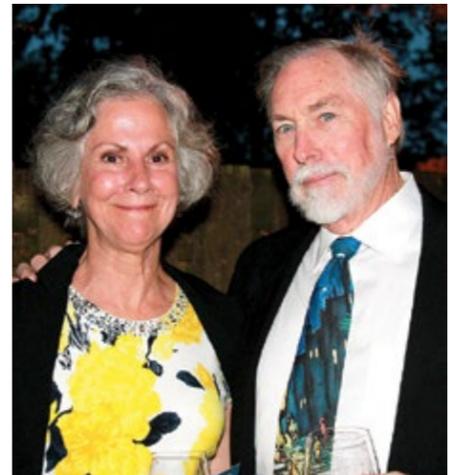
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Staking a reputation on a passion for perfection

John Hunt has been a painter for a long time. While his work can be found in many high-end custom beachfront properties as well as many historic restored homes in Riverside, Avondale, Ortega and San Marco, you won't find it in frames there or in an art gallery.

As owner of Quality Touch Painting, along with partner Joey LaBranche, Hunt's passion is to perfectly paint your home, inside and out.

"I got into this business as a young man and found, as time went on, homeowners expected more than the usual paint job," said Hunt. "It was their home, and it meant a lot to them. To have painters who didn't really care that much, who just wanted to get the job done and a paycheck in their hands, well... lights went off."

"This is a market that is really untapped. The service behind the painting job is important to the homeowner," Hunt continued. "They want someone they can trust, someone who is knowledgeable and won't take advantage of their own inexperience. They're looking for someone to take care of them in that respect, and that's what attracted me."

Before moving to Jacksonville 16 years ago, Hunt worked in historic home restoration, where he learned the tricks of the trade from the "old-school guys." He also developed an appreciation for and knowledge of paint coatings and primers while working in industrial painting for five years before moving on to painting custom homes in Georgia.

In 2000, Hunt and LaBranche started Quality Touch Painting and soon joined a circle of quality architects and



John Hunt and Joey LaBranche

builders, local companies who saw and appreciated their work.

"We have worked together for a long, long time," said Rick Morales of Morales Construction. "I can't say enough good things about John and Joey. They are a top-notch firm from their employees to the way they handle themselves."

Jon Knight, of C.F. Knight Construction agrees. "Quality Touch Painting is a very qualified and honorable company," he said. "A good group... they've been doing work with us for years and I recommend them."

One way Quality Touch Painting has become top-notch is through the sheer joy of meeting project challenges.

"No one puts what I put into this. This is my life, I love it, I have a passion for it," said Hunt. "That makes a big difference. I'm pushing the limits in the painting field."

And he is. Hunt is out in his shop's backyard "lab" on Saturdays and Sundays, tinkering with the coating and painting systems that provide the perfect quality job for each client.



"I test and try to find the things that work, and create systems I feel no one else can offer. With these painting systems, my goal is to offer a paint job that is not available by anyone else," said Hunt. "Everyone wants a paint job that will last. We deal with the ocean, salt environments, on the beach or the rivers."

Quality Touch Painting employs 15 highly qualified, skilled painters, four who have been with the company since the beginning. All his painters work under strict requirements, which results in a thorough, quality and warrantied job.

"All of our painters are taught to use our specific primers, coatings and processes. We expect them to follow our developed, proven methods, and make sure they have an eye for detail," Hunt said. "We inspect everything critically before we walk away from it. We don't skip over problems we discover, we don't Band-Aid them, we find a solution for them." Treating wood rot, for example, is a seven-step process, and when it's complete, the treated wood will hold up better than anywhere else, according to Hunt.

Quality Touch Painting caters to people who want to take care of their property and are very conscious about maintaining it. "Our homes look as good six or seven years later as the day we did them."

It's not just idle boasting. "Word of mouth plays a big role in our jobs. When friends of our clients see what we've done, we get another job. Rarely do we not get return business," shared Hunt, who, along with LaBranche, estimates each job based on specific multiple-step processes customized for the project.

When it comes to proper surface prep, coatings, inspections and maintaining a beautiful, long-lasting paint job, Hunt and LaBranche are in a league of their own.

"We strive to provide a perfect job. If you take shortcuts, the job won't last," Hunt said. "We plan out every stage to allow the proper amount of time required to do it correctly. The outcome is obvious. There's no comparison. Although you can't tell the difference when the coat of paint is fresh, when it fails, it's obvious. I put my signature and my reputation on each job."



Locally owned and operated, Quality Touch Painting has an office at 4228 St. Johns Avenue and a website at www.qtpinc.com. Call (904) 237-1353 or (904) 545-7270 any time for a free estimate.

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IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK



Daryl Bunn saw past the seediness of a 1924 building on Edison Avenue to find the potential.



One of the many rooms in an Edison Avenue multi-use building.

Riverside photographer calls home a historic building with a colorful past

By Kerry Speckman
Resident Community News

In the historic district, it's not unusual for buildings to have had previous lives.

That individuals and businesses would want to preserve historic buildings by repurposing them is not surprising. Riverside's architectural diversity is, after all, what makes it one of the most distinctive and charming areas of town.

At 643 Edison Avenue, just off Park Street, is a building that epitomizes Riverside dwellers' penchant for breathing new life into old places.

When it was constructed in 1924, the two-story brick building was designated as a multi-purpose facility: commercial space on the first floor, apartments on the second. Over the years, it housed a variety of businesses, including a general store, pharmacy, contracting company and a hardware store. After the failure of an upscale restaurant in the late 1970s, it fell into disrepair and sat vacant for several years.

Photographer Daryl Bunn discovered the building in 1983 while on a bike ride,

which he says is the "best way to look at a neighborhood." Despite its deplorable condition, the boarded-up, broken-down structure "spoke" to Bunn, who quickly realized its potential.

"The building was actually condemned at the time, but I saw it as a hidden gem," he recalled. "They don't make them like that anymore." He said multi-use buildings, like his, were very common in the 1920s in Jacksonville, referring to them as "the strip mall of the day." To the best of his knowledge, only four such buildings from that period remain, and his is the only one with its original balcony.

Bunn acquired the building under a 10-year rental agreement and began the process of renovating it so it could function as his new photography studio to replace the existing studio he had outgrown.

Because the space had originally been designed as apartments, there were 10 separate rooms that had to be dismantled without compromising the integrity of the building. After a complete remodel of the building, which took two years,

the 2,000-square-foot space is bright and open and serves as Bunn's living quarters. The 3,500-square-foot first floor houses his photography studio.

These small rooms, Bunn later learned, also played a significant role in one of the building's earliest and most colorful lives—as an infamous bordello, where a double murder occurred—in a bathtub, no less.

"I was outside one day with a sledge hammer in my hand, filthy dirty, blood running down the side of my face and old cab driver pulls up in front of the building. He told me he was so glad to see that

someone was fixing it up," Bunn recalled. "He said that back in the late '20s it was a bordello. And on Friday and Saturday nights, it was THE place to be. Cars were backed up all the way to Riverside Avenue." While Ward Street (now Houston Street) was once considered Jacksonville's red light district, other brothels, such as the one on Edison Street, sprang up around Downtown to cater to the needs of residents and visitors alike.

The building's alleged checkered past certainly made demolition more interesting as Bunn "hoped to find something good" to confirm the cabbie's story. All he found, however, was an imitation pearl under a floorboard. "I was hoping for a stash of Confederate money," he laughed.

After three major renovations since acquiring the building, Bunn is, understandably, thrilled with the results. But for him, it's not only the building's appearance that he appreciates. "There's also something about an older building you don't get from new construction," he said. "It's like you can feel the history."

"The building was actually condemned at the time, but I saw it as a hidden gem... They don't make them like that anymore."

— Daryl Bunn, Photographer

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Ennio, a University of Virginia (UVA) graduate, studied hard, earned his degree and decided to use the knowledge of business to complement his passion for marble and stone. This is what set him on the course to craft a niche with Any Old Stone. After graduating from UVA, he immediately immersed himself in the business of slab purchasing and traveling the world to find unique stones. With his Italian roots and passion for finding unique cuts of Carrara marble from Italy, he's in his element of helping people find rare stones and solid surface products.

With an elder cousin as his mentor, Ennio was taught the ins and outs of the

natural stone business. With guidance, he began purchasing stone from quarries around the globe, from bulk block purchasing to the polished, honed, or leathered slab finishes you see today. An excellent student, Ennio continues to build on his knowledge of new innovative products daily. He's had a keen eye to take on exclusive lines such as Pompeii Quartz, Vetrizzo recycled glass and the unique TopZero seamless sink line, found only at Any Old Stone. TopZero sinks have to be seen to believe how amazing they look. The seamless sink line is structured to be undermounted to a solid countertop where the rimless stainless steel sink reaches the surface level, promoting a sophisticated and infinitive look. By contrast, a standard undermount sink is sealed with caulk, requiring maintenance and cleaning since the caulk harbors mildew and soap scum. The clean, innovative TopZero product truly is a unique approach and one that's implemented in top designs worldwide.

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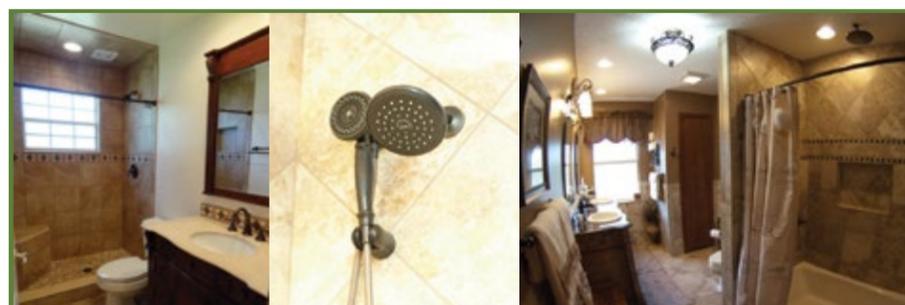
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Spring came in, went out like a lamb for Garden Month

March weather was mostly perfect for Garden Month at the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, coming and going like the proverbial lamb. Vendors lined the sidewalk for the kickoff on March 5, while inside the museum and on the grounds, live music, plein air painters and activities for children made the Weaver Free Saturday a family fun-filled day.



Sally Steinauer and Pat Gmitter at the Native Plant Society booth.



Sarah Philips, Nancy Traver, Pat Vail and Darlene Hall at the IFAS booth at Cummer Garden Day March 5.



Christianna White Fletcher, an art teacher for Cathedral Arts Project and for Riverside Children's Art Center, paints 'en plein air' in the gardens at the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens.



Students from St. Mark's Episcopal Day School turned out at Stockton Park on March 19 to help clean up trash and other debris that could find its way into the St. Johns River.

Annual river clean-up brings out volunteers of all ages

The 20th annual St. Johns River Cleanup & Celebration, held March 19, had a 30 percent lower turn-out over its 2013 high of 1,183 volunteers, but that – and the rain – didn't dampen spirits on the hunt for potential marine debris.

This year, 839 volunteers picked up 835 bags of trash, plus non-degradable items such as a refrigerator, mattresses, a bicycle, chair, television, scooter, a car grille, golf bag, sleeping bag, and shotgun shells.

In addition to rainy weather, one site participant thought it was the start of spring break that contributed to having fewer helpers this year.

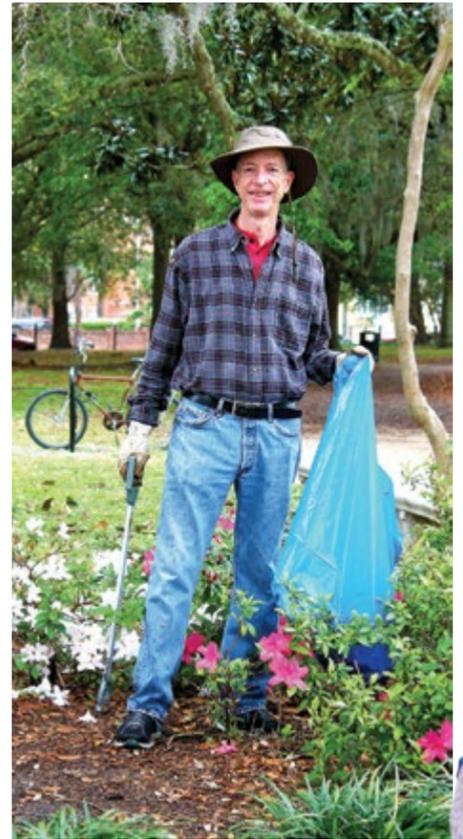
"Normally the Boy Scouts are here to help clean up Yacht Basin Park," said Kate Rouh, surmising many youth may have already left for spring break, however, that was not the case over in Ortega.

Some middle school children, such as fourth-grade students at St. Mark's Episcopal Day School, make the St. Johns River a priority in their pursuit of a well-rounded education. Students at the Ortega school dedicate their efforts to a yearlong pursuit of river awareness and advocacy during the course of the grade level.

From a field trip to the Marina Science Research Institute at Jacksonville University, led by the St. Johns Riverkeeper, to the reading of the acclaimed book "Trouble on the St. Johns," the St. Mark's Episcopal students get up-close and personal with the issues confronting the river and its tributaries. A dedicated, student-run public service campaign for the river is part of their curriculum for the annual fourth-grade service project.

Memorial Park was a draw for people outside the immediate neighborhood. A dozen people signed up by 9 a.m., including a Murray Hill resident, a Beaches resident and a family from McClenney, whose son is a member of Boy Scout Pack 555.

The St. Johns River Cleanup is a kick-off event for the Florida Great American Cleanup, and nearly 50 sites throughout the city and surrounding counties were tagged for clean-up from the shoreline to the streets. Residents made it a community event to beautify their neighborhoods and streets while preventing trash from entering storm drains and making it to the river.



Robert Tebbs, of Murray Hill, came out to Memorial Park to pick up trash for the annual St. Johns River Cleanup and Celebration March 19.



Ken and Kate Rouh and Susan Vancil participating in the cleanup.



Chris Frazee, Jr., with parents Chris and Heather, and siblings Darlene and Addin, came from McClenney to help clean up Memorial Park.



Bobby Arnold, of the cleanup crew.



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With River Shore Village neighbors Mark Krancer and Jeanette Yacoub were part of the cleanup at Memorial Park on March 19.



The Scouts of Troop 2 always make sure Fishweir Creek is clean and clear during the annual St. Johns River cleanup. Participants included Charlie Wheeler, Bruce Jackson, Hayes Duggan, Sean Pniewski, Jacob Soulbly, Gunnar Davidson, adult leader Dan Baker, Cooper Lewis, Chapman Davis, Emery Sawyer, adult leader Barry Burton, Christian Perry and Dylan Pniewski.



Mark Krancer and Jeanette Yacoub were part of the cleanup at Memorial Park on March 19.



Emily Suter, Ashley Hietpas, Heather Dixon and Chris Barnett pick up trash along Edgewood Avenue in Murray Hill for the annual St. Johns River Cleanup and Celebration March 19.

Blooms and butterflies, something for gardeners of all ages

A hardy group of gardeners braved brisk wind, threatening clouds and a bit of rain at the preview party for the Garden Club of Jacksonville's annual Blooms Galore & More sale. Wine and cheese were served as guests circulated among hundreds of plants, pots and gardening tools and accessories on April 15.

This month the San Marco Circle will sponsor "To Mom, With Love," a Budding Gardeners Creative Gardening Camp. Children in grades one to six will learn about butterflies, how to attract them and will make a Mother's Day gift.

The event will be held Saturday, May 7, 10 a.m. to noon at the Garden Club, 1005 Riverside Ave. Pre-registration is required for the camp limited to 20 children. Call (904) 251-3353 or email alineoclement@comcast.net.



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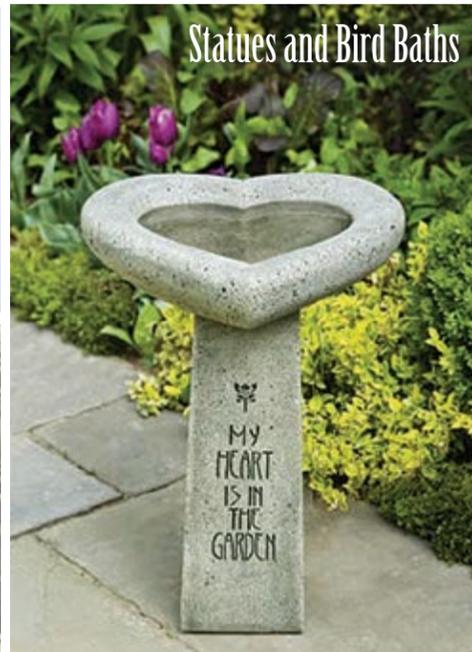
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Real estate flippers: Neighborhood hero or scammer?

Quality workmanship tells the tale



By Marcia Hodgson
Resident Community News

To some, flippers are considered Jacksonville's entrepreneurs, heroes that go into depressed or transitioning neighborhoods to save them by restoring one house at a time.

Others see flippers as the worst kind of neighborhood scammers, real estate speculators, whose business model is to buy property for a song, perform superficial facelifts, and sell quickly, making a killing to the detriment of the buyer and neighborhood.

Gayle Bulls Dixon falls in the first category. As a commercial real estate investor who has refurbished many homes, apartments and condominiums including three historic Marsh and Saxelbye houses in San Jose, Dixon said flippers not only renovate houses, they renovate communities.

"Thank God for flippers. They are restoring the neighborhoods, which restores the values for other homeowners. The quicker they are, the quicker for the good of the city," she said.

"They are improving Jacksonville one house at a time rather than allowing foreclosed homes to sit there, especially in the (inner) city. Once they renovate them, you can watch the neighborhood shift, she said. "You can see the neighborhood feels better. When families start buying and not investors, then you know the neighborhood is shifting."

Flipping can be different from restoring a historic or older home with care, Dixon said, and she does not consider herself to be a flipper. "I will restore a house for resale if the house is interesting to me," said Dixon. "Flipping is quick. Flippers buy it, put very generic details on it as someone

might in a model home in a (planned) community. Everything they do is very generic, and meant to appeal to a broad audience," she said. "The price point is much lower on a flip. With flipping, you buy it at the right price, and you are married to that price. You need to do due diligence. It is important to know what needs to be repaired. There is a lower expectation for flipped (homes) rather than restored ones," she explained.

Flipped homes can be positive or negative depending on the neighborhood and who is doing the flipping, said Avondale realtor Clark LaBlond of Coldwell Banker Vanguard. "It can be very positive if a neighborhood is transitioning or is working to improve its price point and properties," LeBlond said. "The downside is it can overprice a neighborhood and make it unaffordable."

The quality of the flip is important, particularly as a neighborhood grows hot, he said. "Part of the problem is some people do it to make a quick buck and the quality of the improvements made is not good. This can raise the pricing of homes in the area, which can be detrimental to everyone," LeBlond said. "Flipping properties can be a very profitable business venture, but it is more difficult to find properties to flip these days because the market has been fairly strong."

At the height of the recession Jacksonville was hit with a lot of distressed properties and foreclosures, LeBlond said, but lately there have been few in the historic areas. Flippers will find the most luck in Murray Hill or St. Nicholas, he said.

Lending guidelines also impact a buyer's ability to flip, LeBlond said. "Certain types of lending institutions will not allow you to purchase property that has not been owned by an individual for at least 90 days," he said, adding that FHA loans prefer not to allow buyers to purchase flipped houses on the off chance they might pay too much.

Carol Miller, of Fred Miller Group Inc., a residential real estate brokerage in Ortega, agrees. "I believe homes should be restored and the character of the neighborhood preserved by bringing (distressed) homes back to where they were before," she said. "It is better than having homes sit and deteriorate. I appreciate anyone who will take an old home and put life in it, but to do superficial changes and rip people off, that's not good for anybody," she said, noting some flippers ignore structural issues in favor of cosmetics.

"There are good ways to flip, such as people who do it for the love of restoring homes," Miller continued. "They make money, and they should. But the people who do the bare minimum, such as paint and (cheap) kitchen tops just to turn around in 30 days and make a lot of money, that's not good flipping. Owners

in the historic area who buy a house that's down on its luck and restore as much as they can of the original character, replacing what cannot be salvaged with quality materials, that's a positive thing," she said.

For those with an eye on flipping property in historic Riverside or Avondale, Riverside Avondale Preservation standards and the city's Historic Preservation Commission rules may prevent many from doing a shoddy job. "RAP is a deterrent for people who don't want to take the time, expense and care in fixing up a house," Miller said, adding that the rules are there for a reason.

"RAP even impacts homeowners who want to fix up a house and stay in it. They have to follow the rules when restoring a home, and the disclosure form lets buyers know there are guidelines they have to follow," Miller said. "I don't see RAP as a deterrent for people truly restoring homes here, but it needs to be a consideration for anyone buying in the historic area."

"It can be very positive if a neighborhood is transitioning or is working to improve its price point and properties."

— Clark LaBlond

Because of the desirability of Jacksonville's historic neighborhoods and a strong real estate market, there are not as many flippers as in other areas of Jacksonville. Most who buy and restore their homes are people who want to live in them, said Missie Sarra LePrel, of San Marco, a realtor with ReMax Specialists.

According to LePrel, buyers desiring to live in the historic neighborhoods compete with flippers for older homes on both sides of the river, and don't care whether the houses need work. "The business of flipping is no longer a niche market," said LePrel. "People are willing to get their hands dirty, and plenty are willing to do it if they can get in at the right price. This cuts into the flipper market," she continued.

"My first response to people who intentionally buy homes to flip is they have a lot more competition than in the past," LePrel said. "There are more buyers

Continued on page 17

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out there who don't mind purchasing depressed houses knowing they will have to fix them up. Young buyers don't mind redoing the floors, bathrooms, and kitchens. They have vision. There is more competition from young buyers to fix them up and live there," she said.

How-to television shows about flipping properties, as well as interior decorating shows, have put knowledge in the hands of more homeowners, said LaPrell. "They get a vision on how to do things," she said, adding many go to classes at Lowe's or Home Depot so they can cut costs by doing the work themselves.

Flipping is relative to location; it rarely occurs in the "hot, hot areas," like San Marco, LePrell said. "Young couples are so anxious to get on a good street and in a good neighborhood, especially close to Hendricks Area Elementary. San Marco Village has always been great, and it's

"Thank God for flippers. They are restoring the neighborhoods."

— Gayle Bulls Dixon

getting better all the time," she said.

Essential to successful flipping is buying right, LePrell said. "You don't just buy a house. You better know what is behind those walls. The key to the whole thing is having a team of workers you can trust."

Dixon agrees on the necessity for flippers to have a good team of subcontractors at the ready who are reliable and can get things done quickly. Improvements need to be done to code, she said. Buyers need to do due diligence, checking public records to make sure permits have been pulled and inspections have been done.

Amateurs often think anyone can do a flip, but there are many things potential flippers need to take into consideration, she said. One is to decide if you are fixing up the home to rent or to sell. Rental homes with pools mean more maintenance, and you don't put the same fixtures in a rental that you would in your own home, she said.

"You can't look at it as if you are buying it for yourself. Whomever is the end buyer, that's who you design it for, but it's human nature to design it like it's your own home. Rentals are completely different in the finishes," she continued. "Everyone thinks they can flip, but if they put in expensive finishes or over-design

it, the house can feel off and look weird. The house needs to tell you what it needs to be, not the other way around."

According to Dixon, price is more important than location. In addition to buying a property with a low price, potential flippers need to consider the timing in selling the newfound property, its location, and whether there will be buyers interested in the property. Another critical consideration is the question: what price will someone pay for it? Dixon said.

"It's a big mistake if you spend too much on something. Time is money. You need to know what you have to do, do it first and quickly, and then see how much money you have left. Once you know this, then you will know how much money you have left to spend on the finishes," she said. "Do the 'must-haves' first, then check how much money you have left. The big mistake in all of this is emotion. You make a mistake if you go into it with an emotional attachment to something."

LaPrell agreed flippers have to know the market to be successful. Refurbishing and selling quickly are essential because buying the house, closing costs, inspections, carrying the house, repairs and closing costs when you sell all add up, she said. "If you don't buy right, you're dead."

For many years Jacksonville has been among the top 10 in the nation in foreclosures, said Dixon, who scans these lists regularly. According to LePrell, Housing and Urban Development foreclosure lists have recently merged into the MLS. One way for flippers to spot potential properties is to see "bank owned" on the listing, and buying those properties is a long involved process, she said.

"Things are handled very differently if they are bank owned," LePrell said. Although it is not a totally safe way to invest, flippers often bid on as many as 15 properties in the hopes they get two, she said. "If they are buying for investment or to rent, they may put contracts on multiple properties hoping they will get a couple at the end of the process," she said. Since the recession, people are still flipping houses, but many are renovating them as a "labor of love," Miller said, noting quality workmanship and the usage of green products are prevalent now. "Design and quality are more important. Flipping is still popular, but to me it seems it is being done more carefully now," she said.

"The most positive situation is for the buyer to buy the house and have it as their home," said LePrell. "Flippers can perform a service. It's not a good thing for a home to be sitting in poor condition so that no one wants to buy it. Flippers make it marketable. They improve the house, thereby helping the neighborhood."

Juried flower show draws entries from four states

Local gardeners and admirers of green-thumbed friends rubbed elbows with members of garden clubs from Florida, Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina, who had entries at a juried flower show April 20 at The Garden Club of Jacksonville.

The ballroom was the setting for dozens of floral, horticultural and photographic displays at the show hosted by the Late Bloomers Garden Club, a member of the Garden Club of America (GCA).

The show, themed "A River Runs Through It," consisted of 38 competitive classes in four divisions: Floral Design, Horticulture, Photography, and Conservation/Education.

The Floral Design division themes were inspired by Jacksonville history, including the Great Fire of 1901. The Photography division included entries inspired by the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, the Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens, and the Riverside Arts Market Farmers' Market. The Conservation exhibit had examples of ecologically beneficial native plants and featured the St. Johns River and the local wildlife that will be affected by restoring biodiversity, wildlife habitat and natural beauty.

At the awards banquet, Naval Air Station Jacksonville received a Conservation Commendation Award in appreciation of their ingenuity and leadership in conservation efforts, and in recognition of their achievements in environmental sustainability and operations.

The base is the first business to achieve zero storm-water discharge



Marcia Simmons with her second-place entry, a camellia japonica grown from seed, in the Propagation Class

into the St. Johns River by keeping all storm water on the base, said Leslie Pierpont, show co-chair.

Pierpont, of Ortega, was instrumental in helping the Late Bloomers Garden Club become the only Jacksonville chapter of the 200-member national Garden Club of America in 2003. The Late Bloomers Garden Club has left its green mark through projects all over the city, including the Serenity Park at Gateway Community Services, the Marine Science Research Institute at Jacksonville University, the Cummer Museum, and Hemming Park, among others.



Peggy Schiffers admires a place setting enhanced by the dramatic use of plant material.



Debbie Rood Byrd, member of the Garden Club of Jacksonville, pauses while checking out the juried show.

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Edible landscaping challenges notion of perfect lawn



Native Sun Natural Foods was the venue for a lecture on edible yards by Eat Your Yard.

By Lara Patangan
Resident Community News

The growing trend in landscaping is to have your yard and eat it too.

By implementing edible foods into the landscape, traditional suburban lawns are being challenged with the notion that the grass is not always greener on the other side.

After all, it can take a lot of green – via one’s paycheck – to get that perfect lawn.

With the rising consciousness of the environmental impact of transporting foods across thousands of miles, more awareness of the harmful effects of pesticides in industrialized foods and the desire to conserve water and labor, homeowners are increasingly going back to their roots and growing at least some of their own food.

Before supermarkets became prolific in the 1950s, and even dating as far back to a time when mankind relied on hunting, gathering and fishing for survival, humans traditionally harvested their food.

While more recently we simply called residential food-growing “gardening,” the latest trend takes it a step further by injecting edible gardens into the suburban landscape.

Working with, not against, nature

This philosophy of creating an attractive landscape that is also edible is based on the concepts of permaculture.

An Australian professor, Bill Mollison, first coined the term in 1978, defining

permaculture as a “philosophy of working with, rather than against nature; of protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless labor; and of looking at plants and animals in all their functions, rather than treating any area as a single product system.”

Garrett Llopiz, owner of EcoDesign Solutions, a business that includes implementing edible gardens into landscape design so residents can have something that is both attractive and functional, said edible landscaping requires a shift in thought from merely growing one’s own food to creating a mini-ecosystem that runs itself through its own connectivity.

“The human mind is very linear in its thinking. We think of problems as having only one solution,” explained Llopiz. “We don’t take into account all of the issues it is tied to. There are connections that exist in an ecosystem. Without thinking of how things are interconnected, you will find yourself always fighting, but through permaculture nature will create that harmony so we aren’t always fighting against her.”

Llopiz wanted to bring the practice of permaculture to the suburban front yard by using the concept of creating a regenerative and self-maintaining habitat modeled after natural ecosystems.

Llopiz considers edible gardening to be an ethical design science to grow food, with the three tenets being earth care, people care, and lastly, the action of returning the surplus back to the earth, such as composting.

This cyclical practice sets up a polyculture to create relationships with plants, soil, bacteria and insects within an edible landscape. Cycles and networks are a consistent theme in creating a self-sufficient local ecology based on the use of specific plants.

This landscape system seeks to eliminate fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Certain plants are chosen for the likelihood they will attract predators to kill insects, in a balanced way that doesn’t rely on synthetic chemicals.

Unlike traditional gardening, the focus is on making the landscape attractive.

“We want to combine beauty and production, which are typically thought of as opposites,” said Llopiz. “Our goal is to bridge that gap to create a synthesis of something that is beautiful and productive.”

Reduce food miles for earth’s benefit

While it can be intimidating to think about creating an edible landscape in your yard, advocates say there is nothing to fear.

Tim Armstrong, who owns Eat Your Yard Jax and operates a working farm, spoke recently at the San Jose location of Native Sun Natural Foods Market regarding the importance of empowering people to grow food for themselves.

“It’s not hard to do – to take a component of your yard and grow your own food,” explained Armstrong. “We can do the earth a big favor – it’s not a big, scary thing.”

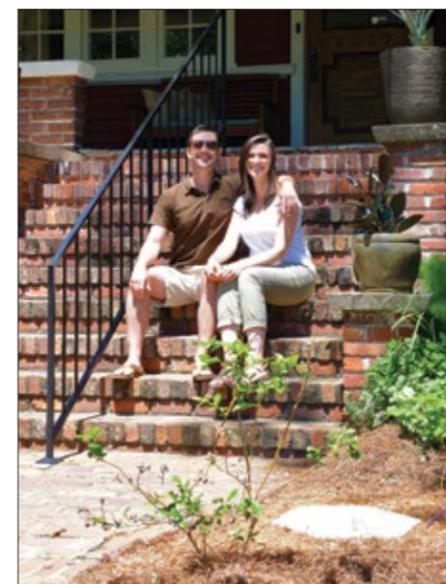
Armstrong also discussed the importance of buying only what’s seasonably available, noting the environmental impact of transporting food.

“We have to think about food miles. The average piece of food travels 1,000 miles to get to the grocery store,” said Armstrong. “We need to take advantage of what is in season and go with the flow of what’s available.”

Growing your own food has benefits beyond the environmental impact.

“The aesthetic value of edible landscaping is attractive landscaping, the economic value is it helps to subsidize what is spent on groceries, but there is social capital as well,” explained Llopiz. “Any time you are growing your own food you have produce you can share with your neighbors. There is that community capital that creates connections.”

Heather Johnson, a San Marco resident who has an edible garden installed in the front yard of her home, made the decision to cut away from grass to try permaculture after her sprinkler system failed. While Johnson said her former front yard



Phil Potter and Cari Sanchez-Potter

was nice, there wasn’t anything that made anyone want to spend time there.

Now Johnson and her family can enjoy the fruits of their labor with visits from butterflies, birds and even foxes who come to host on the mix of avocado, bay and plum trees. There is also a hedge of blueberry bushes and a bounty of herbs and various spinaches they use in salads and cooking.

Having since strung a hammock on the front porch to enjoy the peace of her family’s edible fauna, Johnson also appreciates the source of community, which her landscape has produced.

“I’ve talked to all sorts of neighbors who we’ve never seen before,” said Johnson. “It’s great – it’s a new person I get to meet.”

Cari Sanchez-Potter, a first time homeowner in Riverside and a passionate cook, knew she wanted to implement some type of edibles when setting out to landscape her front yard, and although some of her best memories growing up were in the garden, she felt that a traditional garden wouldn’t make for an attractive landscape.

After doing research on different kinds of landscaping, she realized having an edible yard would combine function with beauty. But for Sanchez-Potter, it’s the community benefit that reaps the biggest harvest.

“We got into the community aspect of gardening – having a chance to talk to neighbors who we otherwise had not met,” said Sanchez-Potter, recounting a story of meeting a previously unknown neighbor who told her how her young daughter likes to stop to eat one of her strawberries when they go on their walk. “That’s exactly what we wanted. We want to share it with everyone in the neighborhood.”



Orchid show brings out admiring amateurs

Eric Cavin, judge and past president of the Jacksonville Orchid Society, with some of his prize-winning paphiopedilum, also known as “lady slippers,” at the Wonderful World of Orchids show and sale April 2-3, hosted by the Jacksonville Orchid Society, one of the oldest in the country.

Celebrating Dining Excellence on the Boulevard

KITCHEN ON SAN MARCO DELIVERS ON ITS MISSION TO TEACH, SERVE



Eve Markowicz

Jacksonville's culinary scene was taken by storm last year, as Kitchen on San Marco opened its doors and blew away foodies and culinary enthusiasts. The accolades continued to roll in as the San Marco-based gastropub and culinary teaching kitchen took home some of the city's most highly-coveted dining awards in year one.

Several proverbial trophies were hoisted as the newly minted establishment took home "Best Farm to Table Restaurant" after votes were tallied for the "Bold City Best" contest, representing Jacksonville.com and Florida Times Union readers. The award for "Best New Restaurant" by Folio Weekly readers delivered another victory, and, not to be overlooked, was Jacksonville's Fine Dining review on Examiner.com, one that named Kitchen on San Marco as one of Jacksonville's Top 20 restaurants for its fresh, seasonal cuisine. The year wouldn't have been complete without racking up another victory, as the gastropub took home the highly sought-after Judge's Choice Award at GastroFest 2016, as their offerings and participation received high marks.

It's the approach to dining and laser sharp focus on locally and regionally sourced food and beverages that has set Kitchen on San Marco apart in the culinary scene. With seasoned Executive Chef Ryan Randolph and his prowess in the kitchen – paired with General Manager Eve Markowicz's cool, calm front of the house operations – the gastropub is poised for a fruitful year two. "The community and customer response keeps us passionate about what we do and how we do it. We are looking forward to serving the Jacksonville community for years to come," said Markowicz.

The top notch operation also doubles as a teaching kitchen for the culinary arts. At Kitchen on San Marco, students are trained through Culinary, a hands on teaching component of the Culinary Institute of Virginia College. Chef Randolph mentors students as they gain real world experience in the teaching kitchen, often times resulting in jobs within his own restaurant. Students in the culinary and pastry arts are immersed in the operation of running a kitchen from top to bottom.

"I am thrilled and honored to work at an establishment like Kitchen on San Marco," said Randolph. "I am excited to be a part of this team and look forward to many more years of working with the students at Culinary and bringing good food to Jacksonville."

As a teacher and mentor for the Culinary students, Randolph is helping shape restaurant

culture in Jacksonville by sprouting and growing talent. It's an achievement he's proud to contribute to the burgeoning culinary scene. Not only does the restaurant employ a local staff, they support of local farms and purveyors of fine food products. The team is also helping to foster the craft beer scene in Jacksonville and the greater suds culture in Florida. With a wide selection of 20 draft beers, the desire to showcase and shine more light on beers of the Sunshine State was a must. Local breweries on tap include Aardwolf, Intuition, Engine 15, Green Room, Bold City and regional breweries Cigar City, Swamphead, Proof and Funky Buddha are also thoughtfully chosen. The pairing side of the beverage offerings is nothing short of outstanding and the staff are

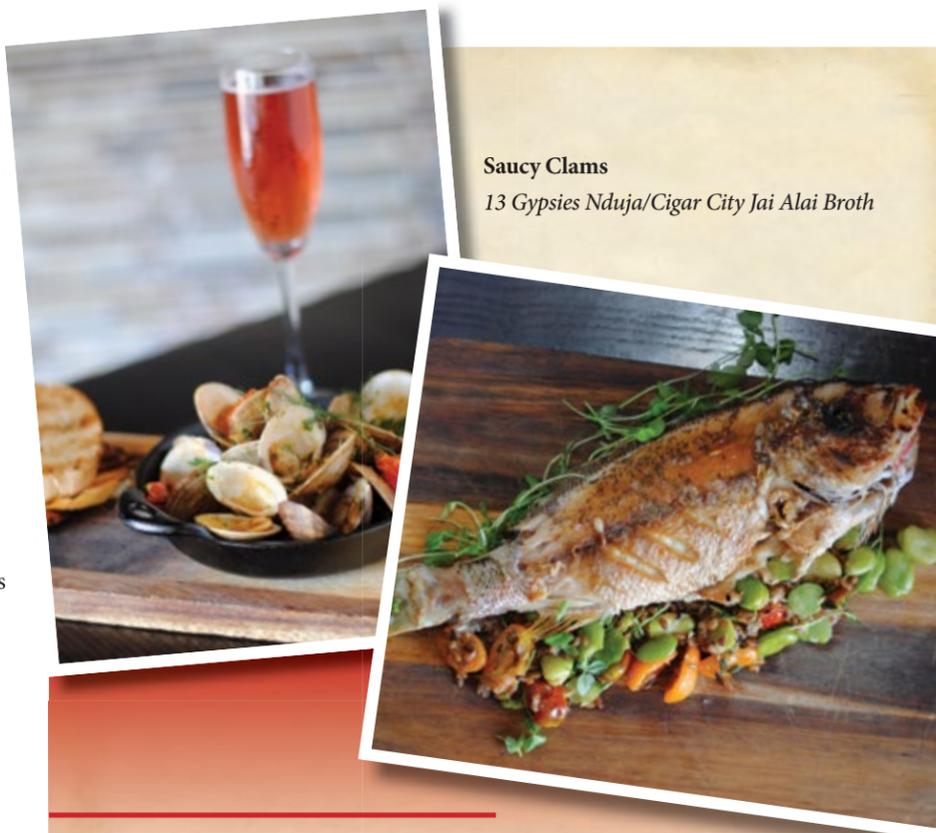
also versed in craft beer, wine, spirits, and signature cocktails to help deliver a heightened experience to compliment the various plates.

Kitchen on San Marco is poised to deliver a fresh, creative, and inspirational spring menu that's now full of seasonal surprises. It's time for a menu change and the team at Kitchen on San Marco has selected the finest ingredients and unique preparations, teeming with fresh microgreens and topped with seasonal sauces to tantalize the taste buds. Get in today to try a dish or stop in for the Florida draft Happy Hour, Monday through Friday from 3 to 7 pm, for a quick sip after work, pints are \$5. The sun sets in San Marco, but never on your good times at the Kitchen on San Marco.



Chef Ryan Randolph

“The community and customer response keeps us passionate about what we do and how we do it. We are looking forward to serving the Jacksonville community for years to come.”



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Autumn Berrang, Danielle Bergh, Mallory Turner and Caitlin Cotroneo

Women gather amid gowns to launch home build event

It was all about Couture, Construction & Cocktails on March 31 at Linda Cunningham Couture Boutique on the Southbank for the kickoff of the Habitat for Humanity of Jacksonville, Inc. (HabiJax) sixth Women Build event.

Honorary Chairwoman Ann Hicks is well known for her Jacksonville philanthropic support and her passion for housing and education. Karen Burdette, chairman and founder of Burdette-Ketchum, was event chair.

Guests heard from women in the HabiJax homeownership program, sampled wines from women-owned vintners, enjoyed shopping at Linda Cunningham's boutique and learned how they can get involved in the HabiJax 2016 Women Build. Ten percent of all purchases at the boutique during the event were donated to support the 2016 Women Build.

"We are thrilled to kick off the Couture Construction Women Build program in partnership with Linda Cunningham,

and we hope everyone will join us for our event," said Mary Kay O'Rourke, president and CEO of HabiJax. "The Women Build program provides a work site that empowers women to take leadership roles and learn new skills, while building a home with a hard-working family. The program brings women and men together from all walks of life and changes the life of a family forever."

HabiJax's Women Build program will run until May 20, 2016. Participants will build a home with homebuyer Redericka, a Jacksonville native, a graduate of Robert E. Lee High School and an E-Service Specialist with CitiBank, who is enrolled in the HabiJax homeownership program. Currently, she and her two sons, ages 5 and 3, live with her mother, in an effort to save money to purchase a home. By the end of the program, Redericka will have put in 300 hours of "sweat equity" toward the building of her home in the New Town section of Jacksonville.



HabiJax Executive Director Mary Kay O'Rourke, Honorary Chair Ann Hicks and Maxine McBride



Muffet Corse and Kaye Glover



Judi Hardwick, Carol Kaplan, Deborah Gervin, Sharon Lucie and Cecelia Werber



Fran Hickenbotham, Linda Cunningham, Jane Upton, Sheri Corder and Shannon Smith

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“Before, we had the largest facility in the area. Now, we have two of the largest,” said owner Chris Jackson of his formula for growth and success. “We are able to lose the middle man, buying direct from manufacturers and negotiating our prices, offering our customers the best price- anywhere,” Jackson explains. “More importantly, we have the product in stock at both locations.”

With two locations, the original at 1988 Wells Road in Orange Park (by Toys R Us plaza), 24,000 sq ft, and the new location at 1770 St. Johns Bluff Road, 46,000 sq ft., (formerly Scottys/ Bourbon Street station) in Jacksonville, they can offer the best variety of products in prime locations, minutes from your home.

Carpet Man Flooring sells anything from top quality flooring from Shaw, Beaulieu, Mohawk, Armstrong, Mannington, Tarkett, Domco, Bruce, Pergo, IWT among many others at unbeatable prices.

Typically, when shopping for flooring customers choose from small, square samples limiting their ability to discover the right texture and look for their space.

“Sample swatches can show you the color and give you a hint of the texture, but you can’t really get an idea of how it will actually look and feel once it’s been installed,” said Jackson. “What separates us from the chains is we have everything already in stock. We can show you samples if you want to see them, but if you want to



see the whole thing, we have that available as well. You can see it, feel it, even lay on it if you want to.”

Another benefit Carpet Man Flooring offers shoppers is flexibility. Because they are locally owned and operated, prices aren’t fixed and negotiating a job is much easier. As the size of the job increases then the cost of the job per square foot decreases. The ability to negotiate the price with the client is limited in a typical flooring store and the owner is seldom in the store to work out a deal.

“We don’t have sales gimmicks or weird specials, because we consistently offer a quality service at an affordable price. People always need flooring and

we know we can save them hundreds or thousands of dollars,” Jackson said.

Jackson recently had an experience that illustrates well the savings he can offer homeowners shopping for the right products and the right price.

“They told me what they were looking for, and, without knowing they had been shopping around, I quoted them a price,” Jackson said. “Then, the wife hugged me out of the blue! One of the larger chain stores had quoted them a price \$2,000 higher, and they were worried they wouldn’t be able to afford furniture once the floors were installed. Not only could they now have the floors they wanted, they could have furniture too. It’s a great

feeling, knowing I can help people with their dream homes.”

Homeowners however aren’t the only benefactors. A huge savings can be felt by the multi-unit property owner seeking a solution to an expensive problem. Frequent tenant traffic can create the need for replacement flooring, often becoming a costly burden. With the prices at Carpet Man Flooring locations, saving thousands of dollars annually may mean turning better profits on properties.

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Diversity, patience best for growing shade trees

By Marian Johns
Resident Community News

If you are currently considering planting shade trees for relief from the hot summer months, local experts suggest you think diversity and exhibit patience. “Fastest growing” is not always the best choice in shade trees.

The good news is homeowners in North Florida have quite an array of choices when it comes to some of the best shade trees to plant, which are also native to our area. However, you should not necessarily aim for the tree which will grow the quickest or even for a tree that is specific to our area, according to Larry Figart, Urban Forestry Extension Agent with the University of Florida/Duval County Extension.

“Fast growing is not always a good thing when it comes to trees,” said Figart. “Trees that grow quickly can tend to be shorter lived and brittle. You can still have fairly moderate growth with durability when it comes to trees.”

Figart’s top five picks for shade trees are Swamp Chestnut, Bald Cypress, Live Oak, Red Maple, and the “Allee” Lacebark Elm, which is not native to North Florida.

Figart explained matching the type of tree you plant to the conditions in your yard is probably more important than worrying about whether a tree is native to this area or fast growing. Homeowners should take into account whether the soil is dry or wet and other factors such as how much space you have and the amount of sun the tree will receive. He also suggests planting a shade tree where



your yard gets southwest exposure, which is often the hottest spot.

Diversity should also be big factor in your tree and landscape choices, explained Anna Dooley, executive director for Greenscape of Jacksonville

“You don’t want to have monoculture in your landscaping, you really want to have some diversity,” said Dooley. “If there is a disease or pest that focuses on one species of tree or plant and you planted 20, you are going to be in trouble.”

Dooley’s choices for shade trees are Red Maple and Sycamore. Dooley explained the Green Ash, which can be seen along parts of Roosevelt Boulevard, are great shade trees for the residential setting, although

they don’t do well along the highway because of the harsh conditions. Oak trees, although not fast growers, are another nice choice for shade trees, Dooley said.

A great resource for homeowners is the National Tree Benefit Calculator, said Figart. The Benefit Calculator can be found at www.treebenefits.com. Simply type in your ZIP Code and the species of tree you are considering to get a list of economic, environmental and property value benefits for your area.

Good reasons to plant shade trees

Besides providing shade in the summer and insulation to your home in winter, which will help with energy efficiency, Figart said there are plenty of other benefits to planting a shade tree.

First, it will make your yard more appealing and beautiful. This can add a 10 to 15 percent value to your property, said Figart. He also explained not only will your yard and home have increased value, but studies show that neighborhoods with more trees have less crime and overall better quality of life.

Helping the environment in many ways is another obvious plus for planting a tree. According to the Urban Forestry Network, even young trees can absorb gaseous pollutants and absorb carbon dioxide at a rate of 13 pounds per tree each year.

Finally, there is that scorching hot afternoon when you can lay in the hammock with a tall glass of lemonade under your beautiful shade tree.

“No one appreciates shade trees as much as Southerners. That’s for sure,” said Dooley.

Good-to-know tree facts

According to the UF IFAS Extension website, target areas for shade trees in Florida’s warm months are the walls on the western, eastern and southern exposures. For winter windbreak effects, trees should be planted on the north and northwestern exposures of the home – the direction of most winter winds in Florida.

Did you know...

...a Swamp Chestnut Oak can grow to over 100 feet tall? This tree produces large acorns and has a light-gray bark. Swamp Chestnut Oaks also grow well in moist, wet soils and humid temperatures. They are found along the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey to North Florida.

...a Red Maple produces a sap that is sometimes used to produce a less sugary maple syrup? Red Maple is a popular shade tree due to its rapid growth and easy establishment. The Red Maple produces brightly colored flowers, which give it an attractive look. This tree can grow 40 to 60 feet tall.

...the Bald Cypress, a large and slow growing tree, can reach up to 120 feet in height? The tops of the Bald Cypress are often used for nests by bald eagles, ospreys, herons and egrets. This tree produces cone fruit and is best for very wet soils. The Bald Cypress is found along Atlantic coast from Delaware to Florida.



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Top Brands Revealed at Local Discount Retailer

Savvy Shoppers Save on Endless Selections

Designers, smart consumers and college-bound students are outfitting office spaces, filling second homes or dorms and staging real estate with furniture and accessories from a hidden treasure in West Jacksonville. Tightlipped buyers enjoy fire-sale prices on brands ranging from Lilly Pulitzer, Michael Amini, and Young American, while concealing their origins from those admiring their stylish choices, but the secret has now been revealed.

Viktor Gjergji, the gentleman and proprietor behind Viktor's Payless and Grocery at 6612 San Juan Avenue, is reaching out to a broader audience to grow his sales by providing unheard of deals on the finest furniture. Gjergji's shop, just a few miles from the tony areas of Riverside, Avondale, Ortega, San Marco, San Jose and St. Nicolas, features brands from top designers while offering steep discounts on a treasure trove of goods. "Drexel, Barclay Butera, Pulasky, Collezione-Europa – any high end brand that exists, we have it," said Gjergji.

The source of Gjergji's selling power comes through purchasing goods from government auctions and seizures, unclaimed freight, and overstocks from other retailers.

By purchasing through these outlets, Viktor provides endless deals on myriad grocery, personal and sportswear items, fine furniture, outdoor furniture and high end mattresses and box springs, to name just a few.

Gjergji enjoys passing those steep discounts on to nonprofits, churches, and even college students in need of assistance. "Not everyone can afford to buy fine furniture, but they can here," he continued. "We do a lot for college kids and homeless shelters. We match dollar for dollar for college students, homeless shelters, Lutheran Services and churches."

Gjergji's honest, friendly and helpful service extends to customers from all walks of life, reflecting his love for both country and community. "You can work anywhere in the world, but it doesn't pay off like it does here. I started out as an employee and now I am the owner. I'm living the American dream," said Gjergji, who immigrated to the United States in 1991.

Filling big ticket orders with high-end furniture is part of that dream, yet nothing new to Gjergji, who recently outfitted the State Attorney's office. "We completed it with seven truckloads of furnishings. We sell to judges,



lawyers – anyone born and raised in Jacksonville should know of this hidden spot."

Viktor's not only furnishes steep discounts for the legal set and real estate staging services, but for anyone who wants half off or more on fabulous, exclusive furniture brands. Have a college-bound student under your roof? Viktor's has a package deal at the ready. Need a new Lilly Pulitzer bed set for your master bedroom, or a classy Michael Amini credenza for the dining room of your vacation home? Viktor's has what you want. Is your deck devoid of a rotisserie grill and comfy outdoor furniture? Viktor's has you covered with deep discounts on some of the best brands.

Gjergji's clientele, who range from college-bound students to high net worth homeowners, multiple property investors to those living paycheck-to-paycheck, all know one thing – there's no day the same at Viktor's. Shipments of goods arrive daily and no trip to the store is without surprises to be found among the newly stocked items.

The secret is out; Viktor's Payless and Grocery has everything you need for every aspect of your life – all at steep discounts, of course. Groceries, sports, health and beauty, and baby and kids departments combine with the finest furniture to make your visit to Viktor's Payless and Grocery a complete, truly one-stop shopping experience.



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Go pro or do it yourself?

Knowledge crucial before tackling project

By Marian Johns
Resident Community News

“This Old House,” “Flip Or Flop,” “Love It Or List It” – we all have our favorite home improvement TV shows. Fun to watch and full of great ideas, they make it very enticing for a homeowner to take on a do-it-yourself project.

While there are plenty of easy do-it-yourself home improvement projects that can add value to your home, you may not want to grab those tools and invest your time just yet. Local experts advise some undertakings can cause you to spend more money to fix problems because of work done improperly.

Most contractors agree not every project requires a professional, but homeowners need to be wary of those do-it-yourself projects that can soon become overwhelming. In fact, many contractors say they spend a lot of time fixing jobs done by homeowners that have gone seriously wrong.

“I have seen homeowners make mistakes regularly,” said Rick Bean, Certified General Contractor with Anchored Construction Enterprises LLC.

Not only can those mistakes cost more money, homeowners who attempt to do the project themselves tend not to stay

within budget or timeline as they might if they hired a professional contractor in the first place, said Bean.

“There are a lot of details that vary from job to job, whether it’s a job in the house or office. If you overlook those details, sometimes you will spend more money fixing the problems,” he explained. “It can also get complicated, especially with building codes and laws, which can be overlooked by many homeowners.”

Tom Trout, President/Owner of Tom Trout Construction said a simple project that might require two or three trades, such as electrical, carpentry or plumbing, is something the homeowner might be able to take on, but when the job gets more involved, you need some help.

“When the job has to take four or five different trades, then you need to have somebody that knows how to pick the right subcontractors and has a proven track record with those partners,” said Trout.

“Oftentimes, I may have as many as 25 trades on one project. In order to get it done correctly, you have to know what comes first – the chicken or the egg,” Trout explained.

If your home improvement involves several trades and subcontractors, Bean said a homeowner would be very wise to seek a professional contractor.

“We interview the subcontractors so we are able to weed out the people who are not qualified,” said Bean.

“Even if you don’t end up with a do-it-yourself nightmare, you probably know someone who did.”

— Rick Bean, Certified General Contractor, Anchored Construction Enterprises LLC

Bean also said by hiring a contractor, you have a recourse if there is some defect in the work – up to five years in Florida for a remodel job.

Trout explained a home improvement job such as installing hardwood flooring can appear to be simple, but to have it done right, you may need to do special testing.

“We do moisture checks. Many times in a remodel, we did not pour the original slab. If that slab does not have the proper moisture barrier or if it has failed over time, the excessive moisture can cause flooring to buckle,” Trout said.

Even something as simple as installing windows, garage doors or roof shingles can seem easy, but the state of Florida requires many of those products to have a product approval code which is all part of the permitting process a professional would handle for you, explained Trout.

“We obtain a permit for every project. It can get complicated, especially if you need structural engineering plans and energy approval,” said Trout.

Do your homework

Trout encourages everyone to get a warranty for any work they are hiring a contractor to perform. He also said it is imperative you do your homework to check on any contractors before you hire them.

One tool homeowners can use to research the contractor or company they are thinking about hiring is the Duval County website at coj.net. The City’s Building and Inspection Division has information such as what permits the contractor currently has with the City so you can review their projects. You can also check a contractor’s license at myfloridalicense.com as well as any complaints filed with the State of Florida.

Bean said homeowners always need to make sure they hire someone who is licensed and insured. It is also a good idea to check references for that contractor, he explained.

“At least consult with a professional,” said Bean. “Even if you don’t end up with a do-it-yourself nightmare, you probably know someone who did.”

What to know before you pick up a hammer

There are three simple rules of thumb to keep in mind before you tackle a home improvement project yourself.

First, know what is needed for the project. Talk with knowledgeable staff at the local building supply/home improvement stores. They can help you learn what supplies you need, how much you need and if what you want to do is feasible.

Next, take a deep breath. Do you have the time and patience to see the project through? Juggling a full-time job and family priorities might make it hard to see the project to the end. Remember, you will need a lot of energy and time for some home improvements.

Finally, know what needs permitting. Even small home improvements could require a permit, so check with the city building department if you are not sure. This is particularly important if you are dealing with load-bearing walls, electrical wiring, plumbing, or other aspects that require inspections. Not having the correct permitting can affect the resale value of your home as well as the safety of the home.

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Sunflower tradition brings smiles to community



For nearly 10 years, St Johns Presbyterian Kindergarten & Preschool has welcomed the warmer spring weather with its annual sunflower planting. The children, teachers and director spend the morning planting a wall of sunflowers along the playground fence on Herschel Street. Throughout the weeks to come, all play an active part in nurturing the seeds and watching them grow tall and beautiful, to bring joy to all those that pass by the school.



Kaylan and Gavin



Brie, Brooklyn and Jack

Steps to minimize risk of mosquito-born Zika virus

Mosquito season is longer than you think. Typically associated with the hotter months, it can start earlier and end later in the South. Mosquito activity begins when the temperature reaches 50-degrees Fahrenheit, which, in Northeast Florida, can be year-round. As the temperature rises, so does the volume of those pesky, painful insects.

With the threat of the Zika virus, it makes sense to take extra precautions

against mosquitoes and their potentially life-threatening bites.

Prevent mosquito breeding

Mosquitoes need water to breed, so items that collect water should be emptied at least once a week to prevent mosquito breeding.

Turn over or cover unused flower pots, buckets, garbage cans and wheelbarrows. Change water in birdbaths once a week.

Remove leaves and other debris that can clog gutters and trap water.

Cover unused swimming pools and turn over kiddie pools when not in use. Be sure to keep swimming pool covers

clear of leaves and water. Keep large pools treated and circulating.

Cover or dispose of old tires, a favorite mosquito-breeding site.

Prevent mosquito bites

Use an EPA-approved mosquito repellent which contains DEET, oil of lemon eucalyptus, Picaridin or IR3535. Read directions carefully for precautions and effectiveness. If you use a product containing DEET, do not use those with more than 30 percent DEET. Apply DEET to exposed skin (not eyes or mouth) and on clothes, but do not apply underneath clothes. Do not use on open cuts or wounds.

Children should not apply repellents to themselves. Adults should apply the repellent to their hands and rub it on the child, but do not apply repellents to eyes, mouth, or hands, and use cautiously around ears. Do not apply DEET on infants or oil of lemon eucalyptus on children under three years of age.

When weather permits, wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and socks.

Use air conditioning or window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside. If needed, sleep under a mosquito net, which can also be used over infant carriers.

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Milkweed and Monarchs: If you plant it, they will come

By Marcia Hodgson
Resident Community News

Last year, for the first time in her life, Dr. Sharon Leonard experienced the thrill of having a monarch butterfly eat off her finger. This year, she decided to offer the San Marco community the opportunity to share the same experience.

On April 14, in the front yard of her home on the corner of San Jose Boulevard and Mapleton Road, Leonard and her hus-



Monarch butterflies in the Leonard family's butterfly hollow find Colin Farhat very attractive.

band, Mike, erected a small tent to serve as an incubator for monarch butterflies, which are in the process of migrating from Mexico and South Florida to New England and other points north.

An avid gardener, Leonard, noticed in the spring the monarchs would lay eggs on the milkweed in her yard. Eventually the eggs hatched to become caterpillars, which enjoyed feeding on the milkweed, the only food monarch butterflies eat, until they become pupas, chrysalis and eventually butterflies.

Realizing monarch butterflies are endangered, Leonard and her family decided to provide them with a nursery, putting up the tent to provide them with a safe place to eat, drink, mate and stay until they are ready to continue their migration up north.

"We started it last year in the backyard and had it open for our closest neighbors and their kids," said Leonard, who is a pediatric allergist and immunologist at Nemours Children's Specialty Care. "This year we decided to bring it into the front yard and share it with the neighborhood."

Creating the nursery was a fun activity for her children, 10-year-old Liam and eight-year-old Anna, said Leonard. In the tent, the Leonards have placed information about the life cycle of the monarch



Liam Leonard sits outside the butterfly nursery his family erected in its front yard on Mapleton Lane.



Eight-year-old Anna Leonard has a close encounter with a monarch butterfly.



Dr. Sharon Leonard invites monarchs to dine by holding a container of milkweed from her garden in a tent she and her family have erected in the front yard of their home in San Marco.

and its migration, the difference between male and female butterflies, how to interact with the beautiful flying insects, as well as conservation advice and ways to help repopulate the species.

"Monarchs have declined in the last 10 years to near extinction levels," said Leonard, noting the importance for local gardeners to plant many different varieties of milkweed in an effort to help the butterflies propagate.

So far between 50 and 100 people have visited the nursery, with many signing the Leonards' guest book. The nursery will stay in place until Mother's Day, when the Leonards intend to set their monarchs free.

"We did it mostly for fun," explained Leonard. "Most people never have a true encounter with a butterfly. To have a butterfly on your finger is thrilling for both kids and adults."

Produce, flowers already sprouting in new community garden

By Kate A. Hallock
Resident Community News

All aspects of public-private enterprise were well represented at the ribbon-cutting for the official opening of the Riverside Avondale Community Garden April 16, when accolades were extended for representatives from government, business and the community.

"If it were not for Councilman [Jim] Love's support, I don't think it would have happened," said Carmen Godwin, former executive director, Riverside Avondale Preservation. "This garden wouldn't be possible without his efforts in negotiating with the City to get funding."

The idea for the garden started with a house-to-house petition about 13 years ago to gauge interest, according to former Riverside resident Victoria Register-Freeman, but it didn't go anywhere at that time.

"I let some of them garden on my front lawn," she said. "Then flash forward to about three years ago when the first real community meeting occurred," and the rest is history. Mary Puckett, the head of IFAS Urban Gardening, consulted early on, said Freeman.

"We're fortunate to have RAP as a partner with the City," said Love. "They came up with the good idea, and all I had to do was find the money." Love noted RAP also raised money for the public-private partnership and acknowledged the efforts of all involved, including Susan Fraser, of Avondale, who oversaw the construction of the enclosure and the garden beds.

"This was a great project for me. I've lived here for 31 years and feel there was pent-up demand for this type of activity in the neighborhood," said Fraser. "It was all volunteers that built this. We had to modify construction techniques so lay

people could do it. We had enthusiastic help for six months, and then the gardeners came in. They pitched in, putting their blood and sweat into building the beds, putting in the soil and the irrigation."

Countless hours were logged by nearly two dozen volunteers, and funds and items for fundraisers were donated by many individuals and local businesses. Support also came from Terry Vereen Plumbing, which donated labor and materials to install the water from the meter to the garden, the backflow preventer and hose bib; Mike's Irrigation, which donated the labor to install the irrigation valves and clock, wired it up, and helped get the water available to the plots; Home Depot, which cut more than 100 posts, many for free and the remainder at a 50-percent discount; Florida Cypress, which donated multiple deliveries of the cypress boards used on the enclosure; and Ryan Herco Flow Solutions, which also provided free delivery of PVC pipe for the irrigation system.

Within the enclosure are 34 plots, each wired to one of three irrigation zones set to go off an hour and a half apart, beginning at 5 a.m. Each plot has a timer so gardeners can set their watering cycle for up to an hour and a half. Still under construction are four accessible plots, with paved access and raised beds to accommodate wheelchairs.

Outside the enclosure is a free herb garden, supported through a three-year commitment by the Shoppes of Avondale Merchants Association.

Brittany and Jake Herbst are not first-time gardeners. Their shady Avondale yard doesn't allow much to grow so they planted a half-plot at the community garden with five kinds of tomatoes, okra, beets, red Swiss chard, and nasturtium to keep bugs away.

Doug Shapiro, a pediatric resident at



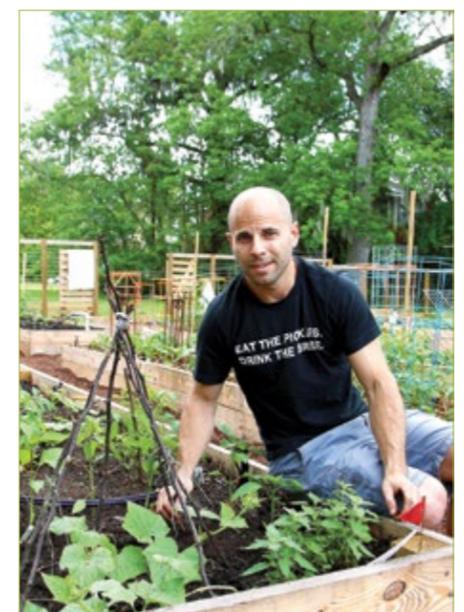
Susan Fraser, District 14 Councilman Jim Love, River and Carmen Godwin cut the ribbon April 16 at the official opening of the new Riverside Avondale Community Garden.

Wolfson Children's Hospital, saw the idea pitched last year at One Spark and kept his eye on announcements for plot applications. "It was a no brainer," he said about the opportunity to grow fresh produce within walking distance of his home.

"We hope the garden will be modeled throughout the city to use our public spaces in this way," said Godwin. "It's a good experience for families; children can see how healthy food is grown, where it comes from."

The new community garden is located on Park Street between Azalea Terrace and Mallory Street, on the site of the former Willowbranch Rose Garden Park. Rose bushes will be planted outside the enclosure to commemorate the original park.

"We had a lot of learning moments and fun moments together. That's really why I did it," Fraser said. "I think growing vegetables is cool, but being part of the community is the best reason we're all here."



Doug Shapiro has filled his half-plot with cucumber, peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, squash, bush beans, basil and catnip.

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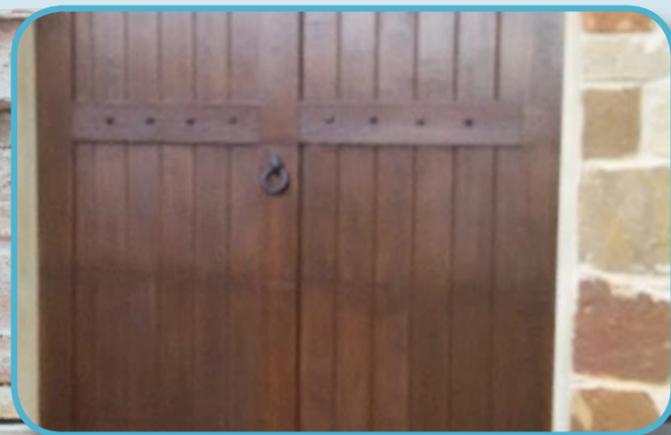
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