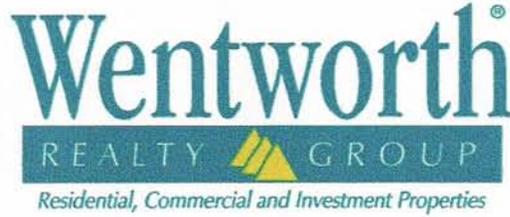




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The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another. The difference between them is sometimes as great as a month.

Henry Van Dyke



Remodeling — no longer just to increase value

Now that the economy is more encouraging, homeowners are improving their homes — for the fun of it, their own enjoyment!

“Rising home equity, improving consumer confidence and historically low interest rates — along with pent-up demand — are behind the trend,” said David Crowe, chief economist of the National Association of Home Builders.

Falling in Love with a home

Realtor.com defined a “home crush” as a listing that a consumer likes and looks at more than once online or in person. They did a survey to analyze the searching. Leslie Piper, consumer housing specialist at Realtor.com said “Men and women prioritize differently. Men are more likely to move from one crush to another on a weekly basis and consider a garage an important home feature. Women tend to find a new home crush on a monthly basis and swoon for updated appliances and fixtures. However, the survey found that women and men share some common ground in that outdoor living spaces topped the list as the attribute most likely to make them fall in real estate love.”

When should retirees downsize homes

For many retirees, it makes better financial sense to downsize sooner than later. According to financial planners, over time, the financial benefits can make a big difference in extending the life of a nest egg. Why not? Selling a home with a paid off mortgage to purchase a condo will cost more. Experts conclude that is not necessarily true. There are hidden costs related to owning a home—new roof, furnace, etc. where the cost of a condo is fixed. How about visiting family? In the long run putting them up in a hotel is more economical. Food for thought.

New Online mortgage tool from CFPB

As a follow up to the new mortgage rules, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has released a new online mortgage tool that sifts through Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data.

According to Richard Cordray, director of the CFPB, "Better public Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data would help us improve upon an important resource that already allows regulators, government agencies, housing groups and consumer rights groups to study and monitor the single most important consumer financial product in the United States: the mortgage loan."

Sounds like good news for the consumer.



Becoming a Florida Resident

Aside from relief from the cold and snow, a favorable tax climate draws more and more people to Florida. Florida is 1st in the nation for individual income tax, 6th for unemployment insurance tax, 13th for corporate tax, 16th for property tax and 18th for sales tax, according to the Tax Foundation's 2014 State Business Tax Climate Index. Overall, it ranks fifth as the best state to live and do business. Compelling reasons to call Florida home, which means registering to vote, getting a driver's license and spending 6 mos. + 1 day each year in Florida.

Recently some of the higher tax states have prosecuted "former" residents who the state claimed did not really make their residence in Florida. And, they have won. The moral: if you're planning to make the move be sure you understand the requirements.

Conduct an annual insurance review

According to the Property Casualty Insurers Association of America, homeowners should review their insurance policies at least once per year. Most of us tend not to think about our coverages year over year.

1. Do a home inventory of possessions.
2. An insurance agent can offer coverage options, assist in determining the best type of policy and offer advice on the proper amount of coverage.
3. Check whether the policy pays replacement cost or actual cash value for a covered loss. Be aware actual cash value takes depreciation into account. Usually, the preferable policy insures a structure for the full replacement cost, which should not be confused with market value.
4. Flooding is not covered in standard homeowners policies, but it can be purchased through the National Flood Insurance Program administered by FEMA.
5. What is your deductible? The higher the deductible, the lower the premium, but the more out of pocket you must pay on a claim.
6. Remember to ask about discounts.