

H **YOUR** HOME



The Happy Homeowner

You've always known that owning a home meant more than putting a roof over your head, but now there's proof. The positive karma that comes from owning a home results in higher life satisfaction and happiness, says Robert Dietz, author of a new study on the social benefits of homeownership. What's more, those benefits extend to the household and community levels.

The study shows that children of homeowners are likely to perform higher on academic achievement tests, are more likely to finish high school and have fewer behavioral problems at school. Political activity,

such as voting and participating in community organizations, is also higher among homeowners.

The bottom line: Homeowners are happier and more satisfied with their lives. Why? A couple of factors could be the government's policy of promoting homeownership and the positive social outcomes of homeownership, Dietz says.

"Through their investment in the home — and therefore in the local neighborhood — homeowners appear to be overall more involved in their communities," Dietz says. "These spillover benefits suggest that the neighborhood



homeownership rate itself may produce positive social consequences for communities."

Homeownership can even have financial benefits. Recent research indicates that high levels of homeownership in neighborhoods increase property values.



Green, Green Grass of Home

In the old days, home buyers skipped right over the yard and made a beeline for the house. But in today's world of low interest rates and high competition, home buyers are paying more attention to what's outside, too.

Big spending increases on professional landscaping and lawn- and tree-care services over the past few years have homeowners showing

prospective buyers that the grass really is greener on their side of the fence.

"Homeowners understand that their landscape is a valuable investment," says Debra Holder, executive vice president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. "Recent reports from REALTORS® across the country cite a return on investment of landscape expenditures of 15 to 20 percent."

In 2002, American households spent \$28.9 billion on landscaping services — a \$3 billion increase from 2001, according to a Harris Interactive survey. The results also indicate that 24.9 million households plan to purchase lawn and landscaping services this year, a 200,000-household rise since 2002.

Does That Stay?

A list of the household fixtures that stay — and go — can save hard feelings. It is easy to mislead potential buyers by leaving a chandelier or bookcase in the house when showing it, even though neither may be included. Be sure to let your real estate agent know in writing exactly what stays and what leaves with you when you move. Avoid any confusion over that favorite light fixture before you hold your first open house.

No Need To Buy a Vowel

With a Certified Residential Specialist (CRS) on your side, you won't be left alone to fill in any blanks. When you enlist a CRS on your buying or selling team, you'll solve the puzzle with confidence. So the next time you step up to the wheel, just remember these three consonants.

C is for career-minded. Real estate is a career for a CRS — not a sideline or a part-time job.

CRS Designees offer the expertise and advanced training that put them in the top 4 percent of residential sales agents nationwide.

R is for responsibility. A CRS considers it a personal mission to make your home-buying or home-selling experience as painless and profitable as possible. It's a promise a CRS agent will make good on.

S is for standards. Exemplary ethical and professional standards are the hallmarks of the CRS Designation. Every CRS Designee maintains membership in the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® and abides by its Code of Ethics.



Weather Report

If you live in or near Hurricane Alley, you realize how important it is to protect your home from potentially serious storm damage. Small, easy steps — taken before and after the storm — can keep weathering and permanent damage from reducing the value of your house.

The outlook for 2003's Atlantic storm season calls for 11 to 15 tropical storms and six to nine hurricanes (with two to four classified as major ones). But don't let those numbers scare you; with the proper preventive steps, you can turn that tropical storm into a spring shower, at least as far as your house is concerned.

Roofing is a key element in damage prevention. Most water damage from heavy windstorms occurs when the roofing system is damaged, allowing moisture to seep through shingles and weaken the frame. To prevent roofing failures in high winds, make sure to inspect and repair roofing frequently, especially before the storm season sets in. Moisture and mold can also wreak havoc on a house, especially if you use vinyl wall coverings, which allow mold growth, says Tom McGuire, national catastrophe manager for Munters Moisture Control Services.

Be sure to keep a list of contractors handy so you can reach one quickly if a storm hits. Memorizing insurance coverage and deductible requirements also gives you a big advantage, particularly if you keep lists or videotapes of all belongings as documentation. Proper planning before a storm and fast action in its wake will help keep your home's value high and dry, even in the midst of storm season.



Do you know someone who is thinking about buying or selling a home? Please mention my name.

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If you are currently working with another real estate agent or broker, it is not a solicitation for business.

