

3D REAL ESTATE

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HAWKINS

HOME: It's all about you

A great place to live, play

Thanks to last week's Wachovia Golf Championship the secret is out: Charlotte is a great place to live and invest in real estate.

Charlotte is slowly evolving into a major player in the sports and entertainment sector. The third Wachovia Championship earned rave reviews and was viewed around the world.

It was just a year ago that the Panthers drew an enormous amount of attention for Charlotte. We're a month removed from the new Charlotte Bobcats' first season. In October, the new Charlotte arena is scheduled to open.

Sports teams and entertainment venues tend to attract new exposure and money to the city. These venues always generate new jobs and financial opportunity for a city and its surrounding communities.

Career and lifestyle opportunities in Charlotte already makes our city one of the best places to reside in America. This growing popularity also contributes to the city being established as the second largest financial center in the United States.

Despite the area's current growing pains, Charlotte is still very appealing to individuals looking to relocate to the southeast region of the country.

As the demand for land and property increases, so does the respective increase in real estate value.

Properties purchased in the uptown and Ballantyne areas a few years ago have already doubled in value. That is why it is said that when investing in real estate the three most important factors is location, location and location.

Everywhere you look there is construction, new homes and shopping centers in progress. It appears that the new homebuilders cannot build fast enough to satisfy buyers' demands for new homes and subdivisions.

There are several new home contractors that are still building entry level homes under \$100,000 in every sector of Charlotte. Like the current low interest rates, it is believed that this opportunity will not last too much longer.

There is a stronger demand for new homes with base prices in excess of \$150,000. That is where a majority of the new homebuilders concentrate their building and marketing efforts. There are still a large number of affordable housing products for those individuals who do not wish to be house rich and possibly cash poor.

Obviously, your purchasing price range will influence where you may consider living and how much home you can afford to buy.

There is an abundance of reasonable priced resale homes on the market today. Most sellers are just as motivated as you are. This motivation can be attributed to the current attractive low interest rates that is obtainable presently. Low interest rates mean everyone can purchase more real estate and possibly pay less for it.

Current homeowners can upgrade while maintaining the same monthly payments or maybe even lower the mortgage payments while gaining more real estate.

To benefit from today's low interest rates, most sellers



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The concept of "home" changes as we pass through different stages of life. For the young it is the starter home that may be updated and improved upon. As careers and families progress, so do the homes we occupy.

Homes at this stage of life may contain more space to accommodate children, and

some amenities to reflect the owner's lifestyle, but they are still defined by resources that must be divided between the need to have a suitable place to live and the need to save for the future. In the past, many of these were meant to be terminal homes. But now a new type of home and homeowner are emerging. These "nexers" are very dif-

ferent from the generations that preceded them. People are living longer and healthier lives, and when they've outgrown the "family" home they are building their "next-stage" homes to meet their needs and wants.

Ty and Ida Mann are such a couple. After their kids moved out, they wanted a home just for the two of them.

Ida says, "We realized that the home we lived in for many years was really not where we wanted to be when we decide to retire. We don't want to move away to a retirement community. We just wanted a home that was ours - for the way we live now."

The Manns set out to define what they wanted: the type

and location of the lot; the style of the home; the number of rooms and their uses based on their needs and interests; and the amenities they had previously done without. They both like the idea of getting back to nature and prefer outdoor activities but didn't want to care for a lawn. Since they both had always

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Bring the islands home this summer



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If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be? One of the most popular answers to that question is on vacation in the islands, basking in the sun, bobbing in the waves and enjoying warm tropical breezes; but even people who live close to the shore can't get out there every day.

So they're doing the next best thing - transforming their master bathroom into a place where they can get away from it all. According to the National Kitchen and Bath Association, bathroom remodels were the most popular home improvement project last year - more than 8 million bathrooms were remodeled in 2004. About 50 percent of the projects involved simply repainting the walls and bringing in dec-

orative accents; but more people than you'd think spent big bucks on their remodels.

Nearly 320,000 households spent \$11,000 or more on upgrades. Scott Tennant of Acryline USA, a New Jersey company that specializes in massaging bath systems, says the most popular trend on the pricier side right now is expanding the size of the room by taking over an adjoining closet, bathroom or bedroom.

"When the majority of homes in America were built, bathrooms weren't given the kind of emphasis they have today. They were tiny rooms with just the bare necessities. Today they are people's private sanctuaries, really the only place left in the house where they can go to just relax and get away from it all, and that's

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Comfort can cost much less

ARTICLE RESOURCE ASSOCIATION

No matter what time of year, the comfort of your home is always a concern. Unfortunately, rising energy costs make it difficult to maintain reliable comfort during all the seasons.

In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates the average U.S. family spends more than \$1,400 a year on energy bills, with heating and cooling functions representing 44 percent (or \$616) of that cost. This number is partially due to the amount of older furnaces and air conditioners in use today. Putting a cost-burden on the homeowner, these units typically operate at only 66 percent efficiency. To combat this problem, manufacturers like Bryant Heating and Cooling Systems design products which use energy more efficiently than in the past - sav-

ing the homeowner money each month.

In addition, the government has established guidelines that follow a simple ratio which rates efficiency. The Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio will tell you how your air conditioning unit compares to what is on the market today. The higher the SEER rating, the greater the efficiency and the more money saved on monthly energy bills when compared to units with a lower SEER rating. Consumers shopping for a new Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning system should know that investing in a higher-rated model now will result in greater comfort and cost savings down the road.

In reality, an air conditioning unit rated at 13 SEER will deliver approximately 23

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