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## How to stage your home to sell fast

09:20 AM CDT on Friday, September 5, 2008

From Staff and Wire Reports

In a sluggish real estate market, sellers need every advantage.



NATALIE CAUDILL/Staff  
Photographer

**Before:** A game room in a Murphy home looks lived-in, which doesn't help the selling process.

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Staging can make the difference between a house that sells and one that stays on the market day after day.

Staging goes beyond improving a home's curb appeal, though that's part of it. The process focuses on the inside of the house and involves purging clutter, rearranging furniture and highlighting a home's best features.

Stagers help homeowners rethink the decor so that a prospective buyer can imagine the house becoming his or her home. The staging process includes removing family photographs, opening blinds and draperies to make the house look airy and bright, removing small appliances from kitchen countertops, using neutral paint and making repairs.

"When I do a consultation with homeowners, I go point by point down a checklist of things they need to tweak in order to help make a fast sale," says Barie Pinnell, president of Plano-based WRE, an interiors consulting firm.

Del Webb, a division of Pulte Homes that targets active seniors, has hired Ms. Pinnell to give staging seminars to clients in the company's Frisco Lakes community. As part of the seminars, Del Webb gave away four of her consultations valued at \$350 each.

Ms. Pinnell says the numbers back up the value of her service. "The average days on the market of properties I've staged is 31 days. Before I staged them, the average is 168 days on the market."



NATALIE CAUDILL/Staff  
Photographer

**After:** The room's clutter has been removed, making it more bright and airy, and more inviting to prospective buyers.

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Like many stagers, Ms. Pinnell walks through an existing home, then writes a report of every room, which translates into a to-do list for sellers to prepare the house for sale. Items can include everything from washing the front door and cleaning out closets to redoing landscaping.

"A lot of people still aren't sure what stagers do and how we work," says Karen Otto, owner of Plano-based Home Star Staging. "It's such a cost-effective way of distinguishing your home in a tight market that, hopefully, once people understand what it is, they'll jump on the bandwagon."

*Lisa Martin contributed to this report.*

## HELP YOUR HOUSE LOOK ITS BEST

Looking to sell your home in a stagnant real-estate market? Here are some staging suggestions from Deborah Ehrlich-Layne of Staging Plus in Tampa, Fla., Handyman Matters and HGTV's *The Stagers*.

**Eliminate countertop clutter.** "You're selling the counter, not the stuff on it," Ms. Erlich says. A countertop covered with small appliances and utensils looks crowded, not spacious.

**Pack up the too-personal.** Don't leave toiletries on the counter. Stash family photos. Erasing your personal stuff gives buyers a chance to imagine that it's their house, not yours.

**Be prepared for snoops.** Prospective buyers pull open drawers, look in closets and peek behind the shower curtain.

**Make sure things work.** Dripping faucets, burned-out light bulbs and squeaking hinges detract from the home's appeal.

**Think "white-glove clean."** Mop, dust, vacuum, clean baseboards, wash windows. Make sure the house looks fresh and smells neutral.

**Get rid of flamboyant colors and too-vivid wallpaper.** "You want colors that everybody's everything goes with. And wallpaper will scare buyers like crazy," Ms. Erlich says.

**Make sure the front door is clean** and the hardware polished "for the best presentation possible." Power-wash walkways.

**Sell the room, not the stuff.** Store furniture that makes rooms feel crowded.

**Show every room for the kind of room it is.** Maybe you've turned your formal dining room into a home office. Get rid of the desk and computer, and bring back the dining table and chairs.