

You have your orders, so now what? If you own your home, you must decide if you want to rent it out or sell it. Most service members choose to sell their homes and buy or rent in their new community, but with today's sluggish housing market, gone are the days you can stick a sign in your yard in the morning and have three offers that evening.

I've seen some houses in my area languish on the market for almost a year. Many are priced too high, as I'm sure the owners are stuck thinking of what their neighbors sold their house for two years ago. Things have changed. With the sheer number of homes on the market these days, you may have to get creative, but there are ways you can set yourself apart from the pack and sell your home fast!

Sell Your Home...*Fast*

By Jennifer G. Williams



Capitol Hill rowhouses photo courtesy WCTC

The Price is Right

First of all, set the right price. Sit down and think about how much money you'd like to get out of your home, and then how much you would settle for. You don't have to tell anyone else your numbers, but it will give you some inner guidelines during negotiations. So many people overprice their homes, only to go back later and lower the price, which can make many potential buyers wonder what is wrong with the property. Check out what homes with similar floor plans, square footage and lots in your area have listed for and *sold for* in the past few months. If you can make the profit you'd like pricing your home under comparable ones in your area, do it. Your home will sell more quickly than the others.

Clean and Spacious

It's too late to do any remodeling of kitchens and baths (the two things real estate professionals emphasize as having the biggest return on investment), but you can make your home show as well as possible. First—and I cannot emphasize this enough—clean your house, top to bottom, so well that you'll be sad to leave it. And get rid of any clutter you may have in your spare bedroom, basement or garage. Being sparkling clean and spacious are two things that can get your house noticed above the others just like it. Do you have too many pieces of furniture in your master bedroom? Your family room? Store your extra stuff in a storage unit or a neighbor's basement, if possible. Or just go through your belongings and get rid of the things you no longer want or need. Doing so will save you weight during the PCS as well—there's no reason

to cart along a bunch of stuff you're just going to get rid of once you get settled in your new home. Do it now.

Clean, clean clean! Even those linen closets, kitchen cabinets and laundry room. Potential buyers want to see if your home has enough room for all their stuff, so expect them to look in your closets and cabinets, and clean accordingly. Potential buyers will not spend a lot of time in a house that is dirty or even messy—too many other houses to see—and most people cannot see past the mess to your lovely hardwood floors or gorgeous views. I remember going through one house during my own house hunt last year that actually had smelly laundry piled up in the kitchen, and dirty dishes stacked up in the sink. I had liked the house up to that point, but I just couldn't help but wonder what else had been neglected (since the owners knew their house was being shown that afternoon). If it had been me, and I didn't have time to clean it up before potential buyers were coming, I would've taken a laundry basket with the dirty clothes with me when I left the house and put all the dishes in the dishwasher (just stacked in there, to be rinsed and cleaned properly later). At least the kitchen would've presented well.

Curb Appeal

Hey, HGTV has a whole program devoted to it, so it must be important, right? I have ridden up to a house and told the realtor not to even bother, just by the way the house looked from the outside. You don't have to have *Extreme Home Makeover* give you a hand (then you *really* wouldn't want to leave), but you can spruce up the exterior of your home and make it more inviting.

Stand at the street and in your driveway and take a good, unbiased look at your house. You are about to look for a new home—would this be one that would catch your interest? Would pots of annuals on either side of the walkway make it more attractive? How about a fresh coat of paint on the shutters or front door? Little things that don't have to cost a lot of money can really make a big difference. And if you've been putting off weeding your front beds, now is the time to catch up...maybe have your children pitch in to help. And do have them keep their toys picked up and out of the yard. And a fresh layer of mulch always makes those beds look more

appealing. Keep the grass trimmed and keep your garbage cans behind a decorative screen or inside the garage.

More Marketing

Even if you hire a realtor, be sure to also market your home on the Internet on the DoD-sponsored Automated Housing Referral Network, www.ahrn.com, a free service that lets you list your house and what installation it is near, as well as search for homes in your new community. The site is accessible only to members of the military, and you must register to use it. Another military-oriented site to check out is www.militarybyowner.com, which caters to relocating members of the armed forces, but the site is not restricted to service members. There is a fee to list your home, varying from \$15 to \$80.

Also keep in mind that everyone likes a good deal. Use some marketing gimmicks if you can. Throw in a year's worth of Homeowners' Association dues, or offer a decorating allowance. If you live in an area close to a military base (and you probably do), offer "specials" for service members—maybe money towards the closing costs or paying down a point on their mortgage. Most of the time, these incentives cost less than dropping the price of your home, and can be just as effective in attracting buyers. ●

Check out the Real Estate section of our website at www.AmeriForce.net.