

Home inspectors pushing benefits of checking twice

Pre-sale review helps speed transactions, uncovers flaws

By DAVID WINZELBERG

It isn't only real estate brokers that are suffering through a languishing Long Island housing market. Fewer home sales mean fewer customers for home inspectors, too, so their local trade organization is now seeking to double up on each transaction as a way to improve business.

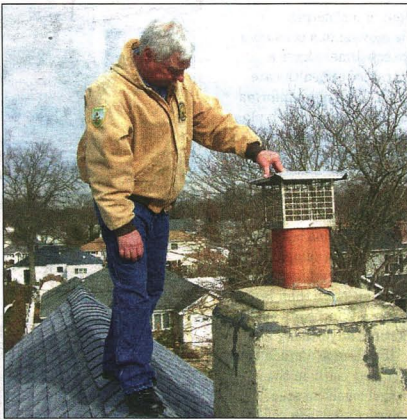
Traditionally, prospective homebuyers hire a licensed home inspector or engineer to check a house they're interested in purchasing. But the Metropolitan Association of Home Inspectors is pushing to add home seller inspections into the mix, claiming they will help ensure a smoother and faster sale, as well as bolster its members' bottom line.

Tom Walsh, owner of All Aspects Home Inspections in East Meadow and a past president of the Metropolitan Association of Home Inspectors, said the idea of a pre-sale inspection of a house isn't new, but it could make all the difference in today's competitive real estate market.

"We're trying to change the mindset of Realtors and real estate attorneys on how important it is to have a pre-sale inspection," Walsh said. "We're trying to get the other end of the deal."

One of the most important advantages of a pre-sale inspection, Walsh said, is a shorter and more effective negotiation between buyer and seller. After a buyer's inspection reveals problems with a home, it often results in the buyer trying to renegotiate the selling price. If the seller does a pre-sale inspection that uncovers some things that need fixing, the seller can either make the required repairs or set a more competitive price at the outset.

"If you wait for the buyer's home inspection, then you have to negotiate all over again," Walsh said. "That leaves a



PAUL GRESSIN: Spending money on a pre-sale inspection helps homes sell faster.

bad taste in everybody's mouth."

He said a home seller can also use the pre-sale inspection as a selling point.

"Everybody needs an edge," Walsh said, "and this way there's fewer hidden problems to disrupt the sale."

Matt Kaplan, owner of Commack-based Housemaster of Long Island, also advocates that home sellers order their own inspection before putting their house on the market.

"They should make this a law in the United States, that you have to inspect your house before you sell," Kaplan said.

Adding pre-sale inspections would certainly be a boon to the shrinking ranks of home inspectors in a down housing market. Kaplan estimated that nearly half of the people

that did home inspections on Long Island five years ago have left the business, though many of those were part-timers. Walsh said there are at least 20 percent fewer licensed home inspectors than there were when the state started licensing them in 2006. There are currently 335 licensed home inspectors in Nassau and Suffolk counties according to the New York Department of State, though some work part time or whenever they get a call.

"A bunch of guys went out of business," said Paul Gressin, owner of Professional Building Inspectors, with offices in Woodmere and Setauket.

A pre-sale inspection, like most home inspections, can cost \$450 and up depending on the size of the house and the number of kitchens and bathrooms. Gressin said it is money well spent.

"We're seeing a lot of people who can't sell their homes," he said. "They're looking to see what I can do to help this home sell."

Real estate broker Liz English, president of the Long Island Board of Realtors, said pre-sale inspections could make home sellers aware of problems with their homes and give them an edge in a very competitive housing market.

"Buyers come with a pre-approval in terms of financing," English said. "A pre-sale inspection report is like a pre-approval for the seller."

Walsh said some home inspectors have added more certifications so they can also do inspections for mold or lead. Tony Sabatino, owner of Sundance Home Inspection Services, became a certified inspector for lead, though he hasn't done more than a half-dozen indoor air quality tests since.

"That's not really helping much," he said. "It's just another ancillary thing."

But Sabatino isn't complaining about business. He said he's already surpassed the 200-home inspection mark in 2011, putting him nearly 20 percent ahead of last year.

Winzelberg can be reached at david.winzelberg@libn.com.