

THE INTERVIEW: BRET MICHAELS ON GROWING UP IN MECHANICSBURG



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STAGING

**SELLING YOUR HOUSE?
SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS.**

BY ANNE BURKLEY

When Joanne Patterson's husband took a job in Pittsburgh, she knew they would have to try to sell their Camp Hill home quickly.

The market was bleak, the holidays were about to begin, and the house was showing the wear of three kids, a dog, a busy mom and a dad who worked out of town — about the worst scenario imaginable.

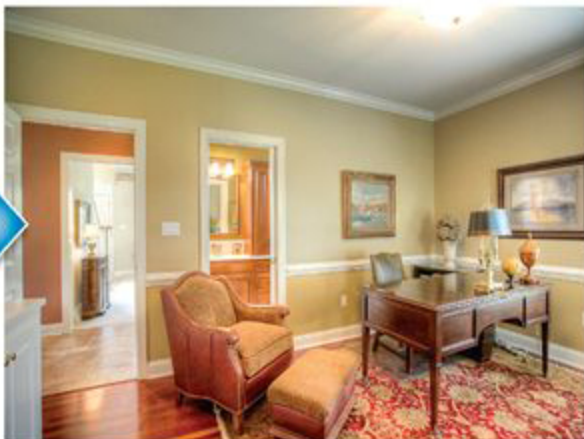
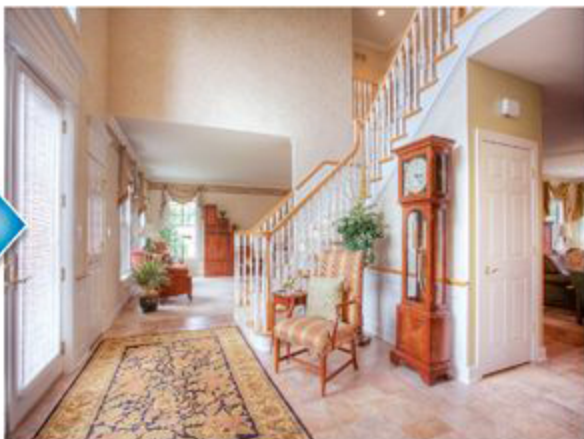
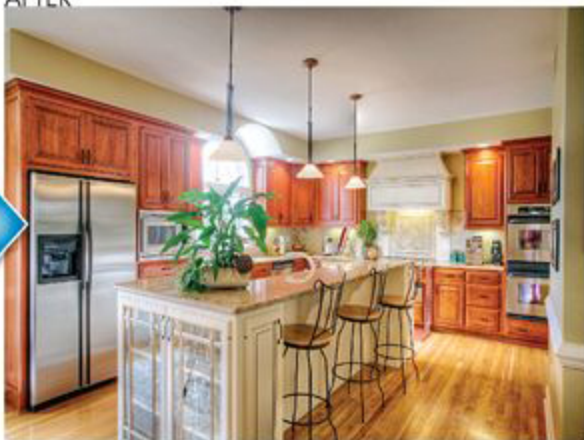
Her Realtor, Joy Daniels, introduced the idea of staging the house to improve her chances for a quick sell. Patterson admits that she was skeptical at first but remained motivated. She consulted with Sheri Walker, a certified home stager and redesigner who works with Daniels and formerly owned Red Door Home Staging in Dillsburg.

The transformation happened fast. Her

BEFORE



AFTER



SUBMITTED PHOTOGRAPHY BY BETTE BRENNAN GOTTWALD

home was cleaned and decluttered. They moved furniture, added accessories and sharpened each room's focus. When the "For Sale" sign went into the ground, everyone crossed their fingers.

The home sold that night.

"This is the quickest one of my staged homes sold ever, even in this terrible (economic) market," Walker said.

Though selling a home in less than a day during a buyers' market is not typical, success stories such as these are

convincing some sellers that using a home stager makes a good investment.

What is home staging?

Staging is "the art of accentuating a home's positives and minimizing its negatives to increase its attractiveness to buyers," said Bette Brennan Gottwald, Realtor and accredited staging professional with Prudential Homesale Services Group in Camp Hill. »

BEFORE



AFTER



Home stagers are usually people with an interest and knowledge in both real estate and design. They know the market, and they know how to appeal to potential buyers.

Walker had been a Realtor for years when she decided to switch gears to home staging. Similarly, Gottwald, who had worked as a sellers' agent on occasion, knew the frustration of pleading with homeowners to have their homes ready to show and seeing the price that they paid when they weren't.

Other stagers have a background in interior design. Allison D. Stewart of Stewart Interiors, Mechanicsburg, and a member of the American Society of Home Stagers and Redesigners, has been staging informally for years.

"My father is an auctioneer, and when he would do property auctions, I would go into the homes and prepare them for sale," she said. "I am an interior designer, and due to my previous experiences, it just seemed logical to add home staging to my services." Staging starts with a consultation. Different stagers offer different packages, and most offer an option to create an action plan for do-it-yourselfers.

A typical job will involve a stager and seller going over a property with a buyer's eye.

"This is often difficult for the home sellers to do because of the emotional connection they have to their home," Stewart said. Clutter is eliminated, everything is cleaned, and the

work agreed upon is completed.

"The final step is establishing the subtle emotional connection points that will subconsciously make potential buyers desire to live there and feel at home," Stewart said. She suggested opening a cookbook to a delicious meal and sitting it on the counter or throwing a comforter and a book on a reading chair.

Invest in the sale

The cost of staging can vary from \$500 to \$20,000 or more depending on the home, what needs to be done and how much the seller is willing to invest. Walker suggested putting 1 percent to 3 percent of the house's value into preparing it for sale.

But shouldn't buyers really be able to picture their family in a home regardless of these changes?

Don't count on it, Gottwald said.

"Your main goal as a seller is to create an environment where a wide variety of potential buyers will connect emotionally with your house and visualize living there," Gottwald said.

This is why stagers say it is important to stage before you list the property. When a house sits, Realtors and buyers tend to disregard the listing. "Staging isn't going to get anyone back into your house," Walker said. "What will get them back in, unfortunately, is a price reduction." ☐