

# SETTING THE STAGE



This Elmhurst home, staged by Lisa Vaisvila, is owned by Brian Ericson and Kelly Siebens of OnTop, Inc. who purchase homes for rehab across the suburban market. Photos by Jeff Krage

## Experts offer tips to ready your home for the market

By ELIZABETH HARMON

The groundhog might have predicted more winter, but the spring and summer real estate market is about to bloom.

Tradition holds that for many buyers, house-hunting season kicked off the weekend following the Super Bowl. This year, still-low interest rates mean good deals for buyers, while tighter inventory is favorable to sellers, says Karen Cookingham, Managing Broker with LW Reedy, Elmhurst.

If your home needs updating, a good place to start is with your real estate agent, who can direct

you where to invest your home improvement dollars.

"A lot depends on your home's list price and the condition of comparable homes," Cookingham says, adding that she provides sellers with a listing price range. "If you want top dollar and other homes at the top of the range have updated kitchens, it might make sense."

But beware of over-improving, which is spending more than you'll get back. A \$100,000 kitchen in a \$200,000 home probably won't be recouped, but a less-expensive facelift to a dated kitchen might.

"You want a good rate of return, and many times all that's needed is new carpet and paint," Cookingham says.

Organize those closets, and if your basement is unfinished, consider some minor improvements to create a second

living space. De-clutter, and store items where they belong. "Toys kept in the living room can make a house seem cramped," she says.

Buyers expect homes to be in good repair, so make sure your structural items are up to date.

"If they're going to put money into improvements, they'd rather it be for a new kitchen than a new roof," Cookingham says.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but first impressions can be the difference between an offer and a "no thank you." To maximize your home's appeal, consider using a home stager, who will ready your home for sale by reducing clutter, moving furniture to make the rooms appear larger, and even making small repairs and color changes that allow potential buyers to "see themselves" in the space.

"Buyers have high expectations so a professional who understands that can be your biggest asset," says Lisa Vaisvila, owner of Home Staging by Lisa, in Lombard.

Just as builders create model homes, home stagers create a comfortable, uncluttered and depersonalized space. "It's important for the home's assets to stand out. You might have beautiful hardwood floors, built-ins or a fireplace but with clutter they don't stand out," she says.

Stagers also can make a home appear larger. "There are techniques for furniture placement, and accessorizing, that create more open space," she says.

Stagers work with both the inside and outside. "Curb appeal so important, and if the outside is not maintained, people will believe the inside isn't either," she says.

Additionally, most home searches begin online, so staging your home to look like something from a magazine, then having it professionally photographed, can help attract buyers.

But living in a model home isn't always easy. Cookingham still remembers packing her small children and their toys into the car for a quick escape when her broker scheduled a showing.

"I always tell my sellers that the more effort they put in at the beginning, the less time their home will be on the market," she says.



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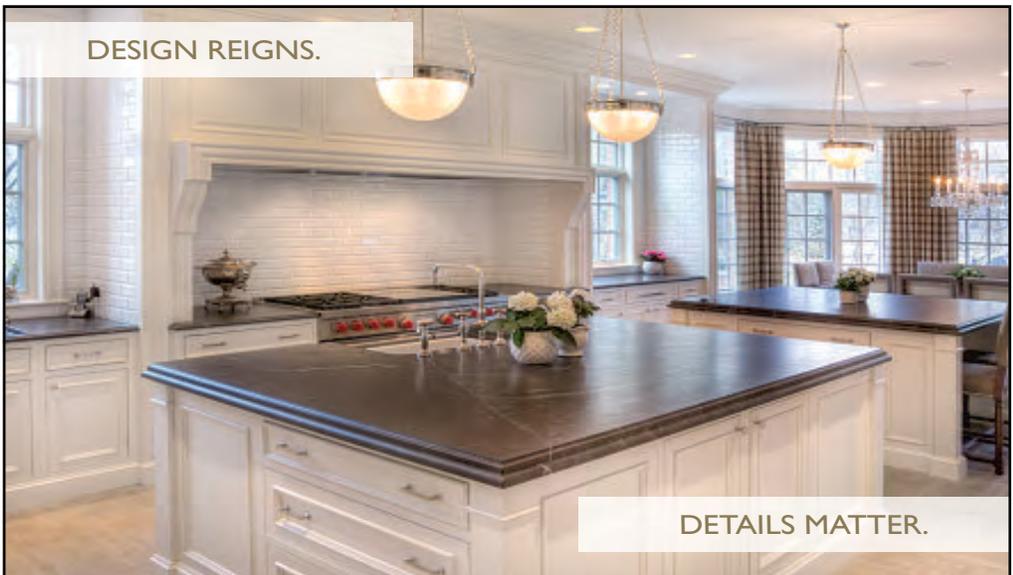
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