

Businessman uses flat-fee approach to sell real estate

Company offers MLS exposure

BY DON MANLEY

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Mark Hetrick, 28, is the broker-owner of List In MLS Realty, a Fort Myers-based agency that specializes in residential properties throughout Lee County.

The Fort Myers native opened his one-man company four years ago.

He is a graduate of Cypress Lake High School, Edison College and the University of Central Florida, where he received a degree in finance, with a concentration in real estate, in 2002.

Unlike most real estate agencies, Hetrick's one-man operation uses a flat-fee approach, which can enable clients to save significant money at closing by avoiding sales commissions.

Hetrick said he became interested in a real estate career during high school when his mother sold her home.

Q: How does the flat-fee concept work and how does it benefit the seller?

A: First, let's be clear on how the traditional real estate transaction works.

When sellers list with a traditional Realtor, they are usually locked into a 6 percent commission for a specified period of time. Simply put, if their property sells during that time they will pay 6 percent (of the sales price) in real estate commissions, which is usually split evenly between the listing agent and the buyer's agent. If the listing agent finds the buyer, then they will usually earn the entire 6 percent. On a \$300,000 sale this will amount to \$18,000 in real estate commissions.

In contrast, my sellers pay \$495 (online) or \$795 (customers) at the time of listing and only pay a 3 percent commission if their buyer is represented by a Realtor. Savings on a \$300,000 sale would amount to \$8,505 if the buyer is represented by a Realtor and \$17,505 sav-



■ Mark Hetrick, broker-owner of List In MLS Realty, in Fort Myers.

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Q & A

The News-Press is sitting down for a series of weekly interviews with leaders in the local real estate industry, as well as developers and builders who are helping shape Lee County's growth. Their views on the market of yesterday, today and tomorrow, and other topics will be featured here each Sunday.

ings if they find the buyer on their own.

Many of my sellers are initially for sale by owner (FSBO), but are willing to pay 3 percent if a Realtor brings them a buyer, so advertising in the MLS (Multiple Listing Service) for a flat fee is a great fit. I offer my sellers the same MLS exposure, enhanced listings on Realtor.com, a lockbox, yard signs, color brochures and pricing advice as a good traditional agent.

Sellers have the option to list their property via our Web site (www.listinmls.com), 24/7, by completing our flat-fee listing contract, filling out the MLS data input form and e-mailing photos to me. They can even pay with a credit card. For sell-

ers that are not as Internet savvy or would rather have more personalized service, I also offer in-person listings.

My flat fee sellers act as their own agent and work directly with other Realtors to schedule showing appointments, answer questions about the property and negotiate the sale.

Q: Why did you decide to use this business model?

A: I began my career in Orlando with a similar company offering flat-fee listings and I knew it was a great alternative to the traditional business model. There is a demand from sellers who want alternatives to the 6 percent, exclusive-right-to-sale listings and this is a way

for them to get the same mainstream exposure for their property at a fraction of the cost. I often refer to this concept as "the best way to sell real estate."

Q: Now that "the season" is in full swing, what effect is it having on business?

A: The phone is ringing! I am getting calls from buyers who drive by my listings and also buyers who see my listings, online. Prices have decreased to a level where both first-time homebuyers and investors are beginning to realize that this is a great time to buy.

Q: What are the key differences between the market today and a year ago at this time?

A: A year ago, there were very few buyers because it was pretty obvious to everyone that prices were decreasing. Today, prospective buyers are just now beginning to think that this might be the bottom and everyone wants to buy at the bottom. I am even starting to get buyers who are interested in buying sight unseen again. Many of the best deals today are short sales and bank owned foreclosures. Today, buyers have an unprecedented amount of properties to choose from and sellers have to be priced better than comparable properties to even stand a chance of getting an offer.

Q: If not real estate, what would your career be?

A: I really have no idea. I have dedicated a great portion of my life to this business and I can't imagine not doing this. I have many other interests and ventures, but my dream is to revolutionize the real estate brokerage business by making the process of buying and selling real estate more efficient and less costly for consumers. Before I started List In MLS Realty, I provided computer and real estate consulting services, mostly to traditional real estate agents, but I really did not see a future in it. I would like to produce fishing shows with my friends, who are very involved in the recreational fishing business. Hopefully I will be able to do both some day.