

Agency's new unit addresses 50+ market's needs

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BURGETTSTOWN - A couple of years ago, Airport Realty owner J.J. Guida began researching the vast baby boomer market, looking for answers to what he suspected were multiple real estate needs from that generation.

What he and his agents found, Guida said recently, is that where real estate matters are concerned, the age group has a lot more on its mind than just selling a house.

While many people in the 50-plus market may be considering downsizing to smaller homes, just as many or more are dealing with aging parents who continue to live in homes that may be on the other side of the country from their children.

For Airport Realty, which has offices on Route 18 near Burgettstown and in Robinson Township, Allegheny County, the market research turned out to be highly revealing.

This year, Guida and his two agents, Ron Cehelsky and Martha Sarish, are rolling out "Baby Boomers & Beyond Realty," a subsidiary of Airport Realty that deals specifically with the needs of the 50-plus age market. Each earned the professional certification of Senior Real Estate Specialists, receiving training to serve a market that includes baby boomers - those born between 1946 and 1964 - as well as those born "beyond" the baby boomer parameter - from 1930 to 1946.

In a move that would seem initially to be directly opposed to selling residential real estate, one of the aims of the new unit is often to help keep parents of baby boomers in their homes longer, a challenge the company is prepared to meet through a network of professionals it developed in 22 different areas that range from elder care attorneys, operators of adult day care services, financial planners and handymen.

"It's a big, big market," Guida said, adding that when it comes to real estate, people in the 50-

plus demographic often have more than their own holdings on their mind.

"We deal with clients with real estate rather than the real estate of the client," added Cehelsky, emphasizing the focus on individual needs as opposed to traditional residential real estate sales.

One of the big challenges that Guida and his team identified early on was the variety of real estate needs of an aging population.

One of the first questions they began asking when contacted by someone in the 50-plus market, Cehelsky said, is "Why do you want to list your real estate?"

The answers often reveal a range of reasons, from a couple looking to downsize into a smaller dwelling to someone who is behind on their taxes. In other cases, the decision to sell could be based on someone's inability to handle a spouse's medical problems to a house that's falling down around the owner.

Depending upon the response, the Airport team may direct the client to get in touch with its network of adult day care providers to explore the possibility of adult daycare or in the case of repairs, talking with a reputable handyman. They may also put the homeowner in touch with a reverse mortgage specialist to help with ways of providing income to stay in a house. The real estate agency doesn't charge its clients for the referrals, Guida said.

The Baby Boomers & Beyond model also considers the children of aging parents, many of whom may live long distances from their parents, but try to keep abreast of their parents' affairs.

According to Cehelsky, the real estate agency can serve its clients in three ways.

"We can list the house and sell it, or we can facilitate ways to keep people in their home," he said, noting that the agency can, with the permission of the homeowner, have safety evaluations conducted or help them to find qualified home care professionals to help them with their daily living needs.

"We know people don't want to leave their house," Cehelsky said. "Even if it's six months or a year, that's better than anyone else could have done for them."

The third way the agency is prepared to help occurs when it is determined that someone can no longer live in their home. At that time, Cehelsky said, it can provide a liaison for placing the resident in an appropriate living situation, whether it's moving the person to an apartment or helping them find an assisted living facility.

Guida stressed that at all times, the agency works with the adult children of the elderly, even those who may not be able to be physically present to help with the decision-making process.

"We invite all of the people they want to solicit advice from," he said. "We can set up a conference call for somebody in Texas or Arizona" who can't attend a discussion. He said the agency can also conduct Webinars with the various family members to display documents.

"It lets everyone participate. We want them to make an informed decision that's in their best interest."

Once a move is made, and the house is empty, Guida said Airport will provide a professional staging service to help sell the home.

"I see these people and hear their stories and hear their plight," said Guida, who has more than four decades in the real estate business.

While acknowledging that the new unit "is a lot more work for us," Guida said he views the effort as a much more personal approach.

"We're really helping people," he said, adding that despite the extra service available, Airport's aim "isn't to become a social services agency," but to address the needs of a market with many different real estate needs.

"If we treat people appropriately, they're going to list with us when the time comes," he said.

The Washington County office of Airport Realty is at 561 Route 18. They can be reached at 724-947-4742.

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