

# Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

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*“A real estate agent who is well connected with local contractors and craftspeople can be your best ally.”*

## Marketing a Historic Home: An Interview with Katya Duncan

by Holly Tsur

**Q:** Can you tell me a little about your real estate sales experience, Katya?

**A:** In 2000, I decided to pursue an independent career and run my own business. Joining a real estate brokerage offered both options. Plus it gave me excellent training and guidance, and complemented my husband’s building career. So I joined ERA, which at the time was the best brokerage in Forest Grove. That same year, I was ERA’s Rookie of the Year and went on to become top producer for the next three years running.

In 2004, ERA was bought out by Prudential where I remained for the next nine years – an invaluable period working and learning with a large, national real estate company. During this time, at least half my sales involved historic properties in Forest Grove, many of which I sold more than once.

In November, 2012, when Prudential was bought out by Berkshire Hathaway, I realized my long-term dream and opened my own brokerage, Grayson Realty.

**Q:** How does a savvy agent target the most likely buyers for a historic home in Forest Grove?

**A:** It’s not as much about targeting likely buyers as it is about creating a highly marketable *product* that attracts buyers of all types. You don’t bring bees to your garden without first planting appealing flowers. For best sales results, much work and thought must go into the preparation of a historic property before it can be marketed. Making a property “show-ready” not only works to attract buyers; it also empowers the seller to get the best possible price.

**Q:** What should I do to make my historic property show ready, and how can I improve its appeal without spending a lot of money?

**A:** First of all, Forest Grove already boasts many of the most show-ready neighborhoods in western Washington County. Our three historic districts are known for their beautiful large yards and trees, lovely gardens, and territorial views. But, in cases where show-readiness is a problem, the most important thing a seller can



1910 farmhouse, 1608 A Street

Sold for highest price in FG historic districts so far this year

do is understand that house and garden are integral, and that relationship is key to successful home selling.

Think *House and Garden* magazine! Upon entering the home, buyers should immediately experience a sense of calm and welcome. Soft music could be playing, lights turned on, windows cleaned and curtains pushed aside to show quality molding and appealing outside views. Bathrooms and kitchens should sparkle, and everything – including doors, handles, and windows – should be in good working order.

As you step outside, garden definition is key. Clean and well-defined sidewalks, patios, garden beds, and external buildings should be featured. Gates and fences should provide creative appeal on the outside as well as privacy from within the yard.

Much of this work can be done by the owner. When that's not possible in time to quickly list and market a property, look for an agent who can quickly offer a cadre of top-notch referrals for landscaping, house cleaning, carpentry, window cleaning, painting, and any other needed house preparation services. A real estate agent who is well connected with local contractors and craftspeople can be your best ally.

**Q:** What's the biggest mistake sellers make when marketing a historic home?

**A:** Overestimating the value of their home. Sellers and their real estate agent should know within the first month after listing if the price should be reduced due to inactivity. If showings aren't happening, something needs adjustment. A great real estate agent not only listens to their seller's needs, they also show them all active, pending, and sold listings in the area so they can see activity for competitive properties or "comps." A wise, well-

informed agent will know which properties will be next to sell because they have been primed to sell due to price, preparation, and value for money.

**Q:** Can I expect buyers to pay more for my property simply because it's historic and located within a historic district?

**A:** By and large, owners can expect 5 to 10 percent more for a fabulously renovated historic property.

**Q:** How much of a part does past history, otherwise known as the *legend factor*, play in marketing a historic property?

**A:** I don't think a property's history plays that big a role in motivating buyers. With all factors being equal, a property with an interesting history could help clinch a sale, but generally not otherwise. I believe, however, it is extremely important for sellers to collect and pass on historic information about their properties to buyers for the sake of the community. I also recom-

mend they pass on such information to *Friends of Historic Forest Grove* so it can be carefully archived for current and future generations.

**Q:** What marketing techniques and tools should I ask for when selecting an agent?

**A:** By far, the Regional Multiple Listing Service (RMLS) is the most-important real estate marketing tool provided by brokerages. The RMLS governs information provided by the agent about the property and its price from of its initial listing until its closing. Putting an attractive sign and flyers in buyers' yards within

48 hours should be your real estate agent's goal. Additional marketing techniques depend on the property – be it residential, farm, or commercial. A great real estate agent will provide a custom marketing plan for each seller and property.



**1910 Old PDX-style farmhouse, 2138 17th Ave.,  
3rd highest price in historic districts so far this year**

**Q:** What marketing considerations are unique to historic homes?

**A:** When marketing a historic home, it is essential for the agent to know what's going on in the historic neighborhood. This includes being known and seen throughout the community. It includes staying abreast of current real estate activity by frequently verifying which historic properties are still active, pending, or sold; and what prices sold properties have recently brought to sellers. Real estate agents need to stay current on such comps when pricing historic properties, and when dealing with appraisals that fall short of a buyer's offer. Such low appraisals can kill a transaction – particularly within the final two weeks of closing. An experienced agent who knows their product and neighborhood and who is great at their job knows how to challenge a low appraisal and *win!*

**Q:** What are the most-common reasons why a historic home sale falls through?

**A:** The most common reasons have to do with an inspector finding issues with the home that the buyers are not equipped to deal with such as roofing, dry rot, foundation, mold, and siding issues.

**Q:** Should I have my historic home inspected before putting it on the market, and if so, why?

**A:** Yes and no. Inspection is a lender requirement and must be paid for by buyers. If a seller chooses to pay for an inspection before listing, this can assist them in prepping their home, and they can offer inspection results to buyers as a marketing tool. However, the buyer's agent is duty bound to recommend that the buyer have their own inspection performed even if they choose to review the seller's inspection.

**Q:** If an inspector reports issues with the property, does the seller always pay for repairs, or can the cost be shared with the buyer?

**A:** If issues are reported following inspection, everything is open to negotiation. Experienced agents guide sellers and buyers through this difficult but necessary process. It is important to realize that all sellers think their property is *perfect*, but inspectors almost *always* find something that needs fixing. However, when everyone does the right thing, it's a win-win conclusion for everyone involved.

**Q:** I have put so much money into my historic home – how long will I have to wait for the market to improve before I can break even?

**A:** Depending upon when you purchased your property, return on your investment will generally occur over the course of five years. If you've remodeled your kitchen and baths, have a good roof and clean, working gutters and downspouts, and siding and paint are in good condition, stop spending money on your house if you plan to sell within the next six months.

**Q:** Is it important to offer a home warranty to historic home buyers, and if so, how do such warranties work?

**A:** Yes; when writing an offer, it can be an important marketing tool for sellers to offer an American Home Shield warranty on their home to buyers. This gives peace of mind to sellers, buyers, and agents alike. Warranties are good for one year and cover the cost of high replacement items such as air conditioning units, furnaces, and heat pumps, appliances, water heaters, and some electrical and plumbing. Cost generally runs from \$360 to \$590 depending on what's covered.



**For Sale!**

**1936 English cottage on .38 acre at 1404 Birch Street**

**Q:** Name three things a great real estate agent does when marketing historic properties that other realtors typically do not?

**A:** First, a great agent will focus on engaging with their clients regarding their needs and expectations, making sure their business



**Katya Duncan, Principal Broker, Grayson Realty**

relationship will be successful because they are working together. Second, the agent must love historic properties and understand the benefits and pitfalls of owning them. The agent must be aware of how to renovate historic homes creatively and well, and who to hire to get the job done. Third, they must aspire to be the go-to person when you're marketing your most-important asset – your historic property – and do their very best to live up to that aspiration.

Katya Duncan, principal broker at Grayson Realty, can be reached at **(503)939-9086**.

## James Reitz Receives 2014 Eric Stewart Award

Each year, in celebration of National Historic Preservation Month, the Historic Landmarks Board (HLB) selects one or more individuals to receive the Eric G. Stewart Award for their outstanding contributions in the name of historic preservation in Forest Grove. The first award was presented to historian and archivist Eric G. Stewart in 1996 – a year following Stewart's death.

The gentleman honored this year with this prestigious award actually *knew* Eric G. Stewart. City Planner, James Reitz, has served as staff advisor to the HLB since he came to work for the City of Forest Grove in 1989. James has seen many HLB members come and go, but for the past 25 years, he has steadfastly remained the board's most enduring contributor.

A few of James' most important historic preservation contributions include:

- He guided HLB members through the process of establishing three historic districts in Forest Grove – the largest number of historic districts for any city in Washington County.
- Each year, he helps the HLB manage the Renovation Grant Program by tracking available funding and coordinating distribution of funds to historic property owners.
- Every two years, he informs the HLB when and how to apply for State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) grant funding for historic preservation projects, and he helps members stay on target to ensure timely project completion.
- His strong connections with influential people in the preservation community and at SHPO have helped HLB members successfully complete project after project with great success.
- Like clockwork, prior to each monthly meeting, James distributes meeting minutes and agendas. He also edits the HLB's quarterly newsletters, and arranges for printing and distribution to the public.
- James is *always* on time! He never misses an HLB meeting – except when he's taking some well-deserved time off for hiking in New Zealand or exploring historic castles in Ireland.

HLB members managed to keep the award a secret up until the moment James was called to the podium and presented with the award by City Councilman, Richard Kidd, at the City Council Meeting on May 12, 2014. Congratulations, James, for this well-deserved historic preservation award!

## Meet Our Newest Board Members

The Historic Landmarks Board is proud to introduce its two newest members: Jennifer Brent and Kaylene Toews.



A 25-year resident of Washington County, Jennifer Brent grew up in upstate New York. The daughter of a town councilman and a mural artist, Jennifer earned degrees in mechanical engineering. Later, she and her husband moved to Oregon to raise their two children. Jennifer has an active interest in the arts and with community programs (she is a past Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District advisory board member). But her life passion has been a deep interest in the synergy between the evolution of communities and the design of homes and other buildings. She moved with her family to Forest Grove in 2013, and is currently working as a school bus driver for Forest Grove School District.

“My family moved to Forest Grove because we love this community,” says Jennifer. “I have always been enamored by historic buildings. I look forward to helping contribute to the evolution of this wonderful city in a way that preserves its historic character for future generations.” Jennifer joined the Historic Landmarks Board in March, 2014.

Kaylene Toews fell in love with Forest Grove by accident. And it was the town’s charm that got her. Since moving into the Walker-Naylor District from Portland’s South Waterfront with her husband in 2013, she has taken full advantage of everything our historic town has to offer – from farmer’s markets to garden tours to scenic drives to the hometown pace. She joined the Historic Landmarks Board in Spring of 2014 because it gave her the opportunity to support thoughtful community development and help preserve the character that makes Forest Grove a gem.

Kaylene works for Edelman, a public relations firm in Portland. She hopes to put her skills as a professional communications manager involved with community infrastructures and consumer clients to use to help the Historic Landmarks Board complete the Historic District Design Standards.



## ***Community Enhancement Grant (CEP) Funds***

The Historic Landmarks Board (HLB) now has CEP grant funding available for the 2014-15 year. If your house is on our local historic register, or is a contributing building in one of the three historic districts, your house may be eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding. The HLB may have funds to help with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work, have structural work to do such as foundation or porch repairs, even exterior painting or re-roofing, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant, up to \$1,000 for many projects, and up to \$500 for painting and roofing. We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to challenges you may have. For more information, contact James Reitz at **503-992-3233** or **[jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov](mailto:jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov)**.

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**Preserving Forest Grove** is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call James Reitz at **503-992-3233** or **[jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov](mailto:jreitz@forestgrove-or.gov)**.

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