

# REAL ESTATE

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## I am proud to call St. Charles County home

It seems like only yesterday that I drove my young family to our new home in St. Peters.

It was, however, about 30 years ago, and my family was moving “west” to the uncharted territory of St. Charles County.

I didn’t know it then, but that move to St. Charles would set my life on a path that led to my election as the 2008 president of the St. Charles County Association of Realtors.

As I listen to all the financial advisers in the media today, I sometimes wonder what I was thinking when I decided to buy our new home for my family. I was just starting out in the construction trade and working hard to provide for my young family. Providing them with the necessities of life and making ends meet, while at the same time trying to save for a home, was a struggle every month.

Had the financial advisers of today been around then, they would have told me I was crazy to want to own my own home.

I was fortunate to grow up watching my father, Mack McCulloh, work all his life to provide for his family. Dad simply taught me that my family deserved a home of their own.

Dad knew that buying a home was the best long-term investment available to my family. Dad didn’t teach me to read all the business publications to analyze the market or to sit and calculate the most profitable time to buy. Dad taught me that life was about more than the money. He taught me that providing for my family meant giving them a place to make memories — giving them their own corner of the American Dream!

The good Lord called Dad home a little more than a year ago, so I can’t ask his opinion on the so-called experts that have filled the airwaves this past year. I chose to begin the New Year talking about what I learned from my father, because as we begin the New Year I think it is important that we remember what really matters.

Homeownership remains the best

long-term investment available to the American family; but with all the financial analysis we see and read today, we sometimes forget that it is not all about the money. It is about our families and providing them with a great place to live.

St. Charles County is a great place to live, work and raise our families. Our county offers everything from the latest in modern homes to those with historical grandeur and charm, and everything in between.

Our outstanding school districts provide excellent education for our children. We are fortunate to have outstanding municipal and county leadership that has helped to make our county a great place for our families. This week’s closure of Highway 40 shows once again how fortunate those of us that live and work in St. Charles County are.

Residents and potential residents see the value of St. Charles County. While some markets around the nation see their real estate values drop, our St.

Charles County market holds steady. For the first 11 months of last year, the average price of a home in St. Charles County rose about \$3,000. If you have lived in your St. Charles County home for five years, you can sell it today for an average of about \$50,000 more than you paid for it.

Yes, fewer people bought homes last year than they did in 2006. Most economists agree that trend will reverse in 2008, as families realize this is a great time to buy a home. If you think 2008 is the year for you, don’t delay! Our large selection, stable prices and near-record low interest rates make today a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to purchase the home of your dreams. If you wait, you might miss the chance to own the home of your dreams, and someone else will be enjoying Easter dinner there instead of your family.

I want to thank Dad and Mom for all that I learned from them. Had it not been for Dad’s example and wise advice, I probably would still be living in a small apartment somewhere in St.



### YOUR PLACE TO CALL HOME

**Keith McCulloh** is the 2008 president of the St. Charles County Association of Realtors. E-mail him at [comments@StCharlesREALTORS.com](mailto:comments@StCharlesREALTORS.com) if you have any real estate-related questions or comments you would like to see addressed in this column.

Louis County.

I am proud to call St. Charles County home, and I have been honored to have spent the last 30 years active in the civic and community affairs of our county. I am honored to currently serve as a member of St. Charles County’s Building Commission.

I want to thank the members of the St. Charles County Association of Realtors for giving me the honor and opportunity to serve as their president. I look forward to the opportunity to visit with you each week in this column.

## Are you prepared for an emergency?

Organizing critical documents can prevent problems later

The past few years have shown that natural or man-made disasters can hit any family at any time. Ensuring the personal safety of you and your loved ones is your No. 1 priority.

But being prepared for the aftermath by organizing your critical documents and communicating their location to designated individuals can save you many problems later should the unexpected occur.

Could you locate all your family’s important documents quickly in the event of an accident, evacuation or disaster? Or could they find them should you be incapacitated or become separated from each other?

If not, here are some important

steps to take.

It’s a good idea to keep document originals in one location, with backup copies stored in at least one additional, equally secure place.

A fire- and waterproof box that can be locked and is small enough to carry is a good way to keep documents nearby, but safe from damage or theft. A safe deposit box at a bank is another secure location. Copies also can be stored with a family member or friend.

Critical documents that you should be able to quickly access include:

- Passports, birth certificates and social security cards
- A list of insurance policies, policy numbers and contact information

• Copies of wills, living wills, power of attorneys and healthcare proxies

• A list of bank, retirement and investment accounts, account numbers and contact information

• Titles to your car or home and sales receipts or proof of ownership of other high-value items

• A list of loan or debt obligations such as mortgages or credit cards, account numbers, balances and contact information

Other documents to think about collecting, making copies of and storing in a central location include medical histories, physicians’ contact information, dental records, past years’ tax filings and Internet account user IDs and passwords.

While paper copies may take up a lot of space, scanning originals and saving them on a portable storage device such as a memory stick or CD-ROM is a convenient alternative.

A videotape copied and stored in multiple locations is a good way to record your material possessions, and will help you remember everything and prove ownership for insurance claims if your property is destroyed. Be sure to get close-ups of serial numbers, and talk about the purchase date and price of each item.

Finally, it is especially important to let a trusted family member or friend know where your important documents are so that they can access them and take action should you be



### HBA COMMENTARY

**Tom Hughes**, of St. Charles, is the 2008 president of the Home Builders Association of St. Louis and Eastern Missouri.

unable to temporarily, or in the worst case, permanently.

While no one likes to think about the implications of a personal or community disaster, taking these steps will help you minimize the impact.