



Len Gluckstal, president of Golden Rule Home Inspections, works on his computer at a condo under contract to be sold.
MOLLY ZOLMAN/news-press.com

Home inspections help assure buyers

With prices already at rock bottom, haggling now rare

Written by
Lindsay Downey

Home inspections can help buyers decide whether they'll walk away from a deal or head to closing.

In some markets across the country, inspections also serve as key negotiation tools. In Philadelphia, for example, inspection results more frequently are providing leverage for buyers as they attempt to whittle down price or get the seller to complete repairs, according to a recent report in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Not so in Southwest Florida, real estate agents say. Deep discounts in this area don't leave much room for haggling over blemishes.



Len Gluckstal, president of Golden Rule Home Inspections, photographs what might be a violation at home in Bonita Springs.
MOLLY ZOLMAN/news-press.com

"The prices have been reduced so drastically, they (sellers) are not going to get started making any kind of repairs because you may get some buyers who are going to nit-pick at every little thing," said Alicia Galante, a real estate agent with Remax Realty Group in Fort Myers.

Terry Donna, sales manager at Gulf Coast Associates Realtors in Bonita Springs, said she rarely sees negotiations as the result of a home inspection. That's because many contracts in the local market are being signed on an "as is" basis. Buyers accept the home in its current condition, or they choose to walk away from the deal if an inspection turns up major issues, such as a leaky roof or broken air conditioning system.

"They (buyers) are not trying to negotiate the price (based on a home inspection)," said Vito Kostrzewski, an agent at Priceless Realty in Fort Myers. "We try to get the best price for the buyer before the inspection. You already know if there are appliances there and if you need new carpet or not. The only question is how the major systems work, like plumbing and air conditioning."

Many investors are purchasing foreclosed homes and condos - sometimes without viewing them in person - with the intent that they'll make repairs or remodel prior to reselling or renting the property. Some investors even waive the inspection requirement, to the delight of sellers.

Inspection Process

Inspections describe a property's condition in detail, but they don't serve as appraisals, which determine property values.

WHAT GETS INSPECTED

The standard inspection report covers the following:

- Heating system
- Central air-conditioning system (weather permitting)
- Interior plumbing and electrical systems
- Roof, attic and visible insulation
- Walls, ceilings, floors, windows and doors
- Foundation, basement and structural components

Golden Rule Home Inspections President Len Gluckstal, who is certified by the American Society of Home Inspectors and has served as president of the Gulf Coast chapter of the group for five of the last six years, spends two to three hours, on average, studying structures during inspections. Large homes and older properties can

take longer to analyze.

Gluckstal, who also is a general contractor and mold assessor, checks the condition of everything from plumbing and wiring to insulation and flooring inside the home. He looks for mold, turns on appliances to make sure they run properly, and checks pools, screens and patios, among other features.

About 50 percent of the time, the buyer is present during the inspection, the Fort Myers-based inspector said. When the buyer isn't there, it's often because the home is being sold to an out-of-state investor. Those involved in the deal receive an emailed report detailing the inspection's findings the same day, Gluckstal said.

In addition to inspecting structural elements, it's important to look for mold, radon and the possibility of Chinese drywall in Southwest Florida. Some inspectors are able to check for those issues themselves. Other times, specialists need to be called in.

"A lot of buyers don't realize how much radon there is in Florida," said Shelly Stines, office manager at Comprehensive Building Consultants in Fort Myers, whose inspector is certified by the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors. "They think you have to have a basement. We have tested for it in condos on the 14th floor."

At CBC, home inspections average approximately \$500, Stines said. Smaller condos might run about \$350, while large homes could be more than \$1,000. Price is determined by square footage under air as well as additional features such as pools and docks.

Gluckstal, who has a degree in structural engineering, said half of his work used to be in serving as a consultant on new construction jobs. Those projects dried up, and eventually, existing home inspections slowed for a bit as well.

Last year, work began to pick up, mostly with inspections for homes valued at \$100,000 or less. This year, though, Gluckstal is more frequently being called out to inspect homes with higher values.

"It's mostly middle class and upper class homes now," he said. "I'm seeing a lot more selling that are in the \$1 million and above category. ... We're starting to talk about homes that are 3,000 square feet and up."

HOME INSPECTOR 411

Some things to consider before choosing an inspector:

• **Credentials.**

• **Experience.** Any prospect should have made enough inspections "to make you feel comfortable," cautions Ronald J. Passaro, a founder of the American Society of Home Inspectors. Has the inspector been in business long enough that you know he or she will still be there in a year, or five years, if you have questions or problems?

• **Professional Affiliations.** These require adherence to codes of ethics and standards.

• **Staff.** If you have a problem or a question, can you get in touch with someone when you call or e-mail?

• **A Sample Report.** Is it concise, readable and in layman's terms, or is it a vague checklist that's not tailored to your home?

• **Other Services.** Does the prospect offer more than just the standard inspection, including radon and water testing?

Source: Ronald J. Passaro, Res-I-Tech Inc.