

REAL ESTATE

SUNDAY, MAY 18, 2008 | THE NEWS-PRESS | news-press.com

REAL ESTATE VOICES



MARK ALEXANDER

Protect your property before the hurricane comes, then get out of Dodge **Page G6**



JOE ADAMS

One time-consuming chore can be done just before the annual meeting **Page G4**

Q&A



DAVE ROBERTS

Former TV meteorologist gets comfortable with his new role: moving real estate in a down market **Page G5**

Developers offering incentives

From furniture to sale prices, it's on the table

BY DON MANLEY

dmanley@news-press.com

Paying closing costs. Free golf club memberships. Across the board price reductions.

In this buyers' market where sales are sluggish, developers hope to entice home shoppers

to sign on the dotted line with a tantalizing list of incentives.

Meritage Homes Corp. is now offering to pay a year of home owners' association dues at Moody River Estates, located off Hancock Bridge Parkway in North Fort Myers.

Moody River Estates is a

gated, 310-acre, riverside development, with 1,100 single-family, coach and carriage homes.

The promotion began April 1 and will probably last through the end of May and savings can range from \$5,000 for multi-family, to \$6,000 for single-family homes, said Maria Atkins, a vice-president of sales for the Arizona-based company.

"People everything as they are, their mont said. "It's actually se when buil costs."

Meritage prices on \$25,000

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT



COMMERCIAL CONNECTION

A word on hurricanes and

Baton down the hatches and get out of Dodge

Sheriff Matt Dillon on the old cowboy TV series *Gunsmoke* used to regularly tell the bad guys with black hats to "Get out of Dodge!" This coming summer, if you happen to see the famous shaved head of Jim Cantore (from the Weather Channel) bobbing past you, you better get out of Dodge, too. Cantore goes to the anticipated ground zero of any approaching hurricane. I met him once on a flight to Boston. He's from Vermont and a fellow Red Sox fan. Cantore told me that people normally start groaning or booing when he suddenly appears during hurricane season. It must be hard getting peace of mind with his job.

But what if you own a commercial building and you suddenly spy that Cantore shiny noggin in town? Should you set up camp, batten down the hatches, plant the flag and get ready to defend your commercial castle against all comers like Jim Bowie did at the Alamo? Well, let's see now. What happened to Jim Bowie again? Oh yeah, he died at the Alamo. Maybe you should consider packing the flag so you can bravely plant it another day, and high-tail it out of town if a hurricane comes our way.

Hurricanes are easy to outrun. Even slow moving ships at sea do it all the time. We know they are coming days in advance, so just go were the hurricane isn't. When I worked as an engineer for Exxon on their ocean-going oil tankers, our ship got caught in the outer bands of a hurricane in the early 1980s on a

run from San Francisco to Valdez, Alaska. This route normally took five and a half days to travel but rough seas and our storm detour caused us to make that particular trip in 8 days. I remember we had one 24-hour period of steady steaming where we traveled one net nautical mile. The hurricane was blowing against us so we just about stood still for one whole day. Big ships often have top speeds of less than 15 miles per hour — and if they can outrun hurricanes, so can you in your car. Just don't wait until the last minute and get caught in traffic.

Back on this stormy voyage to Valdez, I had been young, dumb and full of false bravado. I couldn't wait to see a hurricane thinking it would be way cool. But I quickly learned it takes just a brush with the feel of a powerful hurricane to change your thinking permanently. We experienced 40-foot seas that trip and we were far from the eye of the hurricane. I remember thinking foolishly; I just have to see this thing up close. The captain had restricted all personnel from going outside due to the storm. But my brilliant 24-year-old mind just had to push things. So when no one was looking, I opened a hatch leading to the outside. I stepped out and stood holding the nearby hand-rail with my back braced to the wall. It was my worst roller coaster nightmare come to life. In one moment, I would inhale rain and dark storm clouds as we precariously perched on the crest of a wave. It felt like I was standing at the



MARK ALEXANDER

top of a Ferris wheel looking far down on an angry sea spitting white caps. In my next exhaling moment, the ship pitched violently downward as the sea rammed us with reckless abandon. As she pummeled towards the ocean floor, I stared white-faced at a 40-foot frothy wall of water. It is hard to capture in words, the violence and level of force being exerted in these storm-born waves. It is easy to have a sense of security living on a super tanker over time because they are just so big. It feels like a traveling city at sea that gently rocks on occasion. But the outer bands of a hurricane showed me a sea force so great, that it could effortlessly bounce our huge ship around like a tennis ball on a windy day. I can only imagine what that same hurricane sea force could do to a house.

At the bottom of the wave, the ship would mercifully catch itself for a brief moment before being hurled to the top of the next wave crest. All this took place in a matter of seconds and forever after stained my consciousness with a strident fear and respect for hurricanes. My juvenile mind came to suddenly realize this wasn't a Disney ride

commercial real estate

that guaranteed a happy ending. Gone was my bravado in an instant to be replaced with cowering humility. I quickly scurried back through the hatch, dogged it down to maintain water-tight integrity and slunk back to my cabin.

There is no worse feeling than waking in the middle of the night because you feel yourself being flung across the room. An old seaman's trick during a storm is to roll up your life preserver and wedge it between mattress and box spring to one side of your bed while the other side abuts the bulkhead (i.e. wall). This makes a little cocoon against the wall so you can try to sleep without fear of your bed leaving without you. How I wish we had Ambien back then.

Ever since this experience, I have had a deep abiding respect for the power of Mother Nature.

My daughter loves hurricanes. All she knows about a hurricane is that if one seems to be remotely coming our way of Cat 2 or above, we go someplace nice to play — two days before it is due to arrive. She now tries to convince me during Cat 1 storms that we really shouldn't take any chances and head to Disney or Miami anyway. I see a lot of me in her.

I get a kick out of people who never tasted a hurricane before yet boldly pronounce their intentions to stay put during one. To me, this is like standing in the middle of Interstate 75 with an on-coming Mack truck traveling 80 miles per hour right at you, and you're saying: "I think I can take it." It's silly. Get out of Dodge!

But what do you do about your commercial building? You follow procedures not unlike the ship at sea. Secure the area inside and out. Police the area and stow anything that could become a projectile. If you can't store it, tie it down. Disconnect and move your electronics in a plastic bag to the top of a desk in a room farthest away from windows. Take your insurance papers and don't forget the kids. If the hurricane is swinging through the Gulf of Mexico, go to the east coast. If it is cutting across the Lower Peninsula, head north. All will be fine.

A friend of mine lost her house on Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Her greatest regret was not taking her family photo albums when she fled to Houston. So pack the things you deem irreplaceable, hit the road, make the best of it and try and have some fun. The chances of a hurricane eye hitting your property squarely are very slim. Loss of power and property damage is not the end of the world. Losing you will be the end of the world to you and to your family.

We were taught at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy that a good sailor should use his good judgment so that he does not have to use the good seamanship skills.

When it comes to a hurricane, you have two choices. You can choose to be bold, or choose to be old.

— Mark Alexander, CCIM, is senior medical office advisor at Sperry Van Ness in Fort Myers. Contact him at marka@svn.com or 239-826-4174.