



By BEN LOVE

For this month's InTheNeighborhood, we're going to the most important neighborhood in town: yours. Whether it's time to buy, sell or protect a house, there are a number of essential checkpoints to investigate; many symbolize issues that float to the surface after a natural disaster like Gustav.

To best answer queries about home inspections and tree maintenance, InRegister turned to Spencer Maxcy, an inspector with Advanced Building Inspections, and Paul Orr, a retired urban forester. Both experienced and well-versed in their fields, Maxcy and Orr provide invaluable knowledge that can go a long way in securing the best deals and protecting that investment. The biggest common denominator in the pair's advice: Don't wait too long!

HOME INSPECTIONS

Spencer Maxcy, the first person to integrate infrared technology into the building inspection industry in Louisiana, quickly identifies the most dangerous mentality common to too many homeowners.

"People live around problems they get used to," explains Maxcy. "After five years of something going on, it's 'Oh yeah, that always leaks.'"

One simple way to alleviate this stubborn complacency is to stop the procrastination and get an inspection done prior to putting a house on the market.

As Paul Burns of Burns & Co. explains, "a pre-inspection reminds you of things you put off and, this way, you don't get surprised."

Inspector Maxcy sums up the benefit for sellers: "An inspection really is a great selling tool before putting a house on the market. It eliminates risk for the seller and maximizes both the time on the market and the resale value. It allows someone to close quicker and there's a much lower probability of losing that buyer."

An inspection will also remove a lot of doubt and surprise from a buyer on the market because all the cards are laid on the table in advance. In this day and age, Burns points out "it's very rare for buyers not to get an inspection done."

And what happens when a buyer's inspection points out flaws?

"Money is typically the remedy," continues Maxcy. "The seller just wants to take money off the price, but then the buyer is responsible for repair."

Another helpful resource for the buyer is a home warranty. Home warranties typically cover all heating, mechanical, electrical and plumbing issues for a year. Areas not covered in

the warranty include roof and slab. The warranty can be paid for by the buyer or seller, a negotiable point.

"Warranties provide peace of mind for at least a year," adds Maxcy.

Other common issues tied in with inspections include termites and trees. We'll have plenty to say on trees in the following section, but Burns and Maxcy both echo the importance of the buyer getting a termite inspection within the inspection period.

"Despite all that's happening," reminds Burns, "the market moves on."

For further details on an advanced home inspection and what that entails, go online to www.batonrougeinspection.com.

TREE MAINTENANCE

Paul Orr's years with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry allow him to pinpoint the danger inherent to the state concerning hurricanes and trees.

"It's true of every hurricane we've ever had," explains Orr. "There are three species very prone to damage – water oaks uprooting, pine trees snapping and pecan trees breaking off – and we have a lot of them!"

Now a part-time consultant, Orr shares his counsel with residents who still have these trees on their property.

"I recommend if you have these species in your yard, it's time to be real critical about them. Even if they're not down, it might be time to take them down."

As far as replacement trees and shrubs, Orr gives the nod to several types which can more easily withstand hurricane-force winds.

"Examples of taller trees that are more stable and can work are live oaks, bald cypress and southern magnolias," says Orr.

He goes on to suggest hollies and crepe myrtles are very appropriate and can be kept near the house without any real threat of storm damage. Palm trees

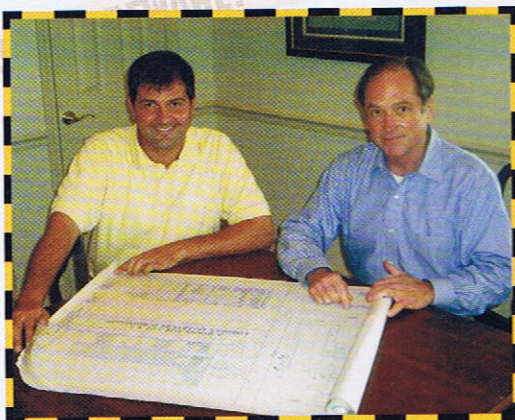
are also highly storm-worthy because they're very coastal and safe despite their relative height.

There are several other concerns for homeowners regarding trees and their place within a yard.

"Generally speaking, if the soil around the roots is poorly drained, surrounding trees are more likely to have problems," continues Orr. "The same is true of trees near restricting structures like slab, a sidewalk or a nearby trench. Soil compaction can be a problem as well. If the soil is too compact, roots can't dig deep."

An addition problem lingers, Orr explains, when soil is oversaturated, which softens the ground and greatly reduces a tree's holding ability. For these reasons, it's recommended to call an arborist before patio installation or pouring slab so that he/she can work with a contractor to minimize tree risk. Even after installation, it doesn't hurt to keep an eye out for any changes in the tree. The goal is to avoid decay in the trunk or any compromising of the root system.

"Decay is a progressive problem that always gets worse and doesn't go away. If decay, which often manifests itself in the form of a black spot or streak, spreads to the trunk, it's time to remove the tree," says Orr.



Spencer Maxcy and Paul Burns

