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# Realtor Excels In Sales

BY LESLEY MITCHELL

DRAPER -- Leslie Thorup says little as she strolls through each room of a tidy brick rambler in an upscale east-side cul-de-sac.

But her mind is racing with the possibilities: decent-sized family room with newer beige carpet; nicely finished basement with bathroom; no clutter.

By the time she has entered an airy country-style kitchen a few minutes after walking through the front door, this veteran real estate agent already has calculated in her mind how long it will take her to sell the home (four months tops) who the buyer will be (a family with a few children) and based on comparable sales, at what price it probably will sell (around \$255,000).

Chances are, she will be right on all three. Thorup, the Salt Lake Board of Realtors' 2001 salesperson of the year, is among only a handful of Wasatch Front agents whose selling savvy affords her a six-figure income.

Thorup, who works for Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, last year sold more than 100 homes worth more than \$18 million. That's a feat unmatched by most other agents not only in Utah but in many parts of the country.

What makes her accomplishments even more impressive is how tough it is to make a decent living selling homes. Most real estate agents in Utah make less than \$20,000 a year, some much less.

"People think that all real estate agents do is drive nice cars, wear nice suits and show a house and collect big bucks," said Jim Naccarato, president of the Wasatch Front Regional Multiple Listing Service. "The majority of agents are not like Leslie -- they aren't making enough to even be in business."

What also sets Thorup apart is that while many top-grossing real estate agents focus on only luxury homes, her listings range from a modest \$100,000 starter home to mansions worth more than \$1 million.

As she zips around the Salt Lake Valley in her gold-colored Lexus GS300 sedan, Thorup says she has no magic formula for selling homes.

What she does have is a system honed over two decades that enables her to attract large numbers of new customers, whose homes she, her husband and associates aggressively market to prospective buyers.

Her clients say Thorup also succeeds because she focuses on the ultimate goal of selling homes and isn't afraid that her honesty will cause her to lose listings.

She isn't shy about telling sellers interested in hiring her to sell their homes that they are asking too much. She has no qualms about pointing out properties' weak points and suggesting ways to address them before trying to sell. And if she and a seller are too far apart on these points, she walks away.

"I'd rather tell them up front that I can't help them than to list a home and have it not sell," she said.

Kevin Heaton of Sandy credits that philosophy with the successful sale of his home. While some real estate agents may just have accepted the home as a listing, "she was really up-front about not only the strengths of our house but about the weaknesses and what we really should do in order to sell it at the price we wanted," said Heaton, who has referred numerous people to Thorup since she sold his home several years ago.

"She said, 'You really need to replace this carpet and paint this wall.' It didn't take long for the house to sell after we did it."

Thorup got into the business in 1978 to help her husband John, a real estate agent, with open houses, scheduling appointments and showing some homes. Then in 1986 he was hospitalized for two months with gall bladder problems that led to pancreatitis.

"When he was in the hospital I stepped in and took over the business," she said. "I was fearful about what was going to happen to him, what was going to happen to us. It was then that I decided I was going to really succeed."

The couple discovered Leslie was not only good at selling real estate, she enjoyed it even more than John did.

John Thorup got out of the business shortly after Leslie started selling homes. But eight years ago he again started working with his wife as her office manager and partner.

"She likes getting listings and working with buyers and selling but she hates the paperwork," he said. "That's where I come in."

Completing her team are three other people. She contracts with two agents who work with buyers so she can focus only on selling homes. Those buyers agents earn a portion of her income.

Her daughter, April Oaks, prospects for new clients and gets a cut of any commissions paid to Thorup. And an assistant handles her calls, schedules appointments and handles other office tasks.

That is quite an entourage, but her sales activity affords her the privilege, said Jaren Davis, a broker who manages 130 agents including Thorup.

"She's in the top 1 percent of agents," Davis said. "It's a very rare circumstance that an agent can support a team like that."

As she has become more successful, Thorup has taken steps to

make real estate less of a focus in her life. Like many agents working their way up the ranks, it was not unusual for her to work seven days a week, showing homes and talking to clients from early morning to late in the evening.

These days, "I don't work seven days a week. I work probably 50 hours a week and some Saturdays, but the fact of the matter is I hire people to help me so I can give people better service and have a more normal schedule," she said.

For years, she sold fewer than 30 homes a year working with buyers and sellers. "My goal was 60 and it seemed like I would never reach it," she said.

Then, in 1990, she began to focus only on listings, taking advantage of the hundreds of clients she had built over the years. In 1996, she sold 53 homes. By 1997, she sold 95. Since then, she has sold about 100 homes a year. Four years ago she joined Mansell & Associates, which last year became part of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage.

These days, Thorup often gets the type of listings that most agents desire -- nice homes in good neighborhoods that sell well. But she says sometimes she enjoys the challenge of selling a home that has a major flaw, such as poor condition, a busy street or a bad neighborhood.

"I get excited each time I walk into a house and know that I can sell it," she said. "There's nothing like it."



Real estate agent Leslie Thorup, left, shows off a home for sale in Sandy to Bonnie and John Clark. Thorup says the challenge of selling a home is what inspires her to succeed. (Photo: Ryan Galbraith/The Salt Lake Tribune)