

Willits Weekly | Edition 10 | May 11, 2017

# REAL ESTATE SECTION



Far left: Eric Mehtlan, owner of 44 State Street, shows off the bank of original windows lining the north wall of the laundry room.

At left: There's around 600 square feet of attic space now more easily accessible with a new staircase in the old Victorian home.

Photos by Maureen Moore

## Bringing Back the Grandeur

Photo by Maureen Moore



44 State Street is getting a new lease on life thanks to veteran construction man and current insurance broker, Eric Mehtlan.

The original three-bed, one-bath Victorian home boasted a wonky floor plan, outdated appliances and fixtures, a "roller coaster" floor, and a host of other issues to be expected with a residence that's more than 100 years old.

**Maureen Moore**  
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None of this fazed Mehtlan, however, who, after taking a 15-year hiatus from the construction field, knew he could handle the redo when the property became available through a family friend.

"Over the last 15 years, I'd been doing small things here and there, helping friends, but I was really wanting to do a remodel project again," said Mehtlan. "When we heard this place was going to be for sale, I thought about how much I

Above: Mehtlan stands on the porch of the in-progress major remodel of the historic Victorian located at 44 State Street. The 1988 book, "The Architectural Heritage of Willits," by Nelson A. Streib and Susan Pritchard, notes that this home was built in 1904 by W.H. Pierce for P.I. Lancaster. Pierce built many of the larger residences in Willits near the turn of the century.

Below: Lots of demo and yard work were required to get the home back to its original grandeur.

Photos by Eric Mehtlan



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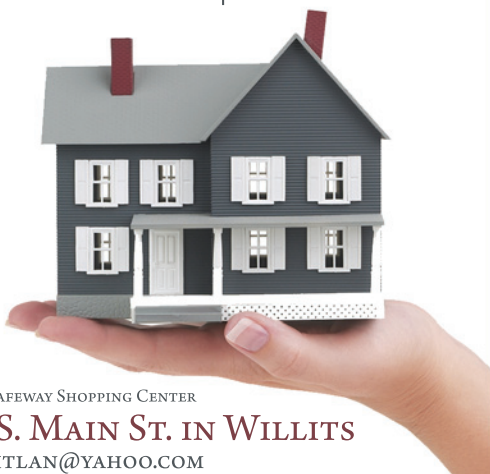
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# No green rush yet for local land

It's springtime in Little Lake Valley, and pot has been legalized. So that means an enormous "green rush," right? Growers coming up to Willits, buying up acreage everywhere, pushing land prices off the charts. Well, according to two local realtors, that scenario is far from reality.

"I think it's changed, and I think it's in the middle of changing. And it's one of those things where you won't really know that it's changed, until it's done changing, and then you can see it," said Tara Moratti, a local realtor who works with Coldwell Banker Realty on the south end of town.

Mike A'Dair  
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"We're watching some higher-priced properties sell, and they're selling at that higher price, or what we thought was a higher price," Moratti said. "But it's hard to tell the cause of that. Because it could be the cannabis, or it could be we're just at that point of the cycle, because we just came out of the recession four years ago. So it's hard to tell why these things are happening."

Longtime realtor Lee Persico, who also works at Coldwell Banker Realty, says pretty much the same thing. "It's hard to put your finger on, whether it's all cannabis-driven or whether it's something else," Persico said, speaking to Willits Weekly in early May, at what appears to be the end of a wet, dark winter.

"There's been a kind of an upswing in rural-type property sales, however we've always had a pretty good run in the spring," Persico said, "and then it slows down later. And around here we've always had a pretty good market for some of those properties that might be conducive to cannabis, prior to legalization. My take right now is that the stuff that I thought would be selling, because of the new laws, basically has kind of slowed up, to the point where

what I understand is the buyers are kind of worried as to what direction all these rules and regulations are gonna take 'em."

"I don't profess to know what the rules and regulations are, because they haven't established them yet. Town-wise, county-wise, state-wise, even though the state voted for it, it's still I think kind of in a state of flux," Persico added. "There's still people out there looking, but there are more people who are interested in where they are buying because they are not in the cannabis operation."

Moratti took a quick peek at the Multiple Listing Service, an intercompany information bank used by local realtors. She said that sales where a broker was involved over the past six months in the Willits area have been limited to 14 sales total. According to Moratti, in the Willits area, nine properties with residences on them, on more than 1 acre, have sold in the past six months, and six properties, on more than 1 acre, without residences, have sold over the past six months. That doesn't sound like a green rush.

"There've been more sales than just that, of course," Moratti said. "But those are the ones in our area where the sellers have used a broker."

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors passed a medical cannabis cultivation ordinance on April 4, which became law on May 4, just a week ago. The 37-page document allows for lawful cannabis cultivation in 10 zoning districts in the unincorporated portion of the county, if the cultivation operation was already in existence on January 1, 2016. The zones in which cultivation will be allowed are Rural Residential 5, Rural Residential 10, Agricultural, Upland Residential, Rangeland, Forestland, Timber Production Zone, Industrial 1, Industrial 2 and Pinoleville Industrial.

Permits for existing operations in zones other than

those noted above will be granted, but only for a three-year window, unless certain neighborhoods are exempted from the ban on growing due to the imposition of either an overlay district, which would offer special rules for this or that neighborhood or community, or an exemption ordinance, which would loosen standards for certain types of properties. Both the overlay ordinance and the exemption ordinance have yet to be written.

In this county, permits for new cannabis operations won't be given out until January 1, 2020, when they will be given out for sites in just seven zones: RR5, RR10, Ag, Upland Residential, and the three industrial zones.

Interim Commissioner of Agriculture Diane Curry said that, as of mid-Tuesday morning, her department had received approximately 120 applications for cultivation permits.

"This cannabis thing is nothing new," Persico said. "I mean, I've been selling property since '73, and we've sold lots of properties to cannabis growers. I mean, that's what people were doing. I'd say half of all the stuff we sold in Island Mountain and in Spyrock has all gone to growers."

Moratti said that, although sales volume has not been high, some of the property inquiries that she has fielded recently have been novel. She suspects these requests have been cannabis-driven. "We've gotten a lot of calls asking for 10 acres, or for 20 acres, and wanting to know if the property has been grown on before. We never used to get those kind of calls before, say, the last few months."

"I have had a lot of calls from people who want to know what their property is worth. It's like they are feeling maybe that it won't be worth as much in a couple of years and so they are asking themselves, maybe now is a good time to get out of Willits?"



Above, from left: This North Street front-yard garden has transformed into a thriving bed of irises, grasses and lavender. This Haehl Creek home showcases colorful beds of purples, yellows and reds to cheer up the low-water rock landscaping. At the East Valley and Bray Road intersection stands this red-and-white farmhouse which features contrasting paint and trim, and American flag and tidy lawn. Below, left: California poppies, purple iris and white calla lilies make an impressive bed in front of the columned porch. On Redwood Avenue, more lavender and California poppies fill in this home's yard.



Photos by Maureen Moore



## Curb appeal: Inexpensive, do-it-yourself tips to boost the value of your home

Curb appeal can go a long way toward making a home more attractive to its inhabitants as well as prospective buyers once the house is put on the market. Improving curb appeal is a goal for many homeowners, and while many projects aimed at making homes more aesthetically appealing can be costly, there are ways for cost-conscious homeowners to improve their properties without breaking the bank.

• Put your green thumb to use. A well-maintained landscape can dramatically improve a home's curb appeal. Pay attention to the plants, shrubs and trees throughout your property, watering them during periods of little rainfall and trimming them when necessary so your lawn does not look like an overgrown, neglected suburban jungle.

Professional landscaping services can help you maintain your property, but even if your budget does not allow for

such an expense, you can still make sure your landscape adds to your home's appeal by keeping a watchful eye on the property and addressing any issues that arise. Maintain your lawn through the colder months of the year as well, making sure no one walks on the grass when frost has settled, as doing so can produce dead spots throughout the lawn.

• Redo your front door. While their eyes may initially be drawn to a well-manicured lawn, prospective buyers will eventually find their way to the front door. If your door is especially old, consider replacing it. If your budget does not allow for such an expense, you can still give your home's front entrance an entirely new look by installing some inexpensive molding around the door before giving the door a fresh coat of paint. Molding around the front door can make an entrance more impressive, while a new coat of paint can make a home feel warmer and more vibrant.

• Plant flowers. Another inexpensive way to make a home more appealing is to plant some colorful flowers around the property. Line walkways with flowers native to your region, as such plants will last longer than exotic alternatives that may not be capable of adapting to the local climate. In addition to lining walkways, hang window boxes filled with colorful flowers or plants outside naked windows. Doing so can make windows seem larger and add some color to your home's exterior.

Another creative way to make use of colorful flowers is to place a few planters at the foot of your driveway and painting the numbers of your address on the planters. This can be both effortless and inexpensive, but it can instantly make a home more inviting to prospective buyers.

• Spotlight certain parts of your property. Many homeowners focus on improving the curb appeal of their property during

the daytime hours, but you can take steps to make a home more appealing at night as well. Solar spotlights placed around trees and other attractive features in your yard can shed light on those areas of your property you're most proud of, even after the sun has gone down. Solar spotlights won't add to your energy bill, as they are powered by the sun, and they can make certain accents on your property stand out at night.

Improving curb appeal may sound like a significant undertaking, but there are many ways budget-conscious homeowners can make their home's exterior more appealing without going broke.



Photo by Maureen Moore

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35 East Commercial Street built in 1913

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It has a flat roof and a very low false front. The building is made of cement and features a large plate glass window beside the main front entrance. Above the window and door is an attached roof-like section that offers some shade to the front of the building. It is slanted, and has a boxed cornice with exposed rafters.



300 East Commercial Street built in 1914

In 1914, the Northwestern Redwood Company decided to move their main office from their mill site at Northwestern to the East Commercial Street site in Willits. The company had been formed in 1901 by A. W. Foster, the president of the Northwestern Railroad.

The building presently houses the offices of Little Lake Industries in the Mission Revival style and features a red-tile covered hip roof. Drawing attention is the entrance tower on the southwest corner of the building. It is one and a half stories, and has a tiled hip roof matching the main building. Both roofs have exposed rafters underneath projecting eaves. The tower, as the rest of the building is covered in wide overlapping boards.

Reprinted with permission from the 1988 book, "The Architectural Heritage of Willits," by Nelson A. Streib and Susan Pritchard, commissioned by the City of Willits.



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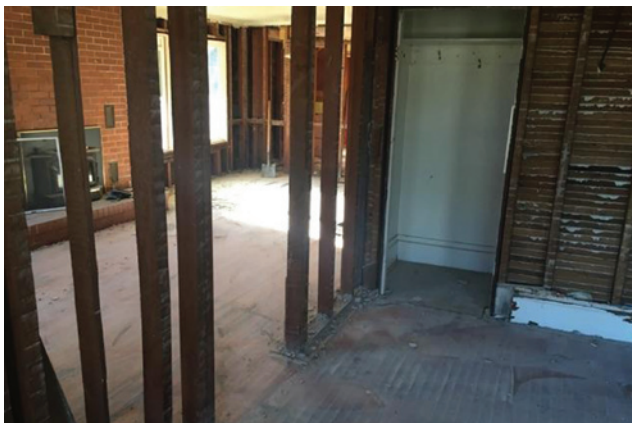
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Above: Eric Mehtlan documents the demo progress over the months, starting in June 2016 when the house was purchased, including tearing out the kitchen, left, front porch, center, and moving walls and doorways to make a better floor plan throughout, right. Below: Mehtlan sits on the front porch of the almost-finished Victorian, left, and shims a door frame in the newly created hallway, right.



## The rest of Grandeur From Page 1

liked the area the house is in, the street its located on, and the architecture of the house itself. However, I wasn't quite expecting the project to turn out to be quite so major – I was originally assuming something that we could turn over a little quicker!"

Mehtlan purchased the home back in June of last year, planning a quick flip for the commercially zoned property, but was talked into completing a major overhaul when it seemed obvious the gain in overall value and equity would make the work worth it in the long run.

Mehtlan has completed a long list of repairs and improvements, including everything from building a new covered deck and rebuilding the front porch, to adding a forced-air heating unit, putting in a brand-new sidewalk out front, installing sprinklers, building an entire new kitchen, redoing one bathroom, and creating a whole new second bathroom. At the beginning of the project, the interior was all still lathe and plaster, Mehtlan noted, and the walls were all replaced with sheetrock. He said he'd completed some 35 dump runs during the remodel.

"We also had to do a lot of leveling of the floors throughout," explained Mehtlan. "Thankfully all the wood

underneath was old growth fir, but it really needed some help."

The home also boasts a one-car garage, a fireplace, a large sunny laundry area and a large, newly fenced back yard on a deep city lot.

The home now stands as a three-bedroom, two-bath at around 1,300 square feet. However, Mehtlan's efforts to rebuild the very steep staircase have opened up the opportunity for the some 600 square feet of vaulted attic space to now be used as additional living space.

"If we were going to keep this as our home, I think we'd finish it in and make a great kids space or office or sewing room up here," noted Mehtlan.

The south-facing dormer windows let in lovely light to the upstairs space, and the angled ceilings would make for great nooks around the second floor.

While working on the property, Mehtlan noted that he's had some 20 people pop in and ask about renting the property.

"There's a real need for rentals here in Willits," Mehtlan noted. "However, we plan to list the house for sale on the market sometime in June."

After this home is completed and back on the market, Mehtlan noted he plans to work on two other properties he



Above, left: Mehtlan snaps a photo of the newly completed back porch before wood staining and the clear corrugated plastic cover were completed, center. The back yard also features several fruit trees, including two apples, a pear, an apricot and a cherry tree. Above, right: the new floor plan and new hallway make traffic patterns much more logical than the floor plan was when Mehtlan purchased the home.

Early progress photos courtesy of Eric Mehtlan; more completed photos by Maureen Moore

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# Preparing your home for sale

If you've been thinking about selling your house, now's the time! It is a seller's market. Rates are low, prices are climbing, and there's not much for sale. And, since we have more buyers than sellers, the marketing time (time it takes to sell a home) is short. If you're curious about what your home might sell for, you can get a free market evaluation from your Realtor.



Richard Selzer  
Columnist

Part of why we have so many buyers is because they know buying now will save them from higher interest rates, higher home prices, and increased property taxes.

So, what's the best way to sell your house? First, take care of all those little cosmetic things that may have driven you crazy once, but now you hardly notice – those minor repairs you kept meaning to get to, like leaky faucets, loose doorknobs, torn vinyl, and new paint.

Now that the easy stuff is done, it's time to imagine your home through the eyes of prospective buyers. It's time to declutter and clean out your garage. If you've lived in your home more than five years, unless you live a spartan life, you've collected a lot of stuff. Serious decluttering means removing about half your furniture and throwing away all those unfinished projects waiting in the garage.

If you're really serious about selling your house, get a home inspection and a pest and fungus inspection. Then, you'll be armed with the information you need to get your house in top shape, and you'll be able to show prospective buyers that they won't be hit with any nasty surprises once they enter escrow.

Having done all this great work, you may just decide to stay in your house! But, if you still want to sell your house, it's time to prepare for a showing. For a successful showing, you have to get people in the front door, so it's time to consider curb appeal. How does your house look from the street? Is the yard mowed? Did you trim the bushes? Are the garbage cans stowed? Did you rake the leaves?

Of course, you'll want to clean your house, but this shouldn't be your weekly dust-and-vacuum clean. This should be your mother-in-law is coming to visit type of have-the-carpets-and-drapes-professionally-cleaned clean. Because we all know the old adage, "Your dirt is dirtier than my dirt."

As you imagine prospective buyers walking through your house, try to appeal to all the senses. Visually, be sure to pick up the toys, make the beds, do the dishes, empty the trash, and, for heaven's sake, put the lid down on the commode. If you have views, be sure to open the window treatments so you can see those views!

If your house is dark, turn on some lights. To make the house smell good, put a drop of vanilla on a light bulb, or use a commercial air freshener. If you like to bake, throw a batch of cookies in that morning and your house will smell wonderful. To appeal to people's sense of sound, have soft music playing when they arrive.

If you move out of your house before you sell it, consider having a staging company furnish it for you. Most people find a furnished home more inviting than a vacant one. Staging companies are expensive but can make a dramatic difference.

If you have questions about real estate or property management, please contact me at [rselzer@selzerrealty.com](mailto:rselzer@selzerrealty.com) or visit [www.realtyworldselzer.com](http://www.realtyworldselzer.com). If I use your suggestion in a column, I'll send you a \$5 gift card to Roland's Bakery. If you'd like to read previous articles, visit my blog at [www.richardselzer.com](http://www.richardselzer.com).

Dick Selzer is a real estate broker who has been in the business for more than 40 years.

# Real estate sales problems

Congratulations! You just got an accepted offer to buy or sell a house. The clock is ticking. You've got 45 days to close the sale. During that time the lender is evaluating the property and the buyer. The seller and buyer are preparing for the big move. Everyone is excited. What could possibly go wrong?

Getting an accepted offer and opening an escrow is just the start of a complex process. Your real estate agent is essentially the coordinator of a team of professionals to help you reach your goal. Those professionals include the lender, title company, escrow officer, and various property inspectors such as pest, home/structural, well, septic, roof, and perhaps geologic inspectors. Reports have to be ordered such as the natural hazard zone disclosure report in California. The preliminary title report will be provided for you to examine with your agent and title officer to make sure you have a "clear title." A home warranty may have to be ordered.

In addition, a buyer will want to inspect public records during their inspection period – normally 17 days from date of acceptance – regarding the property, such as permit files, insurability of the property, neighborhood conditions, and many more things.

The list of "what could possibly go wrong?" can really add up at this point: You find out the buyer has credit issues that need to be corrected in order to qualify. They may not have submitted their tax returns, which can delay things by as much as four weeks. The buyer buys a car or new furniture. Oops, they no longer have the cash reserves to qualify. The buyer picks the property apart trying to get the price down and then backs out. Paperwork is not returned on time, creating a two- to three-week delay. Lender finds the buyer was divorced and needs the divorce decree, making a one-week to two-month delay. The buyer changes jobs without talking to the lender, producing a three-week or more delay and perhaps a denial of financing.

That beautiful family room that the seller added was not built with permits; can the seller get it permitted with a two-month delay? The garage conversion was not permitted, so the appraiser can't approve it for the lender. Unknown defects are discovered in the course of inspections; now the buyer wants a \$20,000 discount. The seller's new house isn't ready on time, so they won't move. The preliminary title report shows the elderly seller only has a life estate ownership interest, and now the seller's son who has the reversion interest can't be found to correct the problem, which can create a one- to three-week delay or more. A power of attorney has expired, so documents can't be signed and notarized. The seller has dementia, and a new trustee must succeed them.

The title company finds tax liens or unpaid child support filed against the seller – two- to four-week delay, perhaps more. The appraisal comes in below the contract price so the lender won't make the loan. Can the buyer make up the difference, or will the seller lower the price? If not, this deal is dead. The appraiser is not familiar with this market and won't back down from a bad appraisal, delaying the deal by one to three weeks as you protest the appraisal – if the lender will allow that. The deal may die here, four to five weeks into the transaction.

The loan processor has too many files to review, so your loan gets bumped for two to three weeks. The lender finds that this buyer does not qualify for the loan program the buyer is in. Can a new program be found, or does the buyer move to a new lender and start over? This can cause another two-week delay – perhaps with no solution. Interest rates suddenly rise and the buyer hasn't locked a lower rate in, so now they don't qualify. Oops, now they have to find extra money or a new program.

Your agent is always looking for solutions, and consulting the "team." Solutions can usually be found, but it's easier for you if these problems are anticipated as much as possible. Transactions can be stressful. It's important that everyone realizes that from the get-go and keeps their cool while things get worked out. Stuff happens. Take a deep breath, work it out, and everyone usually reaches their goal.

Bill Barksdale has been a real estate agent in Mendocino County for over 25 years. Contact him at Coldwell Banker Mendo Realty Inc.: 707-489-2232 or [bark@pacific.net](mailto:bark@pacific.net).



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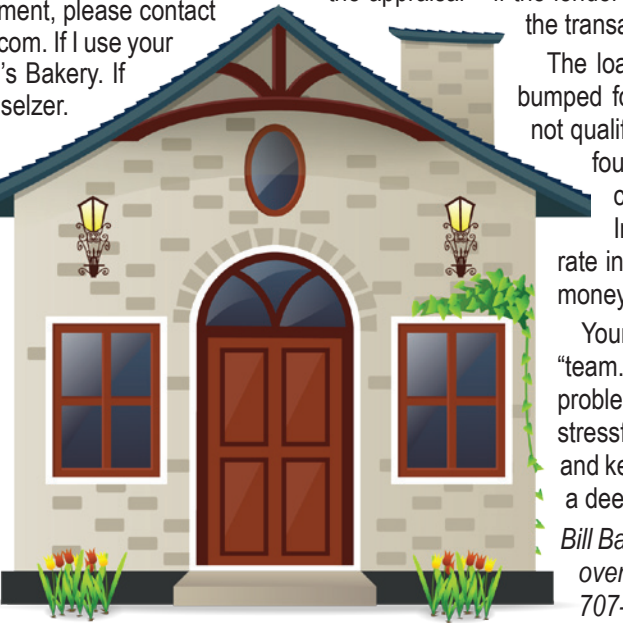
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