

# Real Estate Monthly

## Grace Glastonbury



Sales Representative

Office: (613) 725-1171 Fax: 725-3323

graceglastonbury@royallepage.ca



## National RenoMark Program Adopted by Ottawa-Carleton Home Builders' Association

**H**iring a renovator just got a lot less risky. The renovation wing of the Ottawa-Carleton Home Builders' Association has signed on to RenoMark, a national program to protect consumers from fly-by-night operators.

Created by the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, RenoMark sets out a 10-point code of ethics by which members must abide. Its stipulations include a provision for a written contract, a minimum two-year warranty on all projects (new homes typically carry a one-year warranty) and Workers' Compensation Board coverage.

The program also requires renovators to carry at least \$2 million in liability insurance and to return phone calls within two business days.

The Canadian residential renovation business, worth more than \$43 billion a year according to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), is thriving as flush baby boomers opt to renovate rather than jump into the skyrocketing new home market. CMHC says that, in 2006, more than one million households across Canada invested in renovations.

Remodelling, painting, wallpapering and adding or upgrading floors or carpeting topped the list of popular projects.

According to some estimates, the renovation business in Ottawa has grown by at least 20 percent over the last two years. With the average cost of a single new home in Ottawa reaching \$343,000 in 2006 and forecast to grow to \$367,217 by 2008, renovations will likely remain popular.

Because of rising material costs and hefty labour charges, renovations can be pricey. A bathroom makeover can cost \$10,000 to \$50,000, while a new kitchen may cost at least \$25,000.

Homeowners can be sure that there are many conscientious and skilled renovators working in Ottawa. When you are hiring a renovator, make sure he

has adequate insurance and Workers' Compensation Board coverage, and always ask for references.

You should also check RenoMark's Web site ([www.renomark.ca](http://www.renomark.ca)) to read the program's code of ethics and get a list of RenoMark members. The site also offers the downloadable Renoguide, a five-step consumer guide to ensuring your renovation goes smoothly. It offers everything from basic project planning strategies to common-sense tips, including warning neighbours about the noise and mess before undertaking a major project.



### Focus on Ottawa Home Sales

According to statistics just released by the Ottawa Real Estate Board (OREB), 1,456 homes were sold in July, compared with 1,234 in July 2006, an increase of 18 percent. There were 1,645 sales in June 2007.

"Sales activity through the MLS system continues to set records," said OREB's President. "Members had the busiest July ever for sales. Unlike June, we saw increases in both the number of residential (freehold) and condominium properties."

The average price of residential properties, including condominiums, sold in July in the Ottawa area was \$269,245, an increase of over 6 percent over July 2006.

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## Lights, Locks and Alarms can Deter Would-be Burglars When Families go on Vacation

When a family goes away on vacation, the last thing that it wants to do is put out a welcome mat at home for burglars.

But that's what can happen if people don't take some basic steps to make a house look lived in and, therefore, not an easy target for would-be thieves.

Key measures include making sure outside areas are well-lit, doors and windows are protected with locks or grates, and alarm systems are in place to scare off home invaders or trigger a response by a security firm.

Security is especially important in the summer, when there traditionally is a spike in home break-ins.

Many new homes come with built-in alarm systems, while families buying existing homes often install them and sign up with a local security agency.

It's also important to have a person check on their house periodically when they're away.

A neighbour or relative or hired housesitter can do things like make sure flyers and other deliveries don't accumulate, that the grass gets trimmed and that there's no sign of forced entry into the house. Having someone check on the home ensures that nothing goes wrong with the plumbing, cooling or heating systems.

Experts tell us that it's important to make a house look like someone's at home.

Some steps are obvious, like stopping the mail, suspending newspaper delivery and putting interior lights on timers so the place isn't dark for days on end. There's an often-overlooked sign that a family is away — trash cans pulled out to the street for pickup that aren't put away.

Sometimes, major changes are needed. For example, high bushes may give you a sense of privacy, but they also can shield intruders — so consider trimming them.

Outdoor lights triggered by motion sensors can deter burglars, who don't like light. They'll go to the defenceless household — not one that looks defended.

Your goal should be erecting as many barriers as possible to discourage a would-be burglar. The more difficult you make it to get into your house, the more likely a thief is going to go elsewhere.

You should also be careful not to inadvertently "broadcast" your plans to be away by talking about your travel plans in public

places, like supermarkets.

And people who live in apartments and townhouse communities might want to lower the volume on their answering machines so passers-by can't hear a family's messages: you don't want someone walking by and hearing, "I've been calling you for days and no one has picked up."

Finally, you shouldn't try to hide spare keys outside your homes. That's because the places that are obvious to homeowners — under a doormat, in a porch planter, behind a downspout — are also obvious to burglars.

