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## One of the elite

**Hard work and marketing savvy propel real estate agent onto listing of top Triangle agents.**

By NANCY E. OATES, Correspondent

When Prudential Carolinas real estate agent Connie Shuping asked her son, Evan, then age 5, to pose holding a frog for one of her real estate ads, she offered to pay him a dollar.

"I'll do it for five," he countered.

"That's too high," she said. "Maybe I could get one of the neighbor kids to do it."

He relented. He'd do it for a dollar, he said, "But it'll cost you an extra quarter if you want me to catch the frog."

Deal, she said.

That's the sort of negotiating Evan's mom does frequently. Knowing when to hold, when to fold and when to bluff is the sort of talent that propelled Shuping into a spot on the list of Top Residential Real Estate Brokers published in August in The Business Journal, a Triangle-wide publication. Shuping, who has been with Prudential Carolinas since 1993, was the only Chapel Hill real estate agent among 32 Triangle agents to make the cut.

Winning citations for her prodigious sales volume is nothing new to Shuping. In 1999 she closed a total of 95 sales, amounting to \$16.3 million in gross sales. Those sales stats marked her as the top seller in six of the seven Prudential Carolinas offices in the Triangle. Among the agents in the 17 Prudential Carolinas offices in the region, she ranked seventh, putting her in the top 1 percent of high-producing agents.

"I was really pleased," Shuping said. "I've worked really hard for a long time,



and my team helped, too. Without good team players, I wouldn't be doing what I do."

Dick Roseberry, president of Prudential Carolinas Realty, has nothing but praise for Shuping.

"Obviously, she's one of the elite, and she's a class act, besides," Roseberry said. "She's squeaky clean; she's error free. In all the years I've been here, we've never had a complaint or inquiry about anything she's done, which is unbelievable considering all the business she's transacted."

Shuping got her real estate sales license in 1986, but her sales experience dates back decades. Growing up in New Jersey, she teamed with a friend to sell pot holders. She and the friend took turns sitting in the wagon weaving pot holders on a square plastic form, pulling each other around the neighborhood. They went door-to-door peddling pot holders -- 15 cents each, 25 cents a pair -- producing inventory as they traveled. By the time they finished, they'd earned enough to buy a pup tent for backyard camp-outs.

In junior high school she noticed that people paid 50 cents an hour for a sitter to watch their children but \$3 to have their lawn mowed. Most yards in the neighborhood could be done in half an hour. She took the family lawn mower house to house and left baby-sitting to the other girls. In 1974 she headed to Chapel Hill -- where she was born, though she grew up in New Jersey and Pennsylvania -- and got her bachelor's degree from UNC.

After college, her business savvy kicked in again as she sold ads in a phone book, amazing her co-workers with her success. She found that describing the ads to businesses that had never had a phone book ad wasn't getting the results she wanted, so she took it a step further.

"I'd make sample ads at night, cutting up other ads from old phone books," she said. "Once I'd show [prospective clients] the ads, they'd think it looked pretty good."

And she'd make the sale.

Buoyed by her success in marketing, she enrolled in UNC's business school in 1983. By the time she got her MBA in 1985, she had married a general contractor and had begun working with him to market his homes, a perfect entree into real estate. Many of her husband's customers had to sell their houses before they could buy one that he built. Shuping got her real estate sales license and hit the ground running.

Marketing was a natural for her, and she is known for the clever and sometimes hokey ads she runs in the newspaper. While some agents only hype properties, Shuping believes in the power of a personal promotional. Ads featuring her son mugging for the camera, her dog disguised as a reindeer, her parents feigning horror (in an ad that ran before Halloween), even a coworker unceremoniously



dumped in a shopping cart have all caught the attention of potential clients.

Admittedly, it's hard to track the success of a personal promotion -- many people select a real estate agent based on a recommendation from a friend -- but Shuping views the personal promotion as a way to get people to remember her name. And people feel more at ease with someone whose name they recognize.

"People don't call me and say they want to use me because they saw my Halloween ad," she said. "But they may feel they are working with someone knowledgeable who's here to stay."

After all, media exposure is expensive, she noted. An agent has to do a large volume of business to afford to buy good exposure. Though Shuping credits her success to hard work and a love of what she does, the seriousness with which she takes each transaction has served her and her clients well.

"You can't be successful if you say you're only going to do \$500,000 houses or only in-town properties," said Shuping. "Even if it's a double-wide mobile home or an entry-level student condo, I'm still going to do my best. That comes back to you."

She prides herself on being a good listener and keeping up with what's available throughout the region.

"People don't always know what they want," she said. "They think they want an old house in town, then they buy a contemporary on three acres in Hillsborough."

"Buying a house is an emotional thing," she added. "Most people fall in love with the house they buy, and they are in love with the house they have to sell. Having a person who understands helps."

The numbers crunching Shuping learned in her MBA courses has helped her accurately price houses. Building negotiation room into the asking price might discourage a potential buyer from looking at the property in the first place, she said.

"My theory is, price it right and get full price," she said. "Even a few thousand dollars in overpricing may keep a potential buyer away."

Similarly, her business school training honed her ability to come up with creative financing to make a sale work.

"I've had lenders tell some of my clients they can't get a loan, and I've gone back and showed the lender how it could work," she said.

The challenges -- and the creativity required to surmount them -- keep her going, despite the long hours.

"I didn't think I'd ever want a 9-to-5, Monday-through-Friday job, even though it looks good now because I work a million hours, including weekends," she said. "When you're self-employed, which agents are, you end up working many more hours. But I have flexibility I couldn't have in a 9-to-5 job."

And that allows her time with Evan to dicker over the price of frogs.

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