

Blogs

## Real estate agent spins off into own business

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NORTHAMPTON - Craig Della Penna is taking his love of bicycling to a whole new level, opening a real estate business focused as much on houses as on bikes and trails.

"I was looking for the next big thing," said Della Penna, who for the last six years as an real estate agent with Murphy's Realtors has specialized in selling homes to cycling enthusiasts.

Now on his own, Della Penna said he will be the first to open a franchise of Pedal to Property, which deals in cycle-accessible homes. The Boulder, Colo.-based business got its start in 2006.

He called Murphy's owner David Murphy a mentor, and said he'd never planned on leaving the firm. But when Pedal to Properties began offering franchise deals, he said, he couldn't pass one up.

"If I didn't do this, someone else would and I'd be disappointed," he said.

Della Penna, 57, also owns the Sugar Maple Trailside Inn on Chestnut Street in Florence and runs Northeast Greenway Solutions, which provides consulting for rail-trail projects. His consulting work is winding down, he said, as most of the unused railroad lines in the state have either been converted to trails or are in the process of being converted.

The Pedal to Properties model revolves around environmentalism. Della Penna said other franchises should sprout up in areas around the country "where bicycles are prominent." At his own office, Della Penna plans to hire only real estate agents who are qualified EcoBrokers or have "green" certification from the National Association of Realtors.

Agents and their customers won't be burning a lot of gasoline visiting properties for sale, but they will be burning carbs.

"The best way to tour a neighborhood is not by car but by bike, because that's where you get the true flavor of a neighborhood," Della Penna said. "We're going to do that on a weekly basis."

Della Penna said he plans to offer bicycle tours every Tuesday night during warm weather, inviting prospective buyers and the merely curious alike to ride along on the agency's retro cruiser bicycles.

The agency will focus on real estate in Northampton, Hadley, Amherst, Williamsburg, Hatfield and Holyoke, he said.

"Pedal to Properties is a great fit for buyers with active, healthy lifestyles, and that's the kind of buyer who looks for a home in Northampton," Tim Majors, the franchise's U.S. operations president, said in a press release.

Office space is being renovated at 14 Strong Ave. The storefront also happens to be near an entrance to the Northampton Bike Path. Della Penna said the office will be "sleek, modern and industrial," and filled with decorations from his own collection of railroad maps and memorabilia.

He's planning a grand opening to coincide with Pioneer Valley Bike Commute Week in May.

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Craig Della Penna

