

REAL ESTATE

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Staff photo by David Allard

Kathy Sharpless, the new president of the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors, says her priorities for the board include providing educational opportunities for the

membership, including a program for real estate agents to better utilize the Multiple Listing Service on the Internet.

Back from Paradise

New board president learned the trade while living in the Caribbean

By **STEPHEN DEAR**
Correspondent

CHAPEL HILL—Kathy Sharpless is used to the questions.

She gets asked plenty of times about the best vacation spots and real estate in the Caribbean.

After all, the new president of the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors has also been president of the Virgin Islands Territorial Association of Realtors, president of the St. Thomas-St. John Board of Realtors, and Realtor of the Year for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I loved it. It was great. It was a wonderful place until it was time to grow up and come home," Sharpless said, laughing. "It was like running away after you graduated from college and just not coming back for 20 years."

Makes sense for a kid from Baltimore. After graduating from the University of Maryland with a degree in secondary

At Rehoboth, 26 years ago, she met and married her husband, Chris Sharpless, who at the time was general manager of a hotel.

A year later Chris was transferred to the Caribbean island country of Barbados. Eighteen months after that they moved to St. Thomas, an island in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where they would stay for the better part of two decades.

When they settled Kathy helped Chris with the hotel business for a year and half. Then she decided to find something in which working full-time meant working 40 hours per week, not 70. She wanted more time to spend with her stepsons, Darren, now 31, Chris Jr., now 30, and Ched, now 18.

Kathy tried her hand at a few jobs before working as a secretary in a real estate firm on St. Thomas. In 1977 she decided to sell real estate herself. "I thought I could do pretty well and it would give me even more flexibility with

"[Kathy Sharpless] is a real take-charge type of person. She's one of those people that if you want to get something done, you go to her and it'll get done."

Jenny Crittenden
co-worker

learn the business, Sharpless was selling \$6 to \$7 million in real estate per year. St. Thomas is where she had her best sales years.

"But it was a different kind of market," Sharpless said. "We sold primarily second homes and investment condos... Of course, the price tags were a little higher."

and in 1995 became chairperson of the state-level committee on professional standards.

The Sharplesses moved to town after a chance meeting in Dallas in 1989 between Kathy and A.C. Robbins, now managing broker of Prudential Carolinas Realtors in Chapel Hill. They were attending a conference of the National Association of Realtors. Kathy was there as Realtor of the Year for the Virgin Islands, Robbins for Realtor of the year for North Carolina.

"She saw my badge," Robbins recalls. "She said do you know anybody from Chapel Hill?" I said, "Funny you should ask... She came to work with us and has been extremely successful."

Kathy sells about 10 or 12 houses per year now. Last year her sales totaled \$3.9 million, she said.

Chris is co-owner of Quality Services International, a locally based company that is the master franchiser for Choice Hotels International in the Caribbean.

Board

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The position of board president is usually decided by vote of the membership of the board of realtors. But last year's president-elect, John Tyrrell, started working in Raleigh as head of corporate operations at Howard, Perry and Walston/Better Homes and Gardens' corporate headquarters.

So Sharpless was appointed as board president. "I guess I enjoy a challenge," she said.

Sharpless says her priorities for the board include providing educational opportunities for the membership this year, including a program for real estate agents to learn how to expose their listings in the best fashion when the Multiple Listing Service becomes available on the Internet soon.

Her work will also involve keeping in touch with town and county planning issues and working with the N.C. Department of Transportation "to see what kinds of plans are on their books. Just basically trying to provide for us all the information we need to do

our jobs better."

Sharpless does not see much progress to be made on the issue of creating affordable housing opportunities in Chapel Hill. "It's just very difficult trying to identify a piece of land and so forth in which to operate," she said.

Construction was recently finished on a Habitat for Humanity house that was supported by the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors. The board financed most of the house and contributed a lot of labor hours to it too, Sharpless said. "We have had some members express an interest in trying to see if we can't find another avenue for that in order to try and bring some affordable housing into the area," she said.

Her coworker, Jenny Crittenden, thinks Sharpless could help the board pull off another Habitat project. "She's a real take-charge type of person. She's one of those people that if you want to get something done you go to her and it'll get done."

Sharpless plans to stick around. Other than visiting, she has no plans for returning to live in the Caribbean.

"We've been very happy being back in the States," she said.