



Florida Gulf Coast
Bonita Springs & Estero & Naples

Marie Pimm

PA, REALTOR®
CRS, E-Pro, GRI, ABR
Phone: 239.770.3383
Toll Free (800) 966-3180

MARIE'S SELLERS GUIDE

SELLING YOUR HOME IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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Marie Pimm P.A., Realtor®

Cell: 239.770.3383 Toll Free: 888.777.1193 ext.499

Email: marie@mariepimm.com www.mariepimm.com

Downing-Frye Realty, Inc., 27180 Bay Landing Drive #5, Bonita Springs, FL 34135



Chapter One: First Impressions Count!

When viewing properties in the communities of Estero and Bonita Springs, Buyers frequently are scheduled to see houses every 15 minutes. You have only that one chance to capture their interest and make a significant impact on the Buyer's decision-making process.

When conversing with real estate agents, you will often find that when they talk to you about **buying** real estate, they will refer to your purchase as a "home." Yet if you are **selling** property, they will often refer to it as a "house." There is a reason for this. ***Buying real estate is often an emotional decision, but when selling real estate you need to remove emotion from the equation.***

It's *essential* to think of your house as a marketable commodity. Property. Real Estate. An investment. A potential business transaction. Your goal is to get others to see it as *their* potential home - not yours. If you do not consciously make this decision, you can inadvertently create a situation where it takes longer to sell your property.

TIP

The first step in getting your home ready to sell is to "de-personalize" it.

The reason you want to "de-personalize" your home is because you want buyers to view it as *their* potential home. When a potential homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it puts your own brand on the home and momentarily shatters their illusions about owning the house. Many buyers focus on viewing the family photos rather than the house – once they are outside again, they can't recall a single detail of the interior.

Put away family photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs. Put them in a box. Rent a storage area for a few months and put the box in the storage unit. Do not just put the box in the garage or a closet. Part of preparing a house for sale is to remove "clutter," and that is the next step in preparing your house for sale.

Removing Clutter –Though You May Not Think of it as Clutter

Removing clutter is the hardest thing for most people to do because they are emotionally attached to everything in the house. After years of living in the same home, clutter collects in such a way that may not be evident to the homeowner. However, it does affect the way buyers see the home, though many sellers do not realize it.

Clutter collects on shelves, counter tops, drawers, closets and garages. Take a step back and pretend you are a buyer. Let a friend help point out areas of clutter, as long as you can accept their views without getting defensive.

Let your agent help you, too.



TIP

There should be no more than three “decorative items” on any average-sized surface, five *total* for a large area.

Remember! You have to pack all these items in order to move, doing so now will make your move that much easier, so pack it away in boxes now, get a storage unit and move as much as you can out of your house.

You want your rooms to look as large as possible—de-cluttering and getting as much light as possible into the room are the two best ways to achieve this.

Kitchen Clutter

The kitchen is a good place to start removing clutter, because it is an easy place to start.

- **First, get everything off the counters.** *Everything.* Even the toaster. Put the toaster in a cabinet and take it out when you need it.
- **Store everything in cabinets and drawers.** Of course, you may notice that you do not have cabinet space to put everything. *Clean out the cabinets.* The dishes, pots and pans that rarely get used? Put them in a box and put that box in storage, too.

You see, homebuyers will open all your cabinets and drawers, especially in the kitchen. They want to be sure there is enough room for their "stuff." If your kitchen cabinets, pantries, and drawers look jammed full, it sends a negative message to the buyer and does not promote an image of plentiful storage space. *The best way to show space is to have as much "empty space" as possible.*

For that reason, if you have a "junk drawer," get rid of the junk. If you have a rarely used crock pot, put it in storage. Do this with every cabinet and drawer. **Create open space.**

- **Use up your pantry items and canned goods.** If you have a large amount of foodstuffs crammed into the shelves or pantry, begin using them – especially canned goods. Canned goods are heavy and you don't want to be lugging them to a new house, anyway – or paying a mover to do so. Let what you have on the shelves determine your menus and use up as much as you can.
- **Look beneath the sink.** Beneath the sink is very critical, too. Make sure that area is as empty as possible, removing all extra cleaning supplies. You should scrub the area down as well, and determine if there are any tell-tale signs of water leaks that may cause a homebuyer to hesitate in buying your home.



Closet Clutter

Closets are great for accumulating clutter, though you may not think of it as clutter. We are talking about extra clothes and shoes – things you rarely wear but cannot bear to be without. Do without these items for a couple of months by putting them in a box, because these items can make your closets look "crammed full." Sometimes there are shoeboxes full of "stuff" or other accumulated personal items, too.

Furniture Clutter

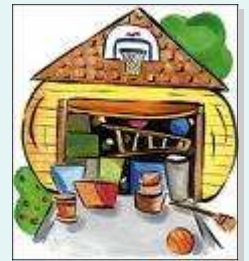
Many people have too much furniture in certain rooms – not too much for your own personal living needs – but too much to give the illusion of space that a homebuyer would like to see. You may want to tour some builders' models to see how they place furniture in the model homes – **placing furniture on an angle rather than hugging the walls is a great way to create the illusion of a larger area.**

Observe how they place furniture in the models so you get some ideas on what to remove and what to leave in your house.

Garage Clutter

Garages accumulate not only clutter, but junk. These areas should be as empty as possible so that buyers can imagine what they would do with the space. Remove anything that is not essential and take it to the storage area.

Or have a garage sale.



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Plumbing and Fixtures

- **All your sink fixtures should look shiny and new.** If this cannot be accomplished by cleaning, buy new ones where needed. If you don't wish to buy something fancy, this project can be accomplished inexpensively and they are fairly easy to install. Make sure all the hot and cold water knobs are easy to turn and that the faucets do not leak. If they do, replace the washers. It is not difficult at all.
- **Check to make sure you have good water pressure and that there are no stains** on any of the porcelain. If you have a difficult stain to remove, one trick is to hire a cleaning crew to go through and clean your home on a one-time basis. They tend to be wonderful at making stains go disappear.

Ceilings, Walls...and Painting

- **Check all the ceilings for water stains.** Sometimes old leaks leave stains, even after you have repaired the leak. Of course, if you do have a leak, you will have to get it repaired, whether it is a plumbing problem or the roof leaks.
- **You should do the same for walls**, looking for not only stains, but also areas where dirt has accumulated and you just may not have noticed. Plus, you may have an outdated color scheme.
- **Painting can be your best investment when selling your home.** It is relatively inexpensive and often you can do it yourself. *Do not choose colors based on your own preferences, but based on what would appeal to the widest possible number of buyers.* **You should almost always choose an off-white or soft creamy-beige color because white helps your rooms appear bright and spacious.**

*I remind my sellers that Southwest Florida is beige city –
the slightest hint of color makes buyers nervous!*

Carpet and Flooring

Clean the carpets. Unless your carpet appears old and worn, or it is definitely an outdated style or color, you probably should do nothing more than hire a good carpet cleaner. If you do choose to replace the carpet, do so with something inexpensive in a fairly neutral color.

Repair or replace broken floor tiles, but do not spend a lot of money on anything. Remember, you are not fixing up the place for yourself—you want to move. Your goal is simply to have as few negative impressions upon those who may want to purchase your property.

Windows and Doors

Check all of your windows to make sure they open and close easily. If not, a spray of WD40 often helps. Any cracked or broken windowpanes should be replaced before you begin showing your home.

Be sure all windows and screens are clean.

Do the same things with the doors—make sure they open and close properly, without creaking. If they do, a shot of WD40 on the hinges usually makes the creak go away.

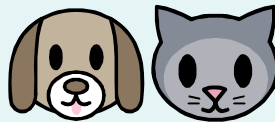
Be sure the doorknobs turn easily, and that they are cleaned and polished to look sharp. As buyers go from room to room, someone opens each door and you want to do everything necessary to create a positive impression.



Odor Control

For those who smoke, it is recommended you minimize smoking indoors while trying to sell your home. You could also purchase an ozone spray that helps to remove odors without creating a masking odor. You may need to repaint throughout and have all carpets and furnishings professionally cleaned.

Pets of all kinds create odors that you may have become used to, but are immediately noticeable to those with more finely tuned olfactory senses. For those with cats, be sure to empty kitty litter boxes daily. There are also products that you can sprinkle in a layer below the kitty litter that helps to control odor. For those with dogs, keep the dog outdoors as much as possible. You might also try sprinkling carpet freshener on the carpet on a periodic basis.



SELLERS CHECKLIST

- ✓ **Have all carpets professionally cleaned.**
- ✓ **Buyers prefer neutral paint colors, particularly in SW Florida** – now is the time to “de-personalize” your decorating and change all your favorite colors to beige!
- ✓ **Hire a professional service to clean** – the home, the windows and the entrance to the home.
- ✓ **Set the dining room table** with attractive linens, dishes and stemware and an interesting centerpiece.
- ✓ **Arrange fresh or silk flowers throughout the house.**
- ✓ **Use as much natural light as possible.** Pull back or remove drapes that block the light.
- ✓ **Add extra lamps in dark rooms or corners.**
- ✓ **Bring in another pair of eyes – even if it is not a professional stager.** That person may see problems you have not seen.
- ✓ **Focus on the most visible areas** – the entrance, living room, dining room, master bedroom, kitchen.
- ✓ **Make your front entrance attractive and memorable** – remember, in our gated communities, so many front entrances are identical – create a great first impression with a colorful plant, gleaming door hardware etc.

Chapter Two: Common Selling Mistakes

Every seller wants to get top dollar for his home – and as your Realtor, I want you to achieve this goal.

Buyers today come very well prepared. Prior to heading to Estero or Bonita Springs they spend inordinate amounts of time on their computers, browsing the Internet, and they watch—in minute detail—the real estate market in the communities of interest to them.

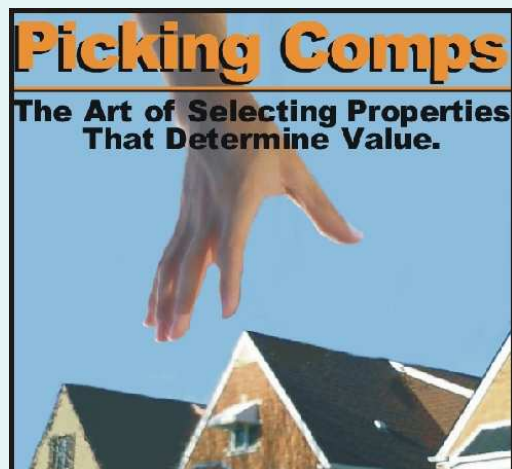
They know what price comparable properties have sold for.

Listing your home at an excessive price will immediately eliminate many of these savvy buyers from even looking at your home.

Those who do take the time to view your home will be expecting more than the house has to offer and will subsequently be disappointed and not inclined to make an offer. As a result, over-priced homes sit on the market longer than necessary, have fewer showings, waste the precious few months of our selling season *and end up selling for less* because they have sat on the market for so long, become “stale”, or now it is summer and in the view of most buyers, “prices must be lower” because Season is over.

The best strategy is to price your home at a point where more buyers will be interested and to make sure it is the property with the best condition and best price for the location.

Ironically, over-pricing your house frequently results in a lower selling price. And fewer dollars in your pocket at the close of the transaction.



Chapter Three: The Listing Agent and The Listing Contracts

The Listing Agent

Contrary to popular opinion, the listing agent's primary objective is not to find the buyer, but to market and promote your home to as many other agents as possible. This dramatically increases your personal sales force. Of course, your agent will also market your home to buyers—both locally and through as many internet portals as possible. Exposure to as many buyers through every possible avenue will get your home sold — **if the price is right.**



If your home is overpriced, fewer agents will show your home. After all, they are professionals and it is their job to know the local market conditions and home values. If your house is dramatically above market it indicates an unrealistic seller, so why waste time?

Listing Contracts

The typical contract used in this area is the “Exclusive Right to Sell”, which means you have contracted with one real estate company to market your home to all the other real estate companies in the area. This is the only type of listing accepted because it gives the agent a reasonable expectation of earning back any money they have spent up front on promoting and marketing your property. For the same reason, most agents will not accept a 90 day listing if properties are typically taking 180 days to sell.

As your Realtor, I provide data of recent sales of similar properties.

Please note: this is the same information that potential buyers have.

The price may be lower than you anticipated, but *the market decides the sales price, not the seller.* Don't think you can “test the market” and lower the price later. The market has already been tested.

If you interview an agent who suggests a sale price in excess of market value – beware! That agent is probably engaging in a questionable sales practice called “**buying a listing**” and once they have the listing, the next step is to pressure you to lower the price.

Details of a Listing Contract

Obviously, the Seller'(s) name, (as it appears in the public records), the property address and the legal description of the property will be included on the listing contract. However, in the case of a homesteaded property, where only one name of a married couple is on the deed, both husband and wife must sign all the listing documents as well as the eventual sales contract.

The price and the terms of sale will be specified, as well as what personal property, if any, goes with the house when you sell it. Typically, in SW Florida, all appliances, window treatments, lights and fans stay with the house.

There may be some items that you do not intend to include in the sale, such as a chandelier. This can be stated in advance to buyers as "Not Conveying" but it is preferable to remove such items prior to marketing the house, so that it does not become a "bone of contention" at the time of sale. If you are selling "turnkey" or "furnished" you should provide a written inventory of the items included in the sale, to prevent confusion.



Chapter Four: Southwest Florida's Real Estate Vocabulary

There are nine basic housing designs, some of which are unique to the Southwest Florida Market:

- Condominium
- Garden Condominium
- Low-Rise
- Mid-Rise
- High-Rise
- Co-Op
- Town House
- Coach Home
- Carriage Home
- Attached Villa
- Detached Villa
- Single Family House
- Estate or Executive Homes



While the terms used to describe the home styles and club memberships in SW Florida reflect the variety of choices available, the designations may be unfamiliar and confusing to buyers from other parts of the country, or from other parts of the world. The high demand for homes and the spread of planned, gated communities has generated a number of different designs and arrangements that may not even be available in other areas.

Condominium

This is a legal description of ownership, not an architectural description. You own the actual structure of the building jointly with other members of the association, along with common areas such as swimming pools, tennis courts or other common areas.

Individually, you own the airspace and interior of the structure, but not the building itself. You and other members of the association own the structure together.

When you purchase homeowners' insurance for a condo, you purchase insurance on the interior space "from the studs out", and for your contents. The Homeowners' Association will purchase insurance for the exterior of the building.

Garden Condominium

Garden condominiums are 2 to 3 story walk up buildings with 6 to 18 units per building. The building design is simple, with access to the units from a catwalk on each floor. This product ranges in size from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet. Parking is detached from the buildings and can be either open carports or detached garages. This product design is typically lower priced, as the building cost is more efficient due to the higher building density.

Low-Rise Condominium

Buildings with one to three floors in height containing multiple units, each unit located on a single floor. Coach and Carriage homes fall within this category.

Mid-Rise Condominium

Defined as a building four to seven floors, with 4 to 12 units per floor, the building design is simple with access to the units from a catwalk on each floor and a central elevator serving all residents. Size ranges from 1,000 to 3,000 square feet. Parking is detached from the buildings and can be either open carports or detached garages. Prices range from the affordable to luxury based on the community type, the design of the building itself, and the views from the upper floors. Frequently available in master planned and golfing communities.

High-Rise Condominium

This building has eight or more floors, and 4 to 8 units per floor. The unit access is from a floor lobby and an interior elevator leading to enclosed catwalks on each floor. In luxury high rises, elevators from the main floor will open to an individual lobby for each unit. Prices range from moderate to ultra luxury (multi-million dollar properties) and size exhibit similar ranges, often up to 7,000 to 9,000 square feet.

The views from the upper floors usually command higher prices. These buildings all face the Gulf of Mexico for spectacular views of gulf and sunsets. Lower floors frequently have wonderful golf course views or views of the bay. High-rise condominium buildings are in coastal locations, sometimes in golf or boating communities.



Co-op Ownership

With Co-Op ownership, you own shares of a corporation or organization that owns the larger structure and ownership of those shares gives you the right to occupy a specific unit or apartment. This type of ownership is less common in SW Florida.

Townhouse

A townhouse is an architectural description for a building or unit that shares a common wall with the building next door, or with both the adjacent buildings. Townhouses typically have an entrance at the ground floor and have two or more stories. A townhouse can be a style of condominium.



While town homes are beginning to gain in popularity in Southwest Florida, there are few communities with this type of housing.

Coach Homes

Usually two stories high, occasionally three floors, with four to six individual units, each with its own garage. Individual units will be on one floor only, i.e. either a first floor unit or a second floor unit. The building design is more unique with access to each home from the ground floor with a distinct entrance. Sizes range from 1,400 to 3,500 square feet and parking is a one or two-car attached garage with access between the garage and the entrance of the home.

Some second floor units will have a private elevator from the lobby. Pricing varies with size of the unit, views, design of the building and community within which it is located. These are frequently found in master planned golf or bundled golf communities, or in communities with limited amenities. Ownership is condominium ownership



Carriage Homes

Another version of Coach Homes; sometimes bigger, sometimes smaller, depending on the developer. If located in the same community with a neighborhood of Coach Homes, there will be a clear difference, i.e., one will have six units to a building and single car garages; the other will have four to a building and two car garages. Carriage homes are often larger than coach, but some developers have named their buildings in reverse.

Detached Villas

These are single or 2 story detached homes on small lots, known as zero lot lines, usually 40' to 65' of road frontage and lot depth ranging from 110' to 150'. Homes range from 1,500 square feet to 3,000 square feet and offer all the amenities of a single family home, with the major difference being the lot frontage.

These homes frequently have pools and spas and large lanais enclosed in a "pool cage," a fine mesh netting over a metal frame. Garages are attached, with access directly into the home. Prices range from affordable to luxury, and these homes can be found in almost every community.



Attached or Twin Villas

These are typical villas that share a common dividing wall. All other aspects are the same as detached villas.

Villas are simply single family homes with the added convenience of having the landscape maintenance cared for by the association in many communities.



Villa neighborhood association's fees frequently cover such items as landscaping and lawn maintenance, outside pest control, irrigation and in some cases may assume responsibility for the maintenance of the exterior of the villa such as painting and roof power washing. However, you should always check to see what is covered; it can vary greatly from one community to another.

Single Family Homes

Typically larger than villas, and frequently on larger lots, lot frontages can be greater than 65' and lot depth can be 125' to 175'. Lots frequently allow for larger lanais and perhaps a three car attached garage.

Typically a developer of single family homes and villas will have four to six pre-designed floor plans to choose from with very limited changes available, if at all. Different finishes are available as in all housing styles, but floor plan changes are rare.



Estate or Executive Homes

These are the biggest homes on the largest lots in the community, and size will depend on individual communities. Typically, these homes are custom homes, built by a variety of high end builders to the purchasers' specifications.



Community Type Definitions

There are three major community types that are unique to the Southwest Florida market. These community types are

- **Bundled Golf,**
- **Master Planned Golf communities,** and
- **Master Planned without golf**

Most of these will be gated communities. In addition, there are small "infill" communities which offer few, if any, amenities.

Bundled Golf Communities

The purchase of each residence includes an equity share ownership of all the amenities and common areas, including membership in the golf club.

Bundled communities tend to be very rich in amenities. All that is required is payment of the annual Master Association fee which included the golf dues, and in some cases, a trail fee if you have your own golf cart.



Pelican Sound

Since all owners are also members, it can provide a common bond and it gives a larger base to pay for the amenities (unlike a traditional country club where homeowners who wish to buy a golf membership pay an initiation fee as well as annual dues to become a member.)

Community amenities offer 18 to 27 holes of golf with approximately 700 homes allocated to each 18 hole course. These communities consist of a diverse mix of housing styles.

Master Planned Golf Communities

Master Planned Golf Communities are those which do not include equity membership with the real estate. Although homes are built around the golf course, there is no requirement for membership. Many residents will buy in these communities for the views, the sense of community and the general amenities.

These people will purchase a Social Membership which will allow them to use the Club House, Exercise Facility, Tennis Courts, Community Pool, etc. Some offer a beach park and a town center.



Bonita Bay

Those residents who wish to become golf members must pay the initiation fee and the annual dues associated with the golf membership, and membership is typically limited to 300 to 400 members per 18 holes of golf. There is typically a diverse mix of home styles, and prices range from moderate for the condominiums to luxury prices for estate homes and high rise residences.

Master Planned Communities without Golf

Master planned communities without golf courses are becoming more popular. Frequently they offer an extensive community amenity and in some cases a town center, or make up the residential portion of a large town center. The typical house styles would be condominiums, coach and carriage homes, attached and detached villas.



Chapter Five: Why Use a Realtor

- ◆ The **REALTOR** you work with could be one of your most valuable resources. Unlike many other real estate agents who are simply licensed to do business, REALTORS have taken additional steps to become members of the local Board of REALTORS and have agreed to act under and adhere to a strict Code of Ethics.
- ◆ A **REALTOR** is already familiar with current real estate values, taxes, utility costs, municipal services and facilities, and may be aware of local zoning changes and upcoming developments that could affect your decision to buy.
- ◆ A **REALTOR** can research your housing needs in advance through a Multiple Listing Service.
- ◆ A **REALTOR** is sensitive to the importance you place on this major commitment you are about to make. Look for a real estate professional to facilitate negotiation of a win-win agreement that will satisfy both you and the seller.
- ◆ A **REALTOR** is familiar with the local lending market and can suggest contacts for financing.
- ◆ A **REALTOR** is trained in negotiating and experienced at ensuring their clients interests and concerns are addressed in the contract.
- ◆ A **REALTOR'S** experience anticipates any possible problems and obstacles that could derail the transaction, and uses her knowledge to ensure the transaction closes on time, without unpleasant surprises.

**Why use a Realtor? Experience counts.
Remember - experience is not expensive
*its priceless!***



In addition, a Realtor provides:

- ◆ Consultation
- ◆ Counsel
- ◆ Advice
- ◆ Knowledge of local laws
- ◆ Knowledge of local market conditions - factual, not based on "scuttlebutt"
- ◆ Knowledge of proposed changes to land use
- ◆ Comparisons and comparables



A Realtor will:

- ◆ Work to achieve your goals
- ◆ Care about you as a client
- ◆ Interpret accurately the information you are finding. Data by itself can be misleading; you need a person knowledgeable with the area and the communities to assist you.
- ◆ Your Realtor will bring her negotiating skills to the table. There are myriad negotiating factors, including, but not limited to price, financing, date of possession, inclusion or exclusion of furnishings, inspection repair issues, etc.
- ◆ Your Realtor can assist you in finding qualified, responsible professionals to carry out inspections, provide title insurance and closing assistance, or find real estate attorneys if you prefer.
- ◆ Your Realtor can help you identify qualified lenders and assist you in understanding different financing options.
- ◆ Your Realtor can guide you through the closing process and make sure it all flows together smoothly, and on time.
- ◆ When selling your home, your Realtor can give you up-to-date information on what is really happening in the marketplace and the price, financing, terms and condition of competing properties. These are key factors in getting your property sold at the best price, quickly and with minimum hassle.



- ◆ Your Realtor markets your property to other real estate professionals as well as to the public, and has the technological networks set up to do so quickly, through the Multiple Listing Service, multiple websites, intranets and Internet and other cooperative marketing networks. The Realtor Code of Ethics requires Realtors to utilize these cooperative relationships when they benefit their clients.



- ◆ Your Realtor will know when, where and how to advertise your property. There is a misconception that print media advertising sells real estate.

The National Association of Realtors (NAR) studies show that 82% of real estate sales are the result of agent contact.

- ◆ And sometimes the most important of all - it keeps the transaction where it belongs - as a critical business transaction. Where each party has an enormous financial stake in the investment, the emotional aspects of selling a home for the seller and the natural anxiety of a buyer can sometimes derail a potential contract. A Realtor can anticipate potential obstacles and provide a buffer of calm between the parties.
- ◆ Buying and selling real estate is a major financial transaction for anyone; you should always have your own representation.

I have become an expert at creating trouble-free transactions from start to closing for both buyers and sellers— and I look forward to providing this service for you.

For more information on Buying or Selling Estero, Bonita Springs or Naples real estate, please call me—I'm here to help: 239.770.3383, or contact me by email—marie@mariepimm.com

I would appreciate your telling your friends and family about me and my website—
I'd love to help them too!

Marie

Despite advertising claims to the contrary, the Internet is NOT an experienced Real Estate Professional. It cannot consult, counsel, advise, have knowledge of local laws and market conditions, make judgments, "own" the result, or - most importantly - understand your individual goals and needs and care about **you** as a Client. Furthermore, data by itself can be very misleading.

To obtain an accurate interpretation of any information you're receiving online, please [contact me.](#)"

Source: Mollie W. Wasserman, Co-Author of "How to Make Your Realtor Get You The Best Deal."

Marie Pimm, P.A. Realtor®

CRS, ABR, e-PRO, GRI

Direct: 239.770.3383

Toll Free: 888.777.1193 ext 499

Email: marie@mariepimm.com



21780 Bay Landing Dr, #5
Bonita Springs, FL 34135

www.mariepimm.com