

New college president had to move fast for new home

Low inventory hinders search

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Two months after starting as president of Clatsop Community College, Christopher Breitmeyer was still living in a house owned by his employer as he tried to close on a home of his own.

Living as a bachelor while his wife and daughter spend another year in St. Charles, Missouri, Breitmeyer rented the Josie Peper Building, still available after the City Council rejected the college's request for a zoning change to make the building a second home and vacation rental.

"There weren't a lot of rentals, particularly if you have pets, which I do," said Breitmeyer, who brought along his rescue dog, Maize. "Josie Peper provided me stability."



Once in Astoria, Breitmeyer enlisted Kathy Whitsett, a Realtor with Pacific Pro Realty, to help him find a house.

"Anytime I found a house that ... I thought was reasonably priced, you needed to act really quickly," Breitmeyer said. "If it was a nice, reasonably priced house, it didn't last too long."

After about a month of searching, Breitmeyer found a house in Astoria. But at a recent meeting on affordable housing, Breitmeyer said his eyes were opened to the North Coast's housing crunch and

the effect it can have on lower-income individuals, many of them his potential students.

"I would hope at some point we as a county can come together and realize that we need to look at this issue as a serious issue," Breitmeyer said. "A lot of the folks doing the good work here can't afford to live here."

The college helps provide resources to students, he said, and in an ideal world would partner with a private developer to create student housing near campus. The college previously did so. But the housing was never delivered, and the college received a \$1 million court settlement, which has since been reallocated toward the ongoing Patriot Hall Redevelopment.

"We can be an advocate for the solutions that the city and county support," Breitmeyer said. "I think it's going to be important to the future of the region to have housing."



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

While looking for a house, Clatsop Community College President Christopher Breitmeyer was able to stay in the college-owned Josie Peper building for two months. He found a home in Astoria.

Couple shares a crowded space in Olney with family

Pair shares with relatives to cope

Shawn and Mollee Leech, married with an infant, got lucky when they found a house to rent in Olney despite the housing crunch.

But, to make their situation easier financially, they are living with Mollee's aunt, uncle and cousin. The five adults share the household expenses: \$1,700 a month in rent, plus about \$500 or more in utilities, groceries and other costs.

The Leeches and their family decided that living together made sense, especially in a region where housing options are limited, the cost of living is rising and people often pool resources.

"It's expensive where we live, and it's rough some months," Mollee said, "but our family ... We all work together cohesively so that everything gets paid, we're all taken care of."

Earlier, the group had lived together in a two-bedroom apartment in Warrenton when Mollee was pregnant. She and her husband now have an 18-month-old son, Owen.

"Warrenton's good to live in," Shawn said. "Quiet neighborhood. Good housing. Affordable rent. If you can find a house, that

is, or an apartment."

But the cramped quarters became an issue, and they decided to find a house.

"It was pretty much the only thing that was available at the time," Shawn said. "It was perfect timing when it opened up."

Shawn, 37, and Mollee, 24, have been married almost three years and make decent money at their jobs in Seaside — he at WorldMark Resort, she at Flashback Malt Shoppe & Gifts — but living in Clatsop County isn't cheap, especially as a parent.

"It's very expensive to have a child," Shawn said. "Unless you're well off, it's hard to pay for a child."

Though six people living in a four-bedroom house isn't ideal, each tenant has greater peace of mind, and the Leeches are working to save money.

"We are very grateful that our family asked us to move in with them," Mollee said. "And so, while it's not ideal, it is a better situation than we could be living in."

Though Shawn enjoys living with his extended family, he would rather be living with Mollee and Owen in a place of their own.

"I love my family," he said, "but I have my own family."

— Erick Bengel



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Shawn and Mollee Leech pose for a portrait outside their rental home in Olney. The Leeches had difficulty finding a rental that accommodated their animals.



AP Photo/David Goldman

Townhomes stand under construction as a pedestrian walks along the BeltLine in Atlanta. First-time buyers may be entering the U.S. home market in greater numbers than industry watchers had assumed.

More first-timers than expected are now buying homes in US

By JOSH BOAK
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — First-time buyers may be entering the U.S. home market in greater numbers than industry watchers had assumed.

Nearly half of sales in the past year went to people who were buying their first home, according to a survey released Tuesday by the real estate firm Zillow. That's a much higher proportion of the market than some other industry estimates had indicated.

Zillow's survey results suggest that this year's growth in home sales has come largely from a wave of couples in their 30s, who are the most common first-time buyers. If that trend were to hold, it could raise hopes that today's vast generation of 18-to-34-year-old millennials will help support the housing market as more of them move into their 30s.

That's among the findings in a 168-page report by Seattle-based Zillow. Its survey also found that home ownership is increasingly the domain of the college-educated. And it indicated that older Americans who are seeking to downsize are paying premiums for smaller homes.

The findings

Here's a breakdown of Zillow's findings:

- First-time buyers make up a larger chunk of the housing market than the real estate industry has generally thought. Forty-seven percent of purchases in the past year went to first-time buyers. Their median age

was 33. By contrast, surveys from the National Association of Realtors have indicated that first-timers account for about 32 percent of all buyers.

The difference between the two surveys may stem from their methodologies. The NAR has used a mail-based survey for its annual figures, while Zillow used an online survey that might have generated more responses from younger buyers. The Zillow findings might help to explain why there is a shortage of listings on the housing market. Unlike move-up buyers, people buying their first home don't have a property to list for sale, depriving the market of inventory.

Adam DeSanctis, an NAR spokesman, noted that his organization's survey out later this month will show a rising share of first-time buyers, although it remains below the historical average of 39 percent since the organization began tracking this figure in 1982.

DeSanctis also noted that government figures show home ownership among young adults is at its lowest level in history, which is why his organization is skeptical that nearly half of sales go to first-time buyers.

- No college? Dwindling chance of homeownership

It's become harder to realize the dream of home ownership without a college degree. Sixty-two percent of buyers have at least a four-year college degree. Census figures show that just 33 percent of the U.S. adults graduated from college. The gap between the education levels of homebuyers and the broader U.S. population

indicates that workers with only a high school degree are becoming less likely to own a home.

This is a major shift for the middle class. Just 12 percent of homeowners in 1986 were college graduates, according to government figures. The trend is driven in part by falling incomes for people with only a high school degree.

- Millennial home buyers are increasingly Hispanic

Out of the 74 million U.S. households that own their homes, a sizable majority • 77 percent • are white. But these demographics are changing fast. Only 66 percent of millennial homeowners are white. The big gains have come from Latinos, who make up 17 percent of millennial homeowners but just 9 percent of all homeowners.

Asians also make up a greater share of millennials. This means that as today's millennial generation ages, the housing market may look considerably more diverse than it does now.

- Older Americans aren't just downsizing; they're also upgrading.

The so-called "silent generation" • those ages 65 to 75 • bought homes in the past year with a median size of just 1,800 square feet, about 220 square feet smaller than the homes they sold. But that smaller new home still cost more. These retirement-age buyers paid a median of \$250,000, nearly \$30,000 more than the home they sold. In some cases, the higher purchase price likely reflects the profits from the sale of their previous home, in other cases a desire by upscale buyers for luxury finishes and amenities.

Baby on the way has couple wishing for a bit more room

Lived in car, tent at first

Ray Fruits, manager at Book Warehouse in Seaside, was unprepared for the lack of housing in Clatsop County when he moved from Wyoming last October.

Fruits and his wife lived in their car for two weeks and tent for two months at a campground in November and December.

"We made it," he said. The couple then went from "motel to motel" before finally finding a one-bedroom apartment for \$800 a month in Astoria. They travel to Seaside for work every day.

"I've talked to many people that have been going through that, too," Fruits said. "The housing is very hard. I know some with pets — we

'It's hard over here. But ... we don't want to move.'

Ray Fruits

manager at Book Warehouse in Seaside

have dogs — so that makes it even harder."

Although the apartment is an improvement over their previous living situations, the couple hopes to find a larger home closer to their jobs for when their child is born in a few months.

"It's hard over here," he said. "But we love it here and we don't want to move."

— Lyra Fontaine

Emerald Heights: 'It's like the only place in Astoria ... that has everything all in one'

Continued from Page 1A

Several years ago, Morales, 27, followed his mother from Salem to work in Astoria's canneries. For five months, he said, he worked 15-hour days and slept in his truck before getting into an apartment.

"I feel really bad for those people who live outside, the homeless," he said. "It's really bad."

Jacobsen, 21, who grew up on the North Coast and graduated a couple of years ago from the Astoria School District's alternative education program, has also dealt with homelessness. She has lived off and on at Emerald Heights for much of her life, and said not much as changed.

"It's like the only place in Astoria ... that has everything all in one," she said.

'I feel really bad for those people who live outside, the homeless. It's really bad.'

Jesus Morales

he and his family reside in the Emerald Heights complex in Astoria

Clatsop County sold Emerald Heights in 1992 to a private developer. The state had handed off the site to the county's housing authority for low-income rental housing.

The sale included deed restrictions reserving 60 units for families whose household income does not exceed 50 percent of the median area income, and another 180 units were reserved for families at no more than 80 percent of the average area income. Rent for those units was also required to include utili-

ties. But those restrictions are set to expire in October 2017.

Whenever they look on the market for a house to rent, Jacobsen said, available places either go quickly or are too expensive for the \$700 to \$800 a month she estimates the couple can afford.

"We've kind of just stopped looking for a while," Jacobsen said, noting there's already a long waiting list for the spots at Emerald Heights.

— Edward Stratton