

YOUR HOME GOSSIP

THE CLOSER



The RV used to sell homes at Opal Ridge on Staten Island

Disclosures, appraisals, flips and splits of New York's real estate community

✿ It didn't take much time for European real estate agencies to catch on. Engel & Volkers, one of Europe's most distinguished property sales groups, founded in Hamburg, Germany, is looking for a major New York City rollout over the next two years.

With offices in Southampton, Greenwich, Connetquot, Scarsdale, West Hartford, Providence, Cape Cod and Naples, Fla., we're surprised to find them this long to get here. The plan — hire personnel, look for space and open up four to six offices on the same day.

COO **Raouf Peters** admits the real estate investment opportunities for his firm's top clients continue to be in New York, as the Euro remains strong across global economies, but he wants a piece of the local market.

"Eighty percent of our business will come from local clients," says Peters, whose company has more than 200 offices in 24-plus countries. "We already have a functioning global network, but our level of European service will bring individual attention that no other New York company can match. We link together aspirations with service and passion."

"We listed the international listings on their Web site, www.engelvolkers.com. For \$10 million, a house can't be all yours. What's a bad idea? A fortified medieval tower built within a single residence. You can walk to the beach from the site, or party in the pool house, or make the guest quarters a bar-bistro. More affordable are homes in Queens listed for under \$300,000."



✿ Sometimes you don't know how creative you are until you have to be. Staten Island developer, builder and lawyer **R. Randy Lee** sold only three out of 22 homes in his Estates at Opal Ridge, Princess Bay complex.

At around \$725,000 a pop with worsening market conditions, Lee and team got the creative juices flowing thinking up ways to get people into the four-bedroom, 4½-bath homes.

"In real estate, you need people walking through your models to close deals," says Lee, who also heads the Staten Island Economic Development Corporation. "Every two weeks, I wanted to come up with new ways to get people into these units."

So what did Lee do? He bought an RV, stuck a banner on it advertising the homes, and sent the vehicle around Staten Island as well as near his competitors. He also helped a buyer get a 4.99% fixed mortgage rate. Since March, he's sold eight homes.

Now he's giving away a car. In an "Opal Ridge Goes Green" initiative, the next three buyers who go to contract will be entered into a lottery to win a brand new **Honda Civic hybrid** valued at around \$20,000. They also get 100 energy-efficient light bulbs and 100 trees planted in their name in a park.

Call (718) 227-1600 for more information. The next home that goes to contract gets a Caribbean cruise. We're not kidding.

✿ When he lived, tennis great **Arthur Ashe** was all class. Even posthumously, he's having quite a summer. This year marks the 40th anniversary of Ashe's 1968 U.S. Open championship. To celebrate, the Open threw **Arthur Ashe Kids Day** this past Saturday and held a party in his honor on Saturday night.

So what's this have to do with real estate? Ashe's widow, **Jeanne**

Moutoussamy-Ashe, put her home on the market. The 2,397-square-foot E. 98th St. duplex is priced at \$3,495,000. Highlights include 20-foot ceilings in the living room, 15-foot ceilings in the master bedroom and a darkroom for photographers.

Moutoussamy-Ashe, who has dedicated her life to keeping Ashe's mission alive, is an acclaimed photographer. Despite its high ceilings, the home located in the Leighton House remains inviting.

"This is a very open and grand duplex," says **Curcuma** senior vice president and consistent Top 25 seller **Wesley Sarasohn**, the listing broker. "In one space, it combines loft and townhouse living."

If you move in, you better be nice to the doorman. We hear Moutoussamy-Ashe was a favorite tenant. Apparently, she's as gentle, kind and giving as her late husband.

Dan Aykroyd lives in the penthouse, which has been recently on and off the market.



Home of Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe (r.) is on market for almost \$3.5 million