



Coastal Carolinas Association (SC) Gets Around Sign Ordinances With New Interactive App to Promote Open Houses – July 2015

For decades, REALTORS® in many communities have been obliged to comply with strict sign ordinances that make it challenging to promote their open houses, and even to publicize property sales within certain condominiums and homeowner associations. But the Coastal Carolinas Association of REALTORS® (CCAR), based in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, is changing all that with a brand-new interactive app that is truly a win-win for those opposed to signs -- and for those who thought they needed them.

Laura Crowther, Chief Executive Officer of the 3,100-member association, credits her Government Affairs Director, Nate Johnson, with the ingenious idea. "Nate had recently joined us here from Minnesota, and as a newcomer to the community just finding his way around, he could easily relate to the tourists and out-of-towners who are the ones driving the housing market in our resort communities. He came to the table with his brainchild: an app with real-time info on local open houses, with driving directions. The Board just ran with it!" she recalls.

As it developed the concept, CCAR received unanimous support for the idea from all the area communities, municipalities, and chambers of commerce along the 72 miles of coastline it serves.

In 2014, it received a Game Changer Grant from the REALTOR® Party to do just that: change the whole game by creating an app that would feed live open-house information directly from MLS, show users how to get to there, and connect them to the listing agent. It's called "Open Door," and CCAR has launched it just in time for the high summer season on the South Carolina coast.

GAD Nate Johnson and CCAR's IT and Marketing & Communications departments worked together to determine the way they wanted the app to look and feel. Then, a local contractor developed the program according to the association's directives. With the app now up and running, CCAR will manage and maintain it in-house.

Of course, even the best app is only as good as its marketing. First, CCAR targeted its members, to make sure they were populating their open houses in the MLS system; it will also be blasting out an instructional video through social media. To reach consumers, CCAR is working closely with the visitors bureaus of its local chambers of commerce, and with city and county officials who can get the word out. As the coastal region attracts more than 17 million vacationers annually, most of whom stay in hotels or rental condos, CCAR is promoting Open Door on in-room channels and on a hundred thousand key cards. "Visiting open houses is a great rainy day activity, when you're having an otherwise wonderful vacation," notes Crowther. "And Open Door will allow agents to hold open houses more spontaneously, even if they've missed the newspaper advertising deadline," she adds.

The Open Door app should be easily transferrable to other markets, which is one of the requirements of the Game Changer Grant program. Crowther points out that it will be effective even where real estate markets are unhindered by restrictive sign ordinances,



and will have ongoing utility after a given open house is over. "Open Door could be especially helpful in areas with strong economic development programs, for example, where companies are bringing new families to town, who'll need to keep in touch with the local housing market remotely." There's an amortization schedule feature built right in, and CCAR plans to add a weather function, down the road. "Imagine being able to show folks sitting in snowy northern Michigan how warm and sunny it is down here where they'd recently enjoyed a vacation, and maybe visited a few open houses..." Interestingly, the most downloads from outside the U.S. so far have been from China, which already has significant property investment in the region.

The member-response so far has been extremely positive, says Crowther, adding, "We're all very proud of this!" She is looking forward to hearing members' Open Door success stories, which are sure to be even more gratifying than tracking the usage data.

To learn more about how CCAR's game-changing app is driving more home-buyers to open houses and connecting them with REALTORS® along the South Carolina coast, contact Association Executive Laura Crowther at laura@ccarsc.org or 843-626-3638.

OPEN DOOR APP

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Download the FREE Open Door App today to find the home of your dreams in the Myrtle Beach Area. Myrtle Beach and its surrounding communities are a great place to visit, but an even better place to live. Affordable property taxes, great schools, friendly neighbors and plenty of sunshine make this area ideal for relocation.

Open Door allows you to search for nearby open houses. Open houses are often hard to locate, especially when prospective buyers are from out of town and don't know how to navigate unfamiliar territory.

Open Door is synchronized with up-to-the-minute MLS data and provides detailed driving directions to each Open House using your phone's GPS capability. Basic search criteria such as desired price point and number of bedrooms allow you to select a home to suit your needs.

Download this FREE app today from the Apple App Store or Android Marketplace.

Open Door was created by Coastal Carolinas Association of REALTORS® and is the first Real Estate app of its kind. Since 1945, The Coastal Carolinas Association of REALTORS® (C.C.A.R.) serving Horry, Georgetown and surrounding counties, is the primary real estate resource for members and the community.