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Real Estate & Homes

CoastLink Realty partners with Land Trust

There are all kinds of ways to sell prospective home buyers on a city, a county, a neighborhood – or an island. For local real estate agents Vel and Jerry McGrath, it's often a ride on their boat, a 23-foot Key West, through the pristine back creeks, rivers and marshes surrounding St. Simons Island. More than once, they've found that the natural beauty of the island becomes a key selling point that attracts clients to the Golden Isles.

"There's nothing like our vast marshes in Florida or South Carolina," says Jerry McGrath. "Only developed land or small sandbars and marshes."

Now, the McGraths, co-owners of CoastLink Realty Inc., have come up with an innovative way to help preserve that unspoiled beauty. They plan to give homebuyers a one-year membership in the St. Simons Land Trust, whose mission is to preserve the natural and scenic character of the island.

Many real estate agents give gifts to their clients, notes Vel McGrath. But giving Land Trust memberships "is like a legacy for us and our company," she says. "What a perfect match to get our clients involved. We are Live Oak Society members of the Land Trust and have always thought about doing something with them on a corporate level. But we didn't quite know where to go with it."

A talk with Land Trust Executive Director Jamie Kendall gave them the idea. The Land Trust was looking for ways to expand its Community Partnership Program, which encourages local businesses to find creative ways to contribute through volunteer customer bill add-ons or by contributions on behalf of customers. The McGraths, who are such vocal supporters of the Land Trust that they feature its logo prominently on both their website and their company brochure, decided that gift memberships to interested clients were the perfect answer. Vel says their goal is that the new homebuyers continue as Land Trust members. That's why they'll be selective and give the memberships to those whom they feel would truly value them and share their vision.

"We're really excited about the CoastLink Realty initiative because it has the potential to get new homeowners involved in preserving the quality of life we enjoy on St. Simons," says Kendall. "We hope it inspires other realty companies to join the Community Partnership Program by giving gift memberships to their clients."

The first recipients of the CoastLink gift membership, at the \$1,000 Live Oak level, are Joe and Beverly DeFoe, who recently purchased a marsh-side home in Hampton Plantation. The DeFoes' original intention back in 2000 was to buy a second home on St. Simons. But they fell in love with the area and moved here permanently from

Maryland in 2001. A cousin from Michigan had introduced them to the area. Now their cousin, brother, sister and their families have all moved to the island. "It's so much nicer than anywhere else on the East Coast," says Beverly DeFoe.

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