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## REAL ESTATE

### Home Buyers Are Bringing Back the Inspection

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Like spring buds, home inspections are sprouting anew all over the area.

Home inspections faded from the market from 2003 until a good way through 2005, when sellers ruled the real estate world. Estimates show that in almost half of all transactions, buyers bidding against other buyers made their offers more attractive by dropping the home-inspection contingency from their contract offers.

Sellers reveled in this, because it smoothed the way to an easier closing, with fewer messy questions about whether the roof really leaked or the electrical system was up to snuff.

Now buyers are in a stronger bargaining position and they are insisting on inspections again.

"The market has slowed down for purchases, which is really good for home inspections," said Reggie Marston, owner and president of Residential Equity Management in Springfield. Marston said he performed 28 inspections in February 2005; this February, he did 35 to 40.

"It's the best I've done in the last three years," Marston said.

Arthur Lazerow, president of Alban

Home Inspection Service Inc. in Frederick, also is seeing a big increase.

Another change, he said, is that listing agents are once again attending the home inspections, rather than just the buyer, the buyer's agent and the seller. These agents are trying to deal on the spot with questions when the inspectors find structural deficiencies.



Lazerow said many listing agents had stopped attending inspections because buyers seldom balked at problems. Now, he said, they are standing by, vigilant.

"They know it's more difficult to sell a house; each sale is more precious," Lazerow said. "It's like they are there to guard the house."

The pricing of home inspections has changed, too. In the past, when most houses had three or four bedrooms and two baths, inspectors charged set fees for their services, perhaps \$250 per inspection.

But many houses have gotten much bigger, so many inspectors now charge a set fee, but then add a premium for additional square footage over a certain base level. Some houses are so big now that home inspections take two people to perform if they want to complete the review in a single day, Marston said.

Lazerow said the pickup in the home-inspection business has been slower in coming than he would have predicted. Many real estate agents are new to the industry, and they are not accustomed to telling their customers that getting a home inspection makes sense, he said.

"They've never done a home inspection, and now they are trying to learn what it is all about," Lazerow said.

Marston said many first-time buyers need to be informed about home inspections.

"Some of these folks are like ostriches — they want to bury their head in the sand and say, 'I hope nothing goes wrong,'" he said.