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# News ON THE HOUSE

December

Be sure to talk to your real estate professional on how you can protect your home & budget with First American



Visit me at: [www.FindHomesInCharlottesville.com](http://www.FindHomesInCharlottesville.com)

## Season's Greetings!

I hope you enjoy this month's newsletter which is full of tips and ideas. My time as a real estate professional enlightens me with keen insights into my clients' needs and challenges, and I want to let you know that my experience is at your disposal.

Please feel free to talk to me about any of your real estate needs.

To ensure that you live without worries about your home's systems or appliances, please contact me regarding homebuyer protection plans.



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## Invest in Real Estate for Financial Independence



Despite the improving economy, 63% of Americans are somewhat or very dissatisfied with their current jobs, according to Paige Wagner, operations manager for the American Real Estate Investor's Association.

"Most people simply end up in a career without really thinking about it," Wagner says. "Once someone settles into a job, they usually stay in the same industry even when changing jobs." As an example, Wagner reports that only two-tenths of 1% of the population are willing to change careers midstream to become real estate investors.

Wagner says people cite many reasons for not investing in real estate: It's the wrong time to get into the real estate market, they don't have enough money, or they've heard too many horror stories about tenants.

However, there are others who learn to overcome these obstacles. "With members in all 50 states, we're able to see investors making money in both 'up' and 'down' markets," Wagner says. "Some investors use creative methods of buying to avoid having to come up with down payments. The investors who hate being landlords usually sell on a rent-to-own basis so that their tenant-buyer will agree to take care of the day-to-day maintenance for them."

Bill Bronchick, president of the Colorado Association of Real Estate Investors, notes: "Investors these days can get started without cash or credit if they are willing to take the time to get educated. Monthly meetings and trainings are a good place to meet others who are already investing or interested in doing so," Bronchick says. "You can also get a feel for whether you are in a hot or a cold market by talking with other investors."

## DID YOU KNOW...

that First American service representatives are available 24/7/365 to assist you with your home repairs?

Call your Real Estate Professional today to find out how you can **save time and money** on home repairs.

## Seal Windows, Doors: Save Money



If you want to save money in the winter months, checking the condition of your home's windows and doors should be high on your to-do list. With the average household spending half of its energy dollars on heating and cooling, it pays to plug all the air leaks you find.

The first thing to do is to check windows to ensure they are well-sealed, and caulk any small openings along the frames and sills, both inside and out. Also, consider installing door sweeps to block outside air.

Larger openings, such as exterior holes for plumbing and electrical wires, should be sealed with spray foam. Attic doors and hatches are a major source of unwanted cold air, so be sure to carefully apply weather-stripping in those areas. Another problem area is the seam where basement walls meet the home's foundation. Any gaps should be caulked to keep unwanted air from entering. Energy-efficient windows and doors employ special glazing between the layers of panes to handle the job.

It is also important to find out how much daylight and heat the window lets in. Glazing can be chosen to allow high, moderate or low heat gain. Casement windows typically provide a tighter seal than double-hung windows.

## Give to Receive: Five Tax Tips



As the holidays approach, making lists of who was naughty, who was nice and what kind of gifts you'll be giving becomes a priority. With the tax year closing just after the holidays, think about how gifting can reduce your tax burden. Get in the spirit of giving with these tips to reduce 2007 federal estate taxes:

- **Watch the calendar.** In 2007, individuals are excluded up to \$12,000 from Federal Gift Tax for gifts made to any one individual. Ensure that your gift qualifies by making it in time for your check to clear.
- **Lifetime exclusion.** Individuals and married couples can avoid gift tax on gifts over \$12,000 by utilizing lifetime exclusion up to \$1 million.
- **Education and medical.** Individuals can gift more than \$12,000 directly to the

provider if the gift is intended to cover education or medical expenses.

- **Invest.** An individual can accelerate up to five years' worth of annual exclusion if the funds are invested in a 529 college savings plan
- **Give to a charity.** New in 2007, you can make distributions directly to public charities. Transfers up to \$100,000 will be excluded from income. Consider gifting appreciated stock or property to charity to avoid paying capital gains tax. Consider gifting an Insurance policy you no longer need to a charity. If the charity owns -; and is the beneficiary of -; the policy, any subsequent premiums paid by the donor are deductible as a charitable contribution.



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## Make Elegant Look Easy This Holiday Season

There's a chill in the air, and it's time for warm gatherings. With hectic schedules, we're all looking for stress-free ways to enjoy the holidays. When it comes to food, a simple appetizer can make an elegant statement. Try this easy and delicious recipe for your next holiday party. Plate the Brie with an assortment of crackers, a sliced baguette and apple or pear slices. Voila! an impressive holiday appetizer. Baked Brie with California Raisins - makes 20 servings

Boil port wine and raisins, set aside to cool. Beat egg yolk with water for egg wash. Divide Brie into two layers. Mix raisins with toasted pecans and spread on bottom layer of Brie and cover with top half. Roll out puff pastry to cover Brie completely. Wrap filled Brie in dough, sealing overlapping edges with egg wash. Arrange on greased baking sheet, and chill for at least 30 minutes. To serve, preheat oven to 400 degreeF. Brush top and sides with egg wash, and bake for 20 to 30 minutes or until golden brown. Let stand a few minutes, and simply serve elegance.

- 1 wheel of Brie cheese (about two pounds), chilled
- 1/4 cup California Raisins - coarsely chopped
- 1/4 cup port wine
- 1 egg yolk, 1 tbsp water
- 2 tablespoons toasted pecans
- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed