

# REAL ESTATE SECTION



Mike and Margie Smith, owners of Willits Furniture Center, at right, with Kyle Brandon, general manager, and Tanya Brandon, office manager, at left.



## Goodbye and thank you from Willits Furniture

Submitted by Willits Furniture

Willits Furniture Center is saying goodbye and thank you after 55 years.

Mike and Margie Smith, owners of Willits Furniture Center, are announcing the immediate liquidation and eventual closure of the store, and want to express their heartfelt appreciation of your trust and patronage over the years.

This thank you not only goes out to their loyal customers and friends in Willits, which is their hometown, but also goes out to the great families throughout the North Coast and inland communities that have supported Willits Furniture Center over the past 55 years.

Mike commented: "One of the great things of having a retail business is all the amazing people you meet along the way. Also, we realize that furniture is a luxury item, and our customers often invest a great deal of money, time and emotion in their buying decisions. Understanding that, we have tried our darnedest to offer the best quality at affordable prices and provide exceptional customer service."

"We believe this is the only way a small business can survive. We are sad that Willits will be losing its hometown store and hope that in Willits Furniture Center's absence our loyal customers can find a store that has the same outlook. Thank you all again for your support and friendship."

Willits Furniture Center was founded by Mike's father, Ottis Smith, in 1968. Ottis moved with his family to the Willits area

in 1946 where he found employment as a timber faller. After five years of working "in the woods," he decided to venture into something that was not quite so physically demanding. He got his contractor's license, built his first home and then moved into town.

Ottis continued to build many quality homes in the Willits area for several years. Another project he was proud of was building the local Methodist Church. Later he, along with some partners, acquired the Safeway shopping center, minus Safeway itself. Ottis then decided he wanted to open up a furniture store. Of course, all of his friends told him he was crazy! They insisted that there was no way Willits could support a furniture store.

After college and having a couple years of fun ski patrolling in Colorado, Ottis' youngest son Mike decided to help his dad out for a few months. Ha ha.

In 1977, Safeway Corp purchased what is now the northern portion of Safeway from the Smiths. Willits Furniture Center did not have a home until the Smiths built the current location and reopened in 1978. Business was OK for several years. Eventually Mike's wife, Margie, came on board in 1997. It was the magic the store needed. Willits Furniture Center transformed from a quiet little business to one

Read the rest of **Furniture** |  
Over on Page RE4

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Mike and Margie Smith's two all-time favorite billboards, featuring their daughter Alana Smith.



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## A good time to review retirement plans



Nicholas Casagrande  
Columnist

Neighbors, One quarter left in 2023. Where did the last nine months go? Can someone let me know?

As a financial advisor and tax strategist/preparer, I do all I can to educate and motivate my clients to make the most of their hard-earned monies – in other words to visualize and protect their future.

FUTURE is a delicate way to say RETIREMENT. Yes, you will stop earning one day and you'll want to maintain your way of living and spending.

A good guide for how much you will need each year you are not working: you need about 80 percent of your current salary to fund each year of retirement. Your annual retirement living monies will be a combination of savings, investments, social security, maybe a pension and any other sources you might have like rental income, etc.

Many of us have Individual Retirement Accounts like 401K, Solo K, Roth, Traditional, 457, 403 ... but you may not be putting money in these accounts. Now is a good time to review your retirement plans and accounts.

Retirement account deposits are tax-smart and tax-efficient – contributions now may change, lowering your 2022 tax outcome. Let's review what you have AND what you want.

Please let me know if I can educate and motivate you!

My best,  
Nick

Nicholas Casagrande, EA, is an accountant and a financial advisor. His firm, NC Financial Group, is a wealth-management firm serving individual clients as well as small-to-medium-sized businesses. Client work includes personal and corporate taxes, investment planning, insurance, and real estate. NC Financial Group's Willits office is located at 675 South Main Street; contact 855-240-6606 or nicholas@ncfinancialgroup.com (taxes) or Nicholas.Casagrande@Ceterafs.com (investments) for more information.

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## The school of Rosie

Recently the universe reached out to me and presented me with a kind of miracle. I was at Savings Bank and my old client and friend of many years, Henrietta Simonsson, was there too. Haven't seen her for a while. She happened to mention that she fosters dogs for the Humane Society of Inland Mendocino County and she had something to show me. On her phone was a short video of a very cute little dog.



Bill Barksdale  
Columnist

"Come here," she called on the video and this sweet, tiny dog, a Chihuahua mix – black with big floppy ears – ran toward the camera wagging her tail held up in a curly-cue.

I couldn't help but let out a laugh of delight. "I'm fostering her. She needs a forever home. Want to adopt her?" Well, I've never had a small dog. My beloved McNab died 3 1/2 years ago after a long, happy life. Didn't think I'd ever have a dog again but suddenly I was thinking about it. I showed the video to Joe and it was love at first video-sight. I forwarded the video to my friend, Gail, and she emailed back "She's got a 'yes' from me."

So, guess what? Here I sit doing my morning writing with a sweet little bundle stretched out over my lap as I reach awkwardly with my pen over this little silky love-bug snuggled up, warming herself on my belly and covering the bottom half of my "morning pages" notebook. I couldn't be happier, truly. We named her Rosie.

She was dumped during the night along with her pups at the Humane Society, caught on their security camera. She's about 6 years old per my friend and veterinarian, Chana. When I was wavering about adopting her, Chana said matter-of-factly, "Why wouldn't you? She's healthy and you need a dog again." Chana knows me too well.

I've been somewhat down since our old cat, Rudi, died some months ago. Have been without a little one since. A big hole in my life but I didn't realize that was the cause of the low mood. I can tell you that that dreariness has lifted. My snuggly Rosie is better than any med.

For one thing, she helps me to quiet my mind and feel peaceful and loving. She helps me to live in the moment, which after all is all one really has. I'm not living in the past or worrying about the future. I'm just here – now. Being with Rosie and feeling good. Yes, I can choose to feel fearful or lonely, but that's not what I want. Who would? What I truly want, I have realized, is to be happy.

There is true inner strength in feeling happy. Caring for her and choosing to be kind gets returned to me many times over. I don't know what her past was like, neglect likely. After all, she's somewhere around 6 and was never spayed, having pups that weren't wanted either – and all of them dumped. Why people don't spay or neuter their pets is beyond me.

The Humane Society is at full capacity with dogs and cats that need loving homes. I mean really – give me a break. Spay and neuter. There are even free clinics around town from time-to-time to do it at J.D. Redhouse and sometimes at Mendo Mill – so DO IT for shit sake! Pardon my French, but really!

I keep learning every day. That's part of life's journey. I miss loved ones, human and not, that are gone or not near, but I've learned to feel gratitude along with the often inevitable sorrow and loss. That's OK. I'm human, but I've come to realize that choosing to be happy can become a habit – just as choosing to be fearful or perpetually unhappy can become a habit. Habits can be changed. It's always a choice, moment to moment.

As Rosie curls up next to me, she feels safe, we both feel happier. Depression



Above, left: Rosie cuddles Bill as he writes his monthly column. Above, right: Rosie, who was dumped along with her puppies at the Humane Society for Inland Mendocino County, has finally found her forever home with Bill Barksdale.



## Tips to sell your house quickly

Once people decide to sell their house, they usually don't want the experience to drag on too long. Here are some tips to sell your house quickly. Some may surprise you.

1. Choose a good real estate agent
2. Set the right price
3. Appearances matter
4. Presale inspections

Remember, a real estate agent has a fiduciary responsibility to deal honestly and in your best interest. This is not just an ethical responsibility – it's a legal one.

Many sellers are under the mistaken impression that if they shoot for the moon and set a high listing price, it'll be fine because buyers will bid them down. Paradoxically, houses listed at too high a price often end up selling for less.

The vast majority of buyers hire real estate agents who guide their clients to make good decisions. When real estate agents believe a property is over-priced, they are less likely to show it and the listing becomes stale. When a property remains on the market for too long, buyers begin making low-ball offers because they assume the sellers are eager to sell.

On the other hand, when you price your house at market rates, you can inspire a bidding war among buyers, which is more likely to increase the final sale price.

More appearances matter. I know they say not to judge a book by its cover, but in real estate, first impressions matter. It's important to increase your property's visual appeal as much as possible. Replace old carpets. Paint the walls with neutral colors. Update outdated light fixtures and appliances and spruce up the yard.

If you're living in the house while it's on the market, declutter by removing at least a third of furniture and closet contents. Then, clean the house until it sparkles before each showing.

If the house will be vacant, hire a professional stager (your real estate agent can recommend one). According to a www.Homelight.com survey, 83 percent of top agents agree that staged homes sell faster, with 71 percent claiming they sell at least 6 to 10 percent faster than vacant houses that are not staged.

Presale inspections. Talk to your real estate agent about completing all relevant inspections as soon as you list the property, including a home inspection, pest and fungus, roof, heating and air conditioning, well and septic, and depending on your property, maybe a few others (natural hazards and flood certifications come to mind).

Consider all the costs. To sell your house quickly, your real estate agent will almost certainly recommend some up-front expenses. Sometimes sellers balk at this because they fail to consider the cost of NOT doing these things. In economics, there's a term called opportunity cost, which describes the cost of the foregone alternative. What are you giving up when you choose to invest (or not invest) in a given activity?



Richard Selzer  
Columnist

Imagine your house is on the market for \$500,000. It is vacant, so you want a quick sale. If you have no loan on the property, the opportunity cost of having that house on the market is about \$40 per day.

So the question is, is it worth spending a few hundred dollars on good photos by a professional photographer who has the skill and experience to keep your neighbor's trash bins and rusty pick-up truck out of the exterior photos, one who knows how to photograph a bathroom without making the toilet the centerpiece?

I'd say yes, especially when you consider that most people narrow their home-buying selections based on their online searches – that is, on the photos of your property.

Spending a little money up front can actually save you money (or make you money) when the transaction is all said and done.

If you have questions about real estate or property management, contact me at rselzer@selzerrealty.com. If you have ideas for this column, let me know. (If I use your suggestion in a column, I'll send you a \$25 gift card to Loose Caboose!) If you'd like to read previous articles, visit https://selzerrealty.com and click on "How's the Market?"

Richard Selzer is a real estate broker who has been in the business for more than 45 years.

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heck of a great place to shop for furniture and accessories.

One of the fun things the Smiths did was feature their daughter Alana in the store's newspaper, television and billboard ads. They were constantly getting positive comments from customers. Alana did her first TV commercial at around 2 years old. Way too cute! She did her last billboard ad at 25 years old. What a run, and what fun! Margie pointed out: "We changed the billboard ads at least every two months. It kept people interested."

Margie also reflected: "Over the years Willits Furniture Center has employed countless teens through Willits High School. Many started as sophomores and were employed until graduation. Some worked for us several years beyond graduation and became key employees. Friendships were made and still are important even 20 or so years later."

"Margie and I have to give a shout out to our current store manager Kyle Brandon and his right-hand mom, Tanya Brandon," said Mike. "They came along and poured their hearts into this business. Unfortunately the Willits economy has been in what I call "A Perfect Storm" and has made their job overly challenging. Thank you Kyle and Tanya for all you have done."

Kyle came on board the Willits Furniture Center team in early 2019. "When I first applied it was for an office job, since I had taken some business classes in college when I was studying computer science and business information systems," Kyle stated. "Mike and Margie had lost their previous manager not long before and were working at the store full-time." He continued, "Unfortunately at that time they didn't think that they needed someone in the office, so they hired me on as a delivery driver instead," Kyle laughed.

That didn't last long! Within a year Kyle had learned the ins and outs of the store working his way up through sales and customer service and was really taking an interest in the business. "Mike ended up asking if I would be interested in training as manager and I said yes." Kyle said. "Eventually we started looking at the possibility of me buying the business and, at that time, it seemed like it would be a perfect opportunity for everybody. We brought my mom on as office manager soon after that."

Then the spring of 2020 came, and for the first two years of managing the store it was a wild ride. "We eventually put our plans on hold to see how things settled out after COVID," Kyle said. With the economic downturn after 2021 things began to become more difficult for the store. "Like Mike said, it was the perfect storm of post-pandemic inventory problems, and the unique economic circumstances of both Mendocino County and the furniture industry as a whole," Kyle stated.

Kyle reflects that managing Willits Furniture Center has been one of his most rewarding experiences. "I was born and raised here in Mendocino County, and small family businesses like these are the heart and soul of the community. I quickly learned that buying furniture is a very personal and unique process for each individual. It is a great feeling that you get when you have helped someone navigate that process and find the perfect item to fit their needs. That will be something I miss about working for the store."

"There have been so many unforgettable and positive things happen throughout my and Margie's careers at the store," Mike said. "It's been an experience we will never forget, and we truly are not happy about closing the store. We fear there may never be another like it in Willits. Independent furniture stores are rapidly becoming a thing of the past nationwide. Furniture has become mostly a disposable industry. It's just not the same, and it's time for us to move on. Thank you to all of our customers for 55 great years!"

### What's next?

Going out of business sale!

**Starts? Tomorrow, Friday, September 15.**

**Ends? When there is nothing left.**

Even if you are not in need of anything, please stop by and visit a bit!

An individual, stand-alone and independent print piece

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