

**Client:** Iowa Realty for en Q Strategies

**Project:** Publicity for desmoinesads.com

**Results:** An off-beat focus on the oddities of classified listings generated plenty of local publicity for a new Internet listing service.

### desmoinesads.com

When people buy and sell homes, they buy and sell a lot of other stuff. And that's the reason **Iowa Realty** created **desmoinesads.com**, a free classified ad site where you can buy and sell, promote a garage sale and even look for a job.

Desmoinesads.com allows web surfers to post classified ads at no cost. Following a quick registration process (also free), users can run ads under a variety of pre-set categories.

Many, many people in Des Moines want to sell you a car. In fact, almost one-third of the 1,570 ads on desmoinesads.com list used vehicles for sale, ranging from vintage to nearly new.

**1982 Pontiac Trans-Am, V-8, 350 turbo tranny. Runs, light rust, must sell.  
Would make great car to restore, or use as parts car. \$1200/obo to take home.  
Call and leave message to view car.**

Of course, any Iowa Realty project has ties to area real estate. Desmoinesads.com brings together landlords and potential tenants seeking anything from studios in Sherman Hill to acreages in Granger.

**Cute home for rent right off 42nd Street and north of I-235, in a sweet location.  
Convenient living and great value for the price.**

Entries in the general and collectibles category can be scanned quickly using the site's high-powered search function. Or simply browse the sheer variety of offerings available.

**8 audio cassette series by Joyce Meyer. An in-depth Bible study on demonology.**

According to **Mike Knapp**, president and CEO of Iowa Realty, desmoinesads.com is attracting about 8,000 searches per day within 17 categories. "It's far exceeded our expectations," Knapp said. "After nearly four months of operation, we're the largest free classified site in the state, maybe even the region. We believe the site runs about half as many classifieds as *The Des Moines Register* does on any given weekday."

Why the leap to electronic classifieds? Desmoinesads.com reads like a massive tag sale before a household move, and that's no accident. "We're in the real estate business," said Knapp. "And anytime someone moves, they have stuff to sell and things they need to buy. This site provides a real service to current and potential clients that complements our core brokerage business and distinguishes us from the competition.

"We don't believe for a moment that a site such as this takes the place of newspaper advertising, but it is a natural next step in the evolution of the e-business," Knapp added.

Currently, desmoinesads.com lists merchandise in the following categories:

- Employment
- Rental properties
- Autos
- Home & garden
- Recreational vehicles
- Furniture & appliances
- Electronics

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- Garage sales
- Industrial equipment
- Sporting goods
- Agriculture & livestock
- General & collectibles
- Pets
- Announcements
- Services
- Manufactured & mobile homes

“Though we cannot track actual sales on desmoinesads.com, the positive feedback we’ve received from our clients means we’ll continue sponsoring this site and possibly expand the concept,” Knapp said.

To place an ad or simply search the merchandise available, visit [www.desmoinesads.com](http://www.desmoinesads.com).

**Client:** Iowa Realty for en Q Strategies

**Project:** Background information for television feature stories

**Results:** Increased visibility for Spring Parade of Homes event.

## Top tips for selling your home

With interest rates at the lowest levels in four decades, homeowners are taking the plunge and moving up to new digs. But first, they have to sell their existing abode.

**Patrick Fox**, a veteran agent for **Iowa Realty**, is hard at work prepping his listings for the **Spring Parade of Homes Sale** beginning on Friday, April 11. Pat can share some time-tested secrets with area homeowners using one of his listings, a Rottlund townhome located at 7955 Vista Drive #1, West Des Moines, as a model. He'll show area homeowners how to present their homes in the best possible light—and make that sale.

- **First impressions are lasting.** View your home through the critical eyes of a homebuyer. Think “curb appeal.” The front door greets prospects; make sure it is clean and freshly painted. Keep your lawn trimmed and edged. Close garage doors and stow trash containers out of sight.
- **Paint and touch up for a quick sale.** Faded walls and scratched woodwork reduce buyer appeal. Your house will show best with a fresh coat of paint. Remember, it is difficult to anticipate the tastes of strangers. Use neutral colors and show buyers a sparkling clean home.
- **Let the sunshine in.** Windows should be clean. Open curtains and draperies and show the buyer how bright and cheerful your home is. For an evening inspection, turn on all the lights. Proper illumination of the house is a welcome sign to a potential homebuyer.
- **Minor repairs can make major differences.** Replace all burned-out light bulbs. A dripping water faucet discolors sinks and suggests faulty plumbing. Loose knobs, sticking doors and broken cabinet drawers detract from your home's value.
- **From top to bottom.** Show buyers the full value of your attic, basement and other utility areas by removing all unnecessary articles. Brighten dark, dull basements by painting walls; cure damp smells with a bag of lime-stone. Now is a good time to wash the outside of your water heater, change the furnace filter and make sure inspection access is easy.
- **Make closets look bigger.** Neat, orderly closets suggest ample storage space. Since you will be moving anyway, remove or pack items that can be stored elsewhere.
- **The kitchen is important.** Many buyers judge housekeeping by the kitchen. The oven, stove and other appliances should be spotless. Repair or replace anything that sticks, squeaks or drips. Counter space should be kept open and uncluttered; store countertop appliances. Floors and walls should be bright and clean.
- **Bathrooms help sell homes.** Rust stains and dripping faucets suggest faulty plumbing. Check and repair caulking and grouting. Tile should be free of soap film. The sink, toilet and tub should sparkle.
- **Arrange bedrooms neatly.** Unclutter your furnishings. Pay special attention to closet spaces. Use attractive bedspreads and window coverings.
- **Show off the family room and living room.** These areas, as centers of family activity, should be open and inviting. Try fresh flowers, wood in the fireplace and either air conditioning or fresh air to set the atmosphere.

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- **Clean the garage.** The ideal garage holds only cars. Sell, give or throw away unnecessary articles. Clean oily spots on cement floors and use strong overhead lighting. Keep storage areas and workbenches orderly. Remember, your garage looks best from the outside with the door down.
- **No pets underfoot.** If at all possible, keep pets out of the house.
- **Music is mellow.** But not when showing a house. Turn off the radio or television. Let the salesperson and the buyer talk, free from disturbances.
- **A word to the wise.** Let the buyer's agent discuss price, terms, possession and other factors with the buyer. Direct any questions you may have to your listing agent.
- **Details are important.** Complete a disclosure of property condition for all potential buyers to review.

As homebuyers prepare their existing properties for sale, it isn't too early to set their sights on a brand-new home. Marking the traditional start of the homebuying season, this year's Spring Parade of Homes Sale showcases a record-setting 250 homes in Des Moines and surrounding communities. The free event will be held from Friday through Sunday, April 11-13, from 4 to 7 p.m. on Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Sponsored by Iowa Realty and First Realty/GMAC, every entry features at least \$1,500 in builder discounts or free upgrades, spanning starter townhomes to luxury properties ranging from \$83,950 to \$725,000.

Thirteen communities in addition to Des Moines are represented in this year's Spring Parade of Homes Sale, including Adel, Altoona, Ankeny, Bondurant, Clive, Grimes, Indianola, Johnston, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Urbandale, Waukee and West Des Moines.

**Client:** Iowa Realty for en Q Strategies

**Project:** Pitch for Spring Parade of Homes

**Results:** Broadcast coverage for annual special event.

**Chances are** you'll see a lot more than dandelions popping up on some of your neighbor's lawns this spring. With the average homeowner moving every seven years, according to the National Association of Realtors, that "For Sale" sign could even be planted in front of your own home.

For many, new construction beckons. But before jumping in, homebuyers must learn:

- What kinds of homes—single family and townhomes—are available across the metro? At what price points?
- How long does it take (really) to build a new home?
- What kinds of customizing features are available that were never an option for many homeowners in their current abodes?

Buyers and browsers alike can discover what to expect from today's new home construction at the annual **Spring Parade of Homes**, April 13, 14, 20 and 21 from noon to 4:30 p.m. each day. Sponsored by **Iowa Realty and First Realty/GMAC** and the **Home Builder's Association of Greater Des Moines (HBA)**, the event marks the official beginning of the "homebuying" season. It's free to one and all.

Des Moines and its surrounding communities will feature nearly 140 homes, including new developments in Altoona, Ankeny, Clive, Grimes, Indianola, Johnston, Norwalk, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Urbandale, Waukee and West Des Moines. Nearly 40 builders are participating this season.

"There's nothing like owning a brand-new home, and the Spring Parade of Homes is a chance for builders to show us their latest and greatest," said **Mike Knapp**, president and CEO of Iowa Realty. "A diverse group of builders this spring means an appealing mix of price points for a variety of lifestyles."

Prices range from \$111,900 to \$724,000. Many homes purchased during the show qualify for a \$1,000 rebate. Individual builders are also offering attractive financing packages and special deals that either lower the list price or enhance options.

***An overview of two Parade developments follows:***

From Accurate Development, **Hallbrook** at 143rd and Douglas, Urbandale, features 33 lots of custom homes ranging from 3,200 to 4,800 square feet. Priced from \$350,000 to \$440,000, the development uses larger lots (most are at least 100 feet wide) and retains the mature trees and rural quality of the original land. The mix of ranches, story-and-a-halves, and two-stories all include walk-out lower levels or daylight windows. Hallbrook homes qualify for the Spring Parade of Homes \$1,000 rebate. The model featured in the show is located at 3724 144th St.

Twelve homes remain for sale in Plat I, while development in Plat II is underway. Plat II also features single-family homes priced from \$325,000 to about \$475,000. Both plats adjoin a new 21-acre park in Urbandale.

**BridgeWood**, a Rottlund development, is designed as a "traditional" community especially for young families. Row house facades boast compact, energy-efficient layouts with three to four bedrooms and up to 2 1/2 baths. Many lifestyle amenities are within easy walking distance, including the new Brookview elementary school in the Waukee school district; a community center for all residents; and miles of greenbelt trails with more than 60 acres of parks. The model home is located at 7842 Cottonwood Lane, West Des Moines. List price for the featured model is \$192,900 with a special \$4,000 off in closing costs or options during the Spring Parade of Homes.

**Client:** Iowa Realty for en Q Strategies

**Project:** Pitch for HomeShow Expo

**Results:** Broadcast coverage for annual special event.

**Lavish and practical, informal and grand:** the 25th anniversary **HomeShow Expo** offers a study in contrasts for the discriminating Central Iowa homebuyer. This year's Expo highlights two residential communities in Johnston and Ankeny as different interpretations of today's increasingly fast-paced, informal and technology-driven lifestyles.

The nine-day show runs July 21-29 with homes open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays and from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12. A \$1 discount on adult tickets is available with advance purchase at any Des Moines-area Hy-Vee store starting July 7.

All of the homes offer great ideas for layout, design and decorating. The following home profiles in Johnston may be useful to you as you put together stories on the show:

**House #3 at 6524 NW 94th Court in Newport Vista**, by Master Craft Estate Homes, fuses the traditional with high-tech. The two-story foyer features porcelain tile, iron rails accenting the staircase and even a built-in niche to house a water fountain. In the living room, the dominant feature is a two-story hand-painted mural set within a recessed, arched wall. There's a home theatre area with programming supplied through a broadband media distribution system, and the home office is wired for high-speed Internet access and multiple telephone lines.

Upstairs, the octagonally shaped master bedroom includes a see-through fireplace opening to the master bath. The bath is tiled in black marble. It features a huge whirlpool tub and five-foot glass-enclosed shower. Other features of note:

- Custom-built natural cherry cabinets with coffee colored granite counters and stainless steel appliances.
- Family room with built-in entertainment center wired for surround sound.
- Hand-painted African mural atop walnut-stained wood paneled walls in the den.

**House #5 at 6520 NW 93rd Street in Newport Vista** is a singular example of luxury and comfort. With a nod to the development's natural setting, Anderson Homes has combined brick and stone on the home's exterior for terrific curb appeal. The two-story walkout is finished on two levels. The house combines maple floors, liberal custom woodwork details and built-in cabinetry, double staircases to the home's upper level and soaring ceilings in the home's entry and hearth room. Other features include:

- Four bedrooms, all on the upper level with adjoining baths, plus a half-bath downstairs.
- Gourmet kitchen with custom-built cherry cabinets and granite countertops. Stainless steel appliances include a sub-zero refrigerator, warming drawer and wine cooler.
- "Smart wiring" for high-speed Internet access, cable TV and multiple telephone lines.
- Black marble floors and impressive granite shower in master bath.

The show is sponsored by the **Home Builders Association of Greater Des Moines, Iowa Realty and First Realty/GMAC**. This Thursday, Friday or Saturday would be good days to stop by. Please give me a call and I can arrange for a spokesperson (a builder, Iowa Realty representative, or Home Builders Association executive) to meet us there.

**Client:** Iowa Realty for en Q Strategies

**Project:** Pitch for Johnston Commons housing development

**Results:** Feature story in *The Des Moines Register* and other regional pubs timed to coincide with grand opening.

## Harkening back to simpler times, Johnston Commons showcases Craftsman style

When **Paul and Tami Stigers** began their search for a new home, they made a wish list: Johnston schools, a neighborhood with lots of children and a place near the lake. They liked the size and minimal maintenance of new houses, but wanted more character than today's suburban dwellings typically offer. The advantages of "new" with the comfort and warmth of the Craftsman era—that's what the Stigers wanted, and that's what they've found in **Johnston Commons**.

Developed by **Hubbell Homes**, Johnston Commons appeals to buyers with cozy, comfortable homes in a neighborhood setting with lots of lifestyle and recreational amenities.

Situated north of 62nd Street off Merle Hay Road in Johnston, new homeowners are only minutes from recreation and leisure, with the greenbelt trail, a city park, and the community's new public library just a short walk from their front doors. The design of Johnston Commons shelters residents from street noise and traffic, yet offers convenient access to the interstate and downtown.

The old-fashioned neighborhood feeling carries over into home designs throughout the 160-acre community. The ranch-style model home draws on Craftsman-style details such as warm oak woodwork and trim, a front porch with massive square pillars, and symmetrical window groupings to let the sun shine through. It's cozy without feeling closed in. Full basements and plenty of storage space mean that Johnston Commons homeowners will enjoy today's comforts and open home layouts while emulating this nostalgic lifestyle.

Johnston Commons homes feature:

- Ranch and two-story models ranging from 1,727 to 2,265 square feet
- Three to four bedrooms and 2-2.5 baths available (with basements pre-plumbed for an additional bath)
- Wood floors in living areas
- Three-car garages on all models
- Optional four-season rooms

"This community was created to attract a diverse group of homeowners: couples, young families, even empty-nesters," said **Janine Seibert**, listing agent for **First Realty GMAC**. "It offers convenient access to work, shopping and entertainment, yet Johnston Commons also evokes that neighborhood feeling that's often missing in modern life—and it takes just minutes to 'unplug' and hit the trails or bike to the park for some rest and relaxation."

Adjacent to Johnston's developing city commons, residents can feel connected to a vibrant town center while enjoying the peace and serenity of a planned community. Hubbell has already sold three homes within the development; the grand opening is set for Sunday, February 24. The model home will be furnished and photography-ready by Wednesday, January 30.

The Stigers and their two young children, ages 2 and 5, will be the first family to move into Johnston Commons this April.

"We knew we wanted to move to Johnston for the schools and to be closer to the lake," Tami Stigers said. "We like older architecture, and the Craftsman exteriors reminded us of vintage homes from years gone by."

The Stigers selected a lot overlooking a valley with a panoramic view of the metro area. Their five-year-old will begin kindergarten in the Johnston school district this fall.

"We wanted a neighborhood with lots of young families," Stigers continued. "Being in a well-planned community and close to the new library makes it that much better."

**Client:** Iowa Realty for en Q Strategies

**Project:** Builder recognition

**Results:** Publicity in the critical Des Moines-area market for one of Iowa Realty's most profitable clients.

## Master builder Tom Gratias celebrates 30 years of building excellence

It's been 30 years since a young man named Tom Gratias from Nora Springs, Iowa, hit the Des Moines housing scene.

Bolstered by a newly minted business degree from Drake University, a few thousand dollars, and a box of tools, Tom built his first house in 1972 as a custom project for a friend. Gratias still remembers the home plan—a split-level two-story he drew himself. “The weather was good, and we finished that home in about 80 days,” he recalls.

From that modest beginning, Gratias gradually fueled his business through word-of-mouth referrals. And after years of tenacity, good decisions, and some luck, today Tom Gratias presides over an array of residential construction companies known collectively as the Gratias Collection of Classic Homes. The Gratias name is now widely recognized for quality single-family and townhome housing in the metro area.

Gratias is a rare hybrid: a tradesman with a keen business acumen and a marketer's sense of what people want in a home. His businesses have evolved over the years under a single philosophy—We Build Dreams. Each of his four award-winning companies appeals to homebuyers at a variety of price points and life stages:

- **Country Classic Homes**, a partnership with fellow Master Builder Darrel Avitt, produces homes and townhouses geared to singles, young couples and empty-nesters from \$145,000 and up;
- **Village Classic Homes**, a joint partnership with son-in-law Alan Wille, focuses on building homes in Ankeny and northeast Des Moines from \$200,000 and up;
- **Gratias Construction, Inc.** specializes in custom single-family homes starting at \$300,000 and townhomes from \$220,000 and up; and
- **C.L.G. Homes (Custom Living by Gratias)**, owned by Tom's wife, LaDonna, and his son Craig, builds ranch-style homes exclusively at \$280,000 and up.

“I'm proud to say that many of our clients initially came to us for their first home, and they've stayed with us over the years as their housing needs changed,” Gratias says. “We're known for combining quality with affordability for every budget and lifestyle.”

Gratias plans to take that affordability a step further during this year's Spring Parade of Homes, co-sponsored by Iowa Realty, First Realty/GMAC and the Home Builders Association (HBA) of Greater Des Moines. With a new financing option, homebuyers can trade in their existing home when they purchase certain Gratias listings, or take advantage of 6.5 percent financing for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage currently available through his companies.

“Two new Gratias developments in northeast Des Moines and Indianola feature tax abatement that make home ownership an even better deal,” Gratias says.

Buyers are comfortable working with Gratias because of his hands-on-style, family approach and his enduring ties to the community. Gratias still designs every floor plan himself, and his wife, LaDonna, personally supervises the finish of each home from the trim stage on to ensure the right attention to detail. His son, Craig, and son-in-law, Al Wille, are partners in his building businesses. His daughter, Jenny, an Iowa Realty agent, markets Gratias projects.

“This is a people business,” Gratias says. “All I really ask of anyone who works for me is to make decisions based on what they would do if it were their own home they were working on.

“This ‘Golden Rule’ approach to home-building results in high standards and happy customers,” Gratias continues.

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It's that success that compels him to give back to his community through his industry expertise. In the past few years, Gratias has donated construction services to build the Bob Feller Museum and built a house as a fundraiser for the Waukeel Family YMCA. Most recently, he donated his project management skills to help build and complete the construction of his family's church, Immanuel Lutheran, in Waukeel.

Gratias says he evaluates these charitable efforts carefully, choosing projects that would best benefit the buyers and families where he builds and works.

The mark of a quality successful builder is adapting to change in a notoriously cyclical business. Gratias began as a custom builder in the 1970s, then recognized the potential in the townhome boom in the '80s. Now, during today's swing back to custom construction, he continues to share his experience and leadership with other builders as a long-time member of the local and state HBA and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). He's held numerous officer and committee positions in these organizations. Gratias is also one of the few builders in Iowa to have earned the prestigious Master Builder designation from the Home Builders Institute, the educational arm of the NAHB.

"While it's a competitive businesses, Tom has always realized that builders need to talk to each other and share their experiences for the health of the whole industry," says Steve Staub, executive vice president of the HBA of Greater Des Moines. "Tom has an excellent reputation not only with his clients, but with his peers both in Iowa and nationwide. It's taken decades to cultivate and it's something he works to maintain with every contact, every project."

The annual Spring Parade of Homes will be held throughout the metro area April 13,14, 20 and 21. Gratias townhomes and single-family homes will be featured in:

- Boulder Brook in Ankeny
- Pond's Edge Townhomes in Ankeny
- Brook Run Village in Des Moines
- Parkside Townhomes in Clive
- Wood Creek in Clive
- Ashton Park in Indianola

For more information about the featured homes and the special financing available during the Spring Parade of Homes, please call on any of the Gratias agents on the next page.