

A Shore Bet

By Colleen M. Sullivan, Banker & Tradesman Staff Writer, Monday, March 26, 2012



Scott Freerksen found his own little slice of heaven – a log cabin on a lake hidden away in the not-so-wilds of Mansfield – fairly early in life. He’s spent the past nine years in real estate helping other people find theirs, carving out a niche with a brokerage and website devoted solely to lakefront properties across New England.

Scott Freerksen, aka “The Lake Guy”

Title: Broker/ Owner, Lakefront Living Realty, Mansfield

Age: 47

Experience: 11 years in real estate, 9 specializing in lakefront property

Q: Obviously you live on a lake yourself – how did you discover it?

A: I grew up three doors down – so I was born and raised on the lake. In fact, my wife’s parents grew up three doors down, on the North Attleboro side. You tend to find that. You find families that have kind of a generational [connection].

Q: This has been a lakeside community then, for a while.

A: Yes, there are a lot of lakes tucked in areas that you’d probably never know about. If you ask half the people in Mansfield, they won’t know about this lake. It’s just one of those things – it’s right on the North Attleboro-Mansfield line, and it’s tucked away a bit. It’s our own little paradise out here. Quite frankly we kind of like it that way.

Q: Were you an agent before this?

A: I was 17 years in the corporate world – I started out in drafting and engineering and finally in management... When 9/11 hit, for whatever reason, that was the kick in the pants I needed to try something I was really passionate about. I started off doing some rehabs, flipping some houses. And I got my real estate license, and thought I’d try this little lakefront niche...

Within three months, it just snowballed. That was in 2003, and ever since, I’ve been strictly selling lakefront property – we’re in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and now New Hampshire. Hopefully, we should have all the New England states by the end of 2014.

Q: How did you decide on this as your niche?

A: I’ve always had a passion for the lakefront living aspect. It’s one of those things where once it gets in your blood you’ll never not live on a lake again. Like I said, my parents have been there for 48 years, [my wife’s] have been there for 30-odd years. You always think to yourself, how can you take your passion and turn it into a business? Nobody else was doing this, [and I thought] why don’t I give it a try and see what happens?

Q: How do you screen the properties, so that you're just showing lakefront?

A: Everything you see on our sites is pulled from MLS, but with a hitch. What you find if you go online to look for direct, lakefront property, 70 percent isn't really lakefront. And even if you do find it, you have no information about the lake itself – and that's really what you're buying, you're buying the lake. What we do is, every new listing that comes on the market coded as "lakefront," we screen them every morning, and everything that makes the cut gets shot over to our site, and attached to the lake that it's on. So now if you're a buyer looking for lakefront property, what used to take three hours you can get in 30 seconds. We don't just have our own listings; anything that's for sale on any lake in Massachusetts or New Hampshire, you'll find on our site.

Q: When you say information about the lake itself, what do you mean?

A: Well, if you went and searched for this lake I'm on, you just won't find anything online – information such as, can I boat on it? Can I swim on it? Are there restrictions? Are there weeds taking over the lake? Is there a lake association? There's tons of things people need to find out before they buy...80 or 90 percent of the people that are buying are buying a permanent residence. If they want to be on the water, they want to be on the water full time.

Q: Do the rights people have as far as using the lake vary from state to state? If you bought one of these homes, do you also own a chunk of the lake itself?

A: It's all lake-specific. Most of the time you own to the high-water line – usually defined by some dam on the property, and it varies according to the lake level... Sometimes you do own 50 feet out into the water. Sometimes you don't own a strip of land between your house and the lake – there's existing rights or easements that the town will impose, saying that's our land, and you have the right to cross over it and put a dock in the water, but you can't do anything to alter this strip of land. And that's another thing people need to know – if you plan to build a nice little gazebo or take out a tree [you may not be able to]. In our case, the lake association owns the lake, but most of the time it's the town – and they may have the right to draw down the level of the water in the middle of summer when you're enjoying it. If the lake is used for drinking water, that may restrict what you can do with it. It's a whole 'nother world.



Q: What about you? Are you a fisherman, a boater?

A: I'm all those things. Everyone always asks me, 'what's the best part of living on a lake?' It's no one thing. It's living on a lake. It's having the option to do nothing, to sit on my deck with a cup of coffee and my laptop and do some work and enjoy the atmosphere. If I want to take my daughter out fishing, I can do that, and she loves fishing with her little Barbie pole...Waking up to that view every morning is really what it is.

Top 5 Tips Before You Buy Lakefront

1. You're not just buying the house, you're buying the lake.
2. Work with an agent who knows lakefront property.
3. Know the shoreline conditions – if you're looking in the winter, you may be buying marsh or muck instead of beach without realizing it.
4. Talk to conservation groups in town – they often know the most about rules and regulations and what you can and can't build.
5. But also talk to at least three neighbors – often a rule may be on the books at the town hall, but it's not actually enforced.