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HEADLINE: Improving energy efficiency to improve odds of selling a home

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NORWALK

By A.J. O'CONNELL

Hour Staff Writer

When real estate agent Lisa Triantafilidis takes clients out to look at one of her listings, two questions typically top their lists of concerns:

"What are the taxes and what are the energy costs," said Triantafilidis, who is a real estate agent with Higgins Group Real Estate.

She can do nothing about the taxes, but now Triantafilidis has some help with the second question. Energy company **Gault Inc.** is partnering with Higgins to provide home energy audits to the company's 300 agents in Fairfield County.

The audit helps expand upon the things Triantafilidis sees herself. As a real estate agent, she often recognizes things that can be done to improve a home's energy efficiency.

"It can be something very simple, just weather stripping around a door," she said.

Or it can be something as simple as an old refrigerator.

That's what's running up Margi Failoni's energy bill. Failoni, who is trying to sell her house through Triantafilidis, had an energy audit done this summer on the real estate agent's suggestion. She says she was pleasantly surprised by the result; as the owner of a 1,400 square-foot home, she was certain that major changes would have to be made. The audit showed otherwise.

"It has definitely proven that my home was energy efficient," she said.

Instead of suggesting that the windows be replaced, the auditor instead took Failoni through her home, starting outside and moving around the house, pointing out little things that could mean big money for her and anyone who might buy the house.

Failoni's second refrigerator, an old unit that runs in her garage, was one of those things; if she were to unplug it, she would save \$30 a month on her electricity bill.

The audit also recommended that the Failonis reduce the home's air infiltration by changing socket plates gasket seals, weather stripping and foaming. In addition, because 80 percent of energy is lost through the attic and the basement, the audit recommended an update of insulation in the home.

"Here are these small cost-saving tips to not use so much energy," she said.

The **Gault**–Higgins partnership was the brainchild of Megan Smith, director of marketing for **Gault**.

"It was really an idea I had crystallized in my head," she said.

Smith, herself a licensed real estate agent in Florida, had also heard a number of buyers ask about the energy efficiency of her listings. An energy inefficient house, she said, is extremely difficult to sell.

"Energy conservation is just top of mind of everyone these days," she said. "It really can be a deal maker or a deal breaker."

An energy audit, she thought, would provide answers to the questions of the buyers and energy solutions to the sellers.

"It's a complete energy snapshot of the home," she said.

Smith added that the partnership with the Higgins Group is not exclusive; **Gault** wants to reach out to other real estate agents as well.

Triantafilidis believes that the energy audit is going to become a trend. She says it has helped her as a real estate agent.

"It has really helped me get the listings," she said. "When you go in to get a listing, you really need an edge."

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Norwalk

In the first six months of the year, in Norwalk, single–family home sales fell 11.1 percent, to 168 from 189 the year before. The average price was down 19.5 percent, to \$531,562 from \$659,916, and the median price was off 15.9 percent, to \$437,500

from \$520,000, according to Bob Gentry of William Raveis Real Estate in Norwalk.

Maybe selling your home in Norwalk is just not worth is right now

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