

[back to article](#)



Printed on page D12

Signature is making a statement

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Signature Sotheby's International Realty, the newest player in Sarasota's luxury home market, has a few new feathers in its cap, including its first \$4 million sale and a contract to represent a new development east of Interstate 75.

Signature agents Peter Laughlin and Brian Wood rang in the new year by closing on the \$4 million sale of 3935 Shell Road on the north end of Siesta Key. The house sits on an 18,000-square-foot lot along the Gulf of Mexico, and goes by the name "Casa del Playa."

Laughlin himself developed the property with Triangle Construction, and the custom home was designed to be environmentally friendly. It was built in 2006.

The home was "green certified," and included, among other features, a five-stage water filtration system, specialized air purification system, a foam-sealed attic to provide better insulation and a chlorine-free swimming pool.

The buyers, which county records show were David and Sharon Goesel, were represented by Wood, who specializes in luxury custom homes. Signature said the buyers searched a number of homes, including sites on Anna Maria Island, Casey Key and Longboat Key, before concluding that the Shell Road property was the correct choice for them.

The time from when the contract was signed to when the closing took place was only two weeks.

"Even in today's challenging real estate environment, there are buyers out there looking for properties," said Judy Green, Signature's managing partner. "As this sale demonstrates, when the value is right, buyers will move quickly."

Signature has also been selected by The Forest at Hi Hat Ranch to exclusively market the planned development east of Interstate 75. The development is five miles east of the interstate on Clark Road, and its plans call for large tracts to go with each home -- 54 home sites in all, each from three and five acres.

Prices will run from just under \$1 million to more than \$3 million. Several home builders have been selected to build houses in the community, according to Signature.

The development's name so far is fitting for its locale -- it is the most naturally forested community under development in the county, the company said. The goal will be to build homes with a very low impact on the environment.

"We are very excited to be chosen to represent such a unique development," Green said.

First-time buyers seminars

For those thinking about buying their first home and feeling like they need a little guidance on how to proceed, one real estate brokerage in town is offering free seminars this week specifically designed for first-time home buyers.

Coldwell Banker Residential Real Estate is offering the seminars on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at three sites in the area. The firm said attendance is free and requires no obligation. Among the topics will be how to take advantage of tax credits and other government incentives that are available to first-time buyers.

The first seminar will be held in Sarasota at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, at Coldwell's office, 5951 Cattleridge Avenue. On Thursday, one will be offered at its University Parkway site, 10920 Technology Terrace, at 6 p.m. On Friday, a seminar will be held at 5:30 p.m. in Venice, at 680 Substation Road.

Coldwell said those interested should contact the participating offices to make reservations.

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This story appeared in print on page D12
