

THE FIRST ✿ THE ONLY

Vero Beach *Magazine*®

APRIL 2020

*Waterfront living is one of the many reasons
buyers are making Vero Beach home*

The State of Real Estate







Taking Care

VERO BEACH PROPERTY MANAGERS GIVE HOMEOWNERS PEACE OF MIND

BY AMY ROBINSON

When asked, “What does a property manager do?” our minds may conjure images of checking a home periodically, collecting mail and meeting the occasional plumber or carpenter. For top management companies, though, the actual list of duties can be a long one, with a vast range of services offered.

David Croom founded Croom Construction Company in 1978, then building the first custom homes in John’s Island, including his own. Twenty years later, he saw the need for services that would take care of unoccupied homes during summer months when seasonal folks were away.

“Whitehall was formed to help take care of homes that Croom had

built,” says David Lyons, co-owner and vice president of Whitehall Professional Property Management. “We would get calls every October from people we had built for maybe four or five years ago, and there would be small maintenance jobs to do. We tried to address those issues one at a time, but it was tedious and tough to keep up with, so we started Whitehall 20 years ago to take care of that side of the equation,” he says.

Two homeowners were approached and asked if they would like to be test cases for the new Whitehall Maintenance Program. The next step was to draw up a home inspection list designed to detect any issues before they became larger and more costly to repair. Croom had met a retired

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

© VERO BEACH MAGAZINE



David Croom, Denise Adams, David Lyons and Richard Shiflett of Whitehall Property Management all seem to share Adams' sentiment: "I love my job," says the woman the team refers to as the "air traffic controller."

Marine who had been an aircraft maintenance manager, a field in which attention to detail is crucial. He and Croom drew up a list of inspection points that currently numbers 220 items. "The idea was to keep our clients in the Croom family."

Whitehall's office manager, Denise Adams, fields the calls and emails as they come in. "Our property management is completely a la carte; we have clients who only want a home checked once a week and those for whom we manage everything, including all their bill payments, so they get one bill from us quarterly and don't have to wonder, 'Did I pay the electric bill on the Vero Beach house?'" Her role is scheduling-

intensive and becomes more so in early summer, when hurricane shutters are inspected and installed, and late fall, when they are taken down and stored. One client refers to Adams as the air traffic controller, a description she says is quite accurate.

Technology has changed the way property management companies operate, both with the surge of smart home connectivity and the sophisticated inspection equipment used to find problems not seen by the naked eye.

Richard Shiflett, general manager of Whitehall, came from a decidedly low-tech background in building. "When I was 13, I worked on a farm in Ohio, and when we weren't planting and harvesting,

we built homes,” he recalls. “We’d cut the trees from farm property, frame out the house and apply carpentry skills to make cabinets, trim work and doors, and then we would maintain those homes.”

The tools available now have made his job easier. “Whitehall was called to a house that was getting water coming in and we went into the attic but could not find the leak because of the sprayed foam insulation that covers up any stains or obvious water spots,” Shiflett says. “We took our thermal camera up there and found a cool spot. Water registers as blue on the meter, but the leak turned out to be nowhere near where the water came into the house. We tracked it along trusses and walls at least 20 feet away. For detecting purposes, the thermal camera is a lifesaver.”

Certain factors contribute to rapid home aging in coastal areas. According to Shiflett, salt and sun are much harder on homes than snow and ice. “We tell people coming from up North, ‘In winter, your home goes into a sort of dormancy. The sun backs way off and snow can act as an insulator,’” he says. “When you combine the salt air that is wind-driven with the sun, that sun bakes the salt right in.” Maintaining homes involves a lot of detail work to mitigate sun and salt.

“We take care of one home that was built about 10 years ago, at the same time as the next-door neighbor’s,” says Shiflett. “The house we cared for was in good shape, but when we visited next door, we noted that all their exterior light fixtures were corroded and beyond repair, and the wiring was broken down. For our program, we take fixtures apart every year, pull bulbs,



MARTINA TANNERY

Tools like a thermal camera make a property manager’s job easier. This one enabled members of Whitehall’s team to find a water leak behind sprayed insulation in an attic.



MARTINA TANNERY

Richard Shiflett demonstrates how the thermal camera can reveal hot and cold spots created by something as simple as a quick handprint.

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

© VERO BEACH MAGAZINE



Salt air quickly corrodes exterior lights and wiring as well as door hardware if they are not properly and regularly maintained. Once the fixtures and wiring are corroded, replacement can be costly.

Do I need a property manager?

We pay to keep our cars well maintained, especially costly ones, so it seems only prudent to do the same with our homes. And if you are a seasonal resident, the fact that you aren't living in your home part of the year doesn't mean things won't go wrong while you are away. "If you have a large investment in your Vero Beach home and you plan to leave it for weeks or months at a time, you want to get some experienced eyes on it," says Ryan Jones.

How should I choose a property manager?

Picking a good property manager means matching your needs with the company's services. Look for 24/7 availability and get referrals from people you trust. "This is a personal business that requires a personal and engaged touch," says Jones. "It is important that you have someone coming into your home who isn't new to it every time."



Veronica Mannion of Watson Realty has seen property managers respond to the unexpected.

clean, lubricate, and we do the same with door locks and doorknobs. You are looking at saving thousands by maintaining instead of replacing," he states.

Even the best of preventative maintenance measures can't predict what happens on a day-to-day basis. Shiflett and a technician arrived at a client's home one day to work on doors and locks. The homeowner backed out of the driveway and motioned for them to go on in, adding "just don't let the dog out." Shiflett eased open the front door, but the terrier inside had been waiting for just such an opportunity. The nimble dog squeezed out and ran around to the back of the house. "I saw him jump into the lake, where he swam like mad and rolled in the mud," Shiflett laughs. "We waded in, mud to our ankles, and brought him back, then we bathed him and even used a blow dryer. When the owners returned, they had this fluffy dog that smelled great."

Veronica Mannion, manager of the Vero Beach and Port St. Lucie offices of Watson Realty, can attest to the fact that good property managers have to be equipped to handle unexpected crises, recalling several challenges her property managers



Ryan Jones of Ryan A. Jones and Associates acknowledges that sometimes the work "is just plain fun."

have faced. In one case, a property manager had to schedule and oversee a same-day tree removal and then have photographs taken in order to keep the client's insurance company from canceling her policy. A quick response kept the policy in place and the client happy. Another Watson client saw a car run a stop sign and drive right into his home. The property manager was on site immediately to help the homeowner manage every aspect of the situation.

Ryan Jones of Ryan A. Jones and Associates, a renovation, construction and estate management company, grew up in the construction business. "I spent summers crawling in attics, watching car-

penters, painters, plumbers and electricians do their work for my dad, Darwyn Jones. Many of the subcontractors I use for my construction and estate management business now, I have known since grade school." Fostering relationships is a large part of the job. "I tell our employees, if you get a text, call or email, get back to that person immediately." Relationships with subcontractors give companies like Jones' favorable pricing and faster responses than individual homeowners looking for home repair.

Requests from clients run the gamut, but sometimes doing the work is just plain fun. "We manage a home where each December,



REPRINTED WITH
PERMISSION

© VERO BEACH
MAGAZINE



As part of their maintenance and monitoring services, Whitehall inspects roofs, including chimneys, dormers and gables for cracking, checks for sliding and cracked roof tiles and inspects the flashing.

the owners want us to buy a live Christmas tree, light it up and string the outdoor lights, too. When the family comes in town for that week, they have a welcoming treat in store,” Jones says. “The children love it.”

Seasonal clients can walk into the house and just start enjoying themselves, rather than looking for trouble that cropped up while

they were away. However, sometimes it is adversity rather than convenience that brings people to a property manager. “One couple contacted us when they were so fed up trying to fix things at their Vero Beach home that they were ready to sell,” Jones says. The last straw came for this couple during a particularly cold snap. “They came down from up North and had no

heat. I brought them space heaters while we worked on the problem. They became instant clients and still are.”

Property management takes care of the structures under contract, but the business is very much about people. “Every one of our employees cares, this is such a family,” says Whitehall’s Denise Adams. “I love my job.” ☘