

Valley of the Sun Real Estate Update

May, 2008

A Few Pennies, and My Thoughts

As you have probably heard, the US Postal Service will be raising the rate for first-class mail on May 12th. The cost of a stamp will go up by a penny, to 42 cents. Since I like to think of my newsletter as a first-class operation, this seemed like a good opportunity to reflect on a little postal trivia, leading into a brief discussion of the difference between value and price, and a little chance to throw in some (hopefully helpful) service at the end.

While we all have our favorite stories of postal goofs—torn letters, lost packages, mail delivered years late—the USPS really does a pretty remarkable job. It is the second-oldest branch of the federal government, having been established in 1775 with Ben Franklin as the first Postmaster General (annual salary: \$1,000.) The USPS handled a mind-boggling 95.9 billion pieces of first-class mail last year, but even that huge number continues a steadily declining trend over the last several years, from 98.1 billion in 2005 & 97.5 billion in 2006.

As these numbers indicate, even as the price of mail is going up, its value for many people is going down. Widespread use of email has supplanted old-fashioned correspondence, and tools like online bill paying have helped consumers save time & money (and avoid late fees!) by transferring funds instantly through cyberspace, further reducing the monthly need for stamps. So the Post Office is engaged in an ongoing balancing act, trying to make more money for their services without driving even more customers away as the price becomes less and less attractive.

Value and price are, of course, constant themes in the real estate market. As all too many homeowners have been finding recently, the price they need to sell for in order to cover their debts is not matched by the current market value of their homes. And unlike the USPS, homeowners can't unilaterally change the rates to balance their books. While lawmakers debate assorted schemes for helping distressed homeowners, the most likely outcome is that the unemotional machinery of the market will eventually decide how we come through this crisis.

Of course, everyone's favorite relationship between value & price is to get something for nothing, and that's where we'll end this month's newsletter. I am enclosing here a few one-cent stamps for you to use in case you haven't had a chance to swing by the Post Office for a supply of new stamps yet. They may not come with a high price, but hopefully having them around will be a real value for you, letting you save some time & some stress. As always, please let me know if there is anything else I can do to be helpful for you.

On the Home Front



I should call this the far-from-home front, as Jill & I just got back from a great vacation in France. We went skiing in the Alps with our friends Brian & Elizabeth, who moved to a cool house just outside Paris last year. That's Brian in the picture with me, and Mont Blanc in the background. We had great spring conditions, warm weather mixed in with some fresh snow. Plus, I got to show Jill some of the highlights of Paris, like Notre Dame, that I first saw 25 years ago. And for a real bonus, my parents watched the kids while we were gone!



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Recipe of the Month

Pork Provence

I have mentioned this before, but as this month's recipe serves to remind me it is worth mentioning again: the Thursday food column in the Arizona Republic is a reliable source of fun & easy recipes for your family. This is a flavorful two-pan meal that is simple enough to whip up after work, but also makes a great presentation if you want to serve it for your dinner guests.

- 1 pound small new potatoes
- 1 pound baby carrots
- 1 pork tenderloin, about 1 pound
- 2 teaspoons dried herbes de Provence
- 1/2 cup orange marmalade
- 2 tablespoons white wine, or white wine vinegar

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Slice the potatoes into quarters and place them in a medium-sized pot. Add the carrots and enough water to cover them all. Bring to a boil and cook for 4 minutes.
3. Place the pork in a lightly-oiled 9x13 baking pan. Drain the potatoes & carrots and arrange them around the pork in an even layer. Sprinkle the herbes de Provence over the pan, and then roast for 15 minutes.
4. Combine the marmalade and wine or vinegar in a small bowl. Brush some directly on the pork loin, and pour the rest evenly over the carrots & potatoes. Return pan to oven for an additional 15 minutes of roasting.
5. Check pork to make sure it has reached about 160° on a meat thermometer. Put it back in for 5 minutes if it is not quite done.

Makes 4 generous servings. Total time with cooking & preparation is under an hour.

If you don't have a jar of herbes de Provence in your pantry, you can come pretty close by combining dried thyme & rosemary, with a little marjoram, basil, or lavender thrown in if you have them. Like many dishes that combine a meat entrée with a savory fruit glaze, this one lends itself to experimentation & variation. You can alter the meal nicely by using a dark balsamic vinegar or red wine instead, or by substituting cherry, apricot, or currant preserves for the marmalade.

Culture Corner

Quick reviews of some recent favorites

Movies: It's not the best animated feature I've seen, but **Bee Movie** is still a very entertaining film for the whole family. It has a simple story & be-careful-what-you-wish-for moral that kids will get, but also plenty of sharp pokes at pop culture to keep their parents laughing too.

Food: **Firebirds**, by the Chandler mall (and also in Peoria) is one of those great restaurants that offers a little of something for everyone. Their menu highlights American cuisine from nachos & burgers up to filet mignon & lobster, so you can be happy there for a business lunch, a casual meal, or a fancy night out. The décor, based on lots of exposed hardwood and open space, also achieves a balance between the feel of a roadhouse & a more elegant evening destination.

Movies: You wouldn't think a movie about teen pregnancy would be so funny. **Juno** succeeds at making us laugh because the story is really about how people find different strategies for coping with the challenges life sends their way. A fantastic cast brings life to a great range of characters, who bounce off each other in many combinations as they try to find the relationships that will last.



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