

# Tampa Bay Times

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## Realtor finds a niche serving the LGBT market in Tampa Bay



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Friday, August 19, 2016 6:00am

As a gay man practicing law in Louisville, Ky. 18 years ago, Greg Burton always felt like a bit of an outsider.

"Everyone knew but no one talked about it," Burton says. "I really wanted to move to a more open, more progressive community that had a larger gay community as well as an airport that could get me to various places."

Initially settling on Tampa, where he had friends, Burton bought and restored a house in Hyde Park. A year later, in 1997, Burton crossed the bay to St. Petersburg. While fixing up a house in the Old Northeast, he got his real estate license and embarked on a new career as a Realtor whose specialty is working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender buyers and sellers.

"From Day One, I've always found St. Pete to be very accepting, and real estate provided a venue where I could be open about my lifestyle — which was real relief — and make money at the same time," says Burton, 64.

A member of the nationwide Gay Realty Network, Burton also has his own website [gayfriendlystpete.com](http://gayfriendlystpete.com). He recently spoke with the *Tampa Bay Times* about the LGBT niche he has cultivated in the bay area real estate market.

### Why do gays want gay agents?



If you asked me 18 years ago, it was so they could be themselves and not be treated as less-than-desirable clients. Over the years that's kind of reversed — more and more they want someone who can show them what it's like living here, what are the best restaurants, what are the things to do. Another reason people contact gay and lesbian agents is wanting to support the (gay) community. Are there gay doctors? Gay dentists? Gay lawyers?

### **How did St. Petersburg develop such a gay-friendly reputation?**

It really kicked in when it got the anti-discrimination ordinance (in 2003). Here we are well represented on the City Council — three of the members are gay — and we have a wonderfully supportive police department. Yet when I get gay people who are coming in from the deepest red state, they're concerned about that. And sometimes you get people from the very progressive Northeast or west coast and they are concerned because they think, "Am I coming into the Bible Belt?" It's been fascinating to see St. Pete being recognized as an alternative to South Florida.

### **When did interest really shift from South Florida?**

Probably about three or four years ago. A lot has to do with the new Dali (museum) and all that's going on downtown. St. Pete Pride is noted as the largest Pride event in the state, and that has certainly helped as well.

### **What other areas of Tampa Bay do LGBT buyers like, or maybe not like so much?**

Gulfport and South Pasadena are very popular, Dunedin, certainly Palm Harbor. We're kind of everywhere but when you think of concentrations in Tampa, it's Seminole Heights, Tampa Heights, South Tampa. I did have a couple move across the street from me (in St. Petersburg), and they had lived in one of those new gated communities in north Tampa. They said, "after two years of our neighbors refusing to acknowledge us, we felt we had to get to St. Pete."

### **So do most of your gay clients want to live near other gays?**

There's an interesting national trend that the gay ghetto is dying. Some still want it simply because of acceptance and assimilation, but I've had far more gay clients say, "We want to be integrated into the community as a whole" than say, "What's the most predominantly gay area?" In that sense, St. Pete is well-positioned — I tell people there's no gay ghetto here.

### **There is a perception that gays often are at the fore of upgrading and gentrifying less desirable neighborhoods. Are gay buyers in fact drawn to areas like that?**

You do sort of notice this nationwide. Hyde Park (back in the 1970s) was an area that was red-lined (making it hard to get mortgages) and gays went in and started restoring old houses. On the south end of the Old Northeast, before the Vinoy (re)opened, that section was kind of rough for awhile until gays went in. Traditionally, gay couples didn't have to worry so much about school districts so they could go in and start revitalizing neighborhoods and see value. Usually it was some place that had some architectural pizzazz and interest and you could get it at a good price. Kenwood (in St. Petersburg) is an excellent example. A group of guys got signposts that said "Historic Kenwood." There was nothing historic about Kenwood but that was brilliant marketing.

### **Speaking of marketing, how has that changed since you started?**

In 1998 there was a local publication called the Alternative Yellow Pages, and there were similar gay Yellow Pages in other metro areas. Those were widely distributed so I advertised in those for a number of years. Since the internet came in, there are numerous sites; if you Google "gay real estate agents" you'll get a slew of them. Social media is also important — you can post on Facebook looking for referrals.

## What do you do once you get a referral?

The way I work is this: I'll get a contact, I'll put together an info packet, stuff from the Chamber of Commerce, from gay publications. They come down and I'll say, "The first day we're going to tour the town and see what neighborhoods really pull you based on price." I can honestly say this — people just love discovering St. Petersburg. It's so nice downtown through the Edge District, Grand Central — the Gay and Lesbian Welcome Center is out on Central. They are amazed by the architecture, amazed by how much is going on downtown. They sense the energy — it's palpable.

## How do they feel about the prices, which are steadily rising near downtown?

Price has become a problem. So many of my clients are taking early retirement and coming from areas like Dallas or Cleveland. They don't understand that we've been built out since the 1960s. I think people coming here have to make a decision: Are you prepared to downsize or how close do you want to be in? I can give you an incredible new-built home in Manatee but do you want to be that far out? I've had some people back away once they saw the prices and others saying, "I don't need a 3/2, maybe I can do with a 2/1."

## Do you also have straight clients?

I got a referral this year from Coldwell Banker, a gentleman attorney from the Northeast. He said, "I'm not gay but I want a gay real estate agent because you know where all the good places are and you know where the good places are to go eat."

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