

Check out home, property listings online

For a decade now the first few Web sites I check every morning include DrudgeReport.com to check latest rumors and edgy news, FoxNews.com to see what the active news stores are, and finally Chron.com (*Houston Chronicle*) to read about events in the big city I no longer live in — thank goodness.



John Deans

Over past year I have added another morning Internet destination that I not only check daily but sometimes numerous times throughout a busy weekday. That site is TXLS.com which started out as the Texas Rural Real Estate network in 1996 and since 2001 has become known as the Texas Listing Service also available at TRRN.com. Both of these URLs, www.trrn.com and www.txls.com, delivers users to the same real estate Website.

The original service began as a collaboration between Dustin Davis and the Greater Brenham Bellville Association of Realtors which later became the South Central Texas Board of Realtors.

After starting our rental home company, Brenham Home Rental, last year I have been scouring the TXLS.com Web site like a maniac. With the nationwide housing market crash last year

and the demise of our economy, we saw an opportunity to become landlords and ran with it. The good news is that Washington County has not only been spared the massive fall of real estate values, but has actually continued to rise over the years which is completely opposite to the rest of the country.

In fact I have had a worse time finding good deals on nice family homes to buy over the past few months than we did last year. The last rental home we bought was a fierce and lightning fast deal that was made just hours after it was listed and I had to compete with two other bids made that same day.

We had to pay top dollar for a simple three bedroom, one and a half bath house. I was able to jump on this deal due to my almost obsessive search efforts on TXLS.com numerous times a day to find available houses for sale.

I came to know TXLS.com when I met the owner, developer, and operator Dustin Davis 10 years ago at one of my first computer consulting clients here in Brenham. Dustin was trying to exit out of the computer consulting business while I was working my way in around this area.

We worked on a couple of early projects and have since recommended each other to new contacts. With Dustin's Rice University background and strong software development skills, he was able to implement a robust Internet service that serves real estate professionals Texas wide.

The TXLS.com site has a public viewing side and then a paid members section reserved for licensed real estate people like realtors, brokers, and appraisers. I spend all my time in the public area of the site looking for available properties.

The site is setup logically enabling you to drill down through the three choices of Property Search, Find a Realtor or Helpful Services. Real estate professionals can be contacted through the last two options, but the primary area is the Property Search.

From there you can choose one of the seven areas of Texas to focus the search on and it will take you to that area's page. My searches in our area were in the South Central which includes Washington County along with Waco, Bryan and Sealy. At the South Central page you can scroll down the counties list and pick Washington with the number of available properties displayed within the parenthesis.

At that point you will be on a search

options page letting you fine tune the type and price of the property you are seeking. Since we are looking for a specific price range and type of residential home within Brenham city limits, I select those basic search parameters so the listings displayed are only the ones that may meet our needs.

The advanced options allow you to further refine your search operation by specifying number of bedrooms, minimum square footage, age of the home, and even land features. Dustin Davis has done a great job at constructing this versatile database and is "Johnny On The Spot" at keeping this information up to date.

Dustin has invested quite a sum building up the server and network infrastructure at his Round Top office to provide this robust and reliable Web service to both real estate professionals and people looking to buy and sell rural properties.

One of the reasons why I check TXLS.com for new properties is that he updates the database multiple times a day. There have been times I saw a new property appear in the afternoon that was not there at lunch and other times I have seen listing go from newly available to "contract pending" within hours of initial appearance on the TXLS site.

Nearly all area real estate profes-

sional use the TXLS.com site by listing their properties for sale or scanning it daily like I do for new opportunities for their clients. Dustin makes his money by charging these Realtors a monthly listing fee and a yearly membership charge to actively participate in the content of his real estate Web site. There is no charge for browsers and buyers to search and view the property listings.

TXLS.com provides real estate listing services to roughly 250 Texas Realtors and delivers market information to around 175 certified appraisers and accredited lending institutions. It currently has over 4,500 active listings which are viewed approximately 350,000 times each month.

Dustin Davis also works closely with Realtor.com and uploads listing data to Realtor.com for realtors who are members of the South Central Board of Realtors.

Bottom line: Both realtors and property owners need to check out the TXLS.com Web site to buy or sell small town homes or large rural properties in Texas.

Next week's column: Windows 7.

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