

Expert says buyers should attend home inspection

By Eileen Koutnik
Special Sections Editor

Robert C. Smith believes home buyers get an education participating in their home inspection.

"Buyers will benefit because they will become familiar with the home and learn proper maintenance and operating procedures for many of the building's systems. It also helps when they read the inspector's report," he said.

Smith, who resides in South River, has owned A-Alert Home Inspections Inc. for the past five years.

"I saw an upcoming opportunity five years ago and it was right up my alley. I have a lifetime of hands-on experience in the installation of major components of the home," he said on why he made the move into his own business.

He was recently accepted as a member of the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI). Founded in 1976, it is the oldest international professional organization of independent home inspectors in North America. Prior to becoming a member, Smith had to meet professional and technical requirements, including completion of two comprehensive exams and the performance of at least 250 paid home inspections that meet or exceed the ASHI standards of practice.

Smith knows an extensive amount of information needed for home inspections through his 17-year tenure working as a mechanic for a division of Johnson & Johnson. During his employment, the company sent him to apprenticeship school for electrical, plumbing, carpentry and other areas. In addition, the company sent him to Middlesex County Vocational School.

He defines home inspection as an "objective examination of the conditions of the visible and accessible components of the home."

"Inspectors will provide an objective opinion of a home's true condition before you buy and reduce the chance of unwanted home repairs. This can help you make a more sound and sensible purchasing decision," he said.

According to Smith, the most common deficiencies he comes across while inspecting are: moisture in the attic, cracks in foundations, faulty heating systems, deficiencies in plumbing and electrical panels.

In order to help home buyers see the

problems, Smith uses a digital camera throughout the inspection to record problem areas.

He cites several reasons why home buyers should have a home inspected:

- The purchase of a home represents the largest investment most people make in a lifetime.

- The house could be a "dressed up nightmare" that may appear to be a dream home.

- A home can have many hidden defects and problems that only a well-trained home inspector can evaluate.

Home buyers can expect these areas to be inspected:

- heating system
- central air condition
- internal plumbing
- electrical system
- roof
- attic
- visible insulation
- walls, ceilings and floors
- windows and doors
- foundation and
- basement

Smith highlights eight questions buyers should ask when choosing a home inspector:

- Are you certified and by who?
- How long have you been in the business?
- Are you specifically experienced in residential inspections?
- Do you do repairs or improvements found in the inspection? Smith believes this can cause a conflict of interest.
- How long does the inspection take? Smith estimates between two to three hours.
- Do you participate in continuing educational programs in order to keep current with the latest in building technology?
- Do you allow clients to attend the inspections?
- Do you have insurance?

Smith said the inspection costs \$225 and clients receive a written report in a timely manner in layman's terms that address all areas of the inspection.

A-Alert Home Inspection can be reached by calling (732) 432-9101.