

OPPORTUNITY MAKER

Laura Harris knows sales ebbs—and how to make them flow to her advantage. Harris, a salesperson with Coldwell Banker Adams Realty, moved to Kennewick, Wash., in 1995, to enjoy a quiet life in scenic surroundings.

Quiet she got. The area had just entered a downswing in sales due to the closing of the Hanford Nuclear Plant in Richland. The plant had employed thousands of engineers, scientists, and workers who lived in the tri-cities area of Kennewick, Pasco, and Richland in eastern Washington about four hours west of Seattle.

“I had bad luck in a way,” she says. “I had just come from a slow market in Simi Valley in California. But that experience was a good thing, because I knew how to deal with a down market when I came here. Not many other salespeople did.”

Harris was able to create success in Simi Valley, one hour northeast of downtown Los Angeles, by using tactics she would put to use in Kennewick.

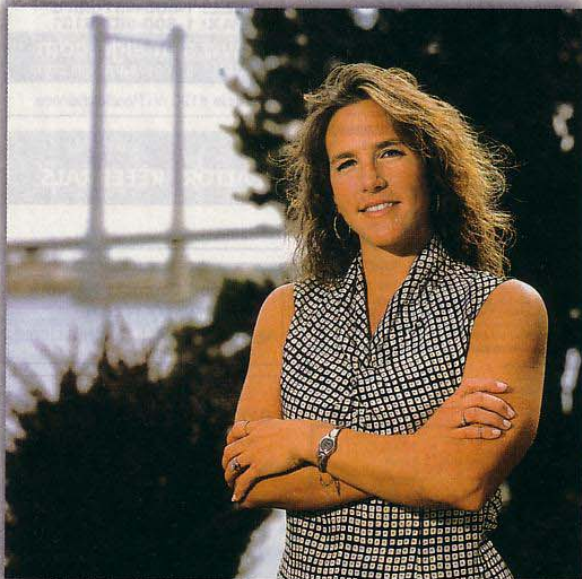
“I was very aggressive. I was cold calling, knocking on doors, and holding open houses every other week,” she says. “And in Kennewick, I played up my track record of working in a tough market and building a solid referral base in California.”

As other area salespeople seemed to stop marketing, Harris began inundating the tri-cities area with mailings, sending out 200 to 300 just-listed and just-sold mailers a month.

Before long, Harris became the No. 1 salesperson in her office. Last year, her sales volume topped \$16 million.

By the late 1990s, the market began to pick up as retirees dis-

covered the beauty of the wine country in the Columbia River Valley, which runs through the tri-cities, and the reasonable cost of homes, which average about \$300,000. Harris spotted that trend and began building relationships with developers who were planning subdivisions in anticipation of the growth. “New construction is just booming now—and I represent three area builders,” she says. About 60 percent of her business comes from new construction.



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Despite her success, struggles are part and parcel of working a newly discovered market. For one, there aren't enough homes to go around. But she's ready with a solution. “If people don't see what they want, I tell them they can buy a custom-built home if they can just wait six months.”

The demand for homes will continue. Construction is expected to begin in July 2003 on a vitrification factory, which will melt nuclear waste from the plant together with glass to make glass logs that can be stored long term.

The factory is already bringing in potential homebuyers as engineers have arrived to work on the facility's design. When the plant is up and running in 2007, it will create hundreds of jobs.

Harris—whose husband, Wes Hodges, now works with her, helping scout new business and real estate investment opportunities for clients and customers—plans to capitalize on the relocation business she says will come with the new plant.

“Right now, Wes and I are riding the wave,” she says. But Harris's experience ensures the couple will be ready the next time the tide turns.

—Leslie Cummings

Laura Harris

Coldwell Banker Adams Realty,
Kennewick, Wash.; 509/737-3092
E-mail: lharris@cbadams.com
Web: www.laurashomesonline.com

2001 gross production volume	\$16 million
Average sales price	\$210,000
Average number of listings	9
Hours per week I work	70