

Home again

Rod Dreher grew up in St. Francisville, La., a town of about 1,700 people 30 minutes northwest of Baton Rouge. He left for college and then lived in Washington, New York, Miami, Dallas and Philadelphia, working as a writer for various magazines, a newspaper and a foundation.

His younger sister, Ruthie, went to LSU, returned to St. Francisville as a middle-school teacher and married an Iraq war veteran who worked as a fireman. On Feb. 22, 2010, Ruthie, who was 40, was diagnosed with a virulent form of cancer. She told her brother that she was afraid that her three young girls would be angry with God for taking her from them: "We can't have anger," she told him. "Make sure nobody is angry at the doctors, either."

The entire town rallied around her. There were cookouts to raise money for her medical care. Ruthie met a woman named Stephanie when they were both getting chemotherapy. Stephanie continued to accompany Ruthie to the hospital even after her own treatments were finished.

April 10, 2010, was officially Ruthie Leming Day in St. Francisville. More than half the town went to a fundraising concert. Somebody took a camper-trailer to the concert so Ruthie would have a place to rest and take oxygen.

Dreher, one of the country's most interesting bloggers, captured Ruthie's illness in real time. "It's so beautiful to see it's almost painful," he wrote the night of the concert, "and so unreal in its generosity that you think it must have been a movie."

As Ruthie's illness worsened, Dreher's grief would be mixed with something else. "The outpouring — an eruption, really — of goodness and charity from the people of our town has been quite simply stunning," he blogged. "The acts of aid and comfort have been ceaseless, often reducing our parents to tears of shock and awe."

She died Sept. 15. More than 1,000 people signed the guest book at the funeral, Dreher reported. Mike, her husband, stood for hours by the open coffin as people filed past. Since Ruthie liked to go barefoot, the pallbearers took off their shoes and carried the coffin to the grave in bare feet.

During the wake, Dreher and his wife received an email informing them that the deal for a farmhouse they had hoped

to rent in Pennsylvania had fallen through. They were surprised as waves of relief swept over them.

Then a thought occurred. Maybe they should move back to Louisiana. "Standing in Ruthie's kitchen the day after she died, laughing with all of Mike's friends who had surrounded him to hold him up, I thought, 'Even with all the sadness, there's no place else in the world I'd rather be.'"

They considered the practicalities. They wondered if they were experiencing a passing emotion from a traumatic event. To their great astonishment, they decided to make the move.

They wanted to be enmeshed in a tight community. They wanted to be around Ruthie's daughters, and they wanted their kids to be able to go hunting with Mike. They wanted to be where the family had been for five generations and participate in the rituals ranging from Mardi Gras to LSU football. They decided to accept the limitations of small-town life in exchange for being a part of a community.

They moved in just before Christmas. For the past many years, Ruthie and her mother had a tradition of going to a nearby cemetery on Christmas Eve to put candles on all the graves. This year, with Ruthie in that cemetery, her mother was too sad to do it. But, as she was driving by the cemetery that night, she noticed little flames dotting the graveyard.

She called Dreher, sobbing. "You've got to find out who did this for us. ... Whoever it is, they will never know what this meant to me. They will never, ever know."

It turns out that it was a neighbor named Susan Harvey Wymore, who learned that Ruthie's mother would be unable to light the cemetery and did it for her.

Dreher is a writer for *The American Conservative* and is part of a communitarian conservative tradition that goes back to thinkers like Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet. Forty years ago, Kirk led one of the two great poles of conservatism. It existed in creative tension with the other great pole, Milton Friedman's free-market philosophy.

In recent decades, the communitarian conservatism has become less popular while the market conservatism dominates. But that doesn't make Kirk's insights into small towns, traditions and community any less true, as Rod Dreher so powerfully rediscovered.

Luxury markets heat up across U.S.

Last month Lawrence Yun, the chief economist for the National Association of Realtors, delivered his state of the union address to the members of the association at the annual meeting in Anaheim, Calif. During the presentation Yun shared the myriad data that he uses to analyze the housing market across the United States.

After more than 30 slides of charts and graphs depicting various trends and aspects of the market, Yun summarized by stating that current record low interest rates in conjunction with the very high affordability of residential property has created a once-in-a-generation opportunity to buy property throughout the real estate spectrum.

This year, buyers in the luxury home segments across the country responded to these real estate opportunities by recording an impressive number of notable sales many of which were recently completed. New York City was particular noteworthy with more than 25 sales in excess of \$10 million during 2011. Included among these residences was this month's closing of the record-breaking sale of a Central Park West condominium of 6,744 square feet for \$88 million. Two other residences sold for \$48 million apiece earlier this year in Manhattan. Further up the coast, Boston enjoyed a remarkable November as 25 residences in excess of \$1 million were sold and a further 20 were put under contract. In the

Hamptons a modest waterfront property on 2.5 acres recently sold in for \$23 million.

The West Coast also enjoyed exceptional activity in the luxury market. In the last three months, San Francisco reported that four homes sold for more than \$20 million each.

The Los Angeles market produced 30 sales over \$7 million in November alone. Just outside Atherton, The Levi Strauss estate sold for \$53 million in September. But perhaps the most impressive sale was a 25,000-square-foot compound in Silicon Valley that commanded \$100 million.

Outside the Northeast and the West Coast, other states saw luxury segments rack up many significant sales. South Florida, one of the hardest hit states during the downturn, recently completed a transaction for the highest price per square foot ever paid for a condo in that market. In Palm Beach more than a dozen homes sold this year with price tags of over \$30 million and Miami had four sales in excess of \$20 million in 2011. There are similar reports from Chicago, Dallas, Houston and other large metropolitan areas.

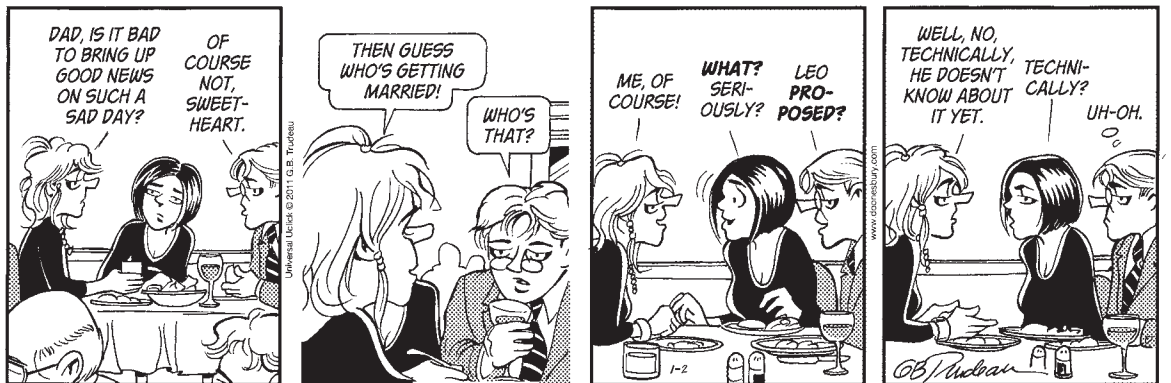
Communities outside of the largest metropolitan areas also saw notable sales of their luxury home segment. One of the largest resort sales occurred this year in Maui when an oceanfront home on 1.7 acres sold for \$27 million. Closer to home in Aspen there were 19 sales over \$10 million in 2011 — more such sales than in any previous year. Vail

and Jackson Hole also saw very significant transactions in the luxury residential market.

Telluride joined in the flurry of luxury property sales with 30 residential properties selling for over \$2 million this year, including a \$7.25 million home in Aldasoro. Of particular interest is that a nearby 1,134-acre ranch parcel with an asking price of \$18.8 million has recently gone under contract. Additionally, there are recent reports of buyers bidding on properties with asking prices in excess of \$10 million, which just recently has resulted in a 14,526-square-foot Mountain Village residence going under contract, which was currently at an asking price of \$14.9 million.

This year's activity in the luxury real estate market has been widely noted in preeminent national publications but perhaps Barron's captured it best by noting that "Two years after the worst of the financial crisis, the rich have dusted themselves off and resumed some serious discretionary spending. Both sales volume and prices are clearly on the rise for luxury vacation homes. One of the greatest indulgences of all."

— Stewart Seeligson is president elect of the Telluride Association of Realtors. His sources for this article also include the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *National Association of Realtors*, *Sotheby's International Realty*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *Telluride MLS*.



DOONESBURY GARRY TRUDEAU

Letters

Generosity and the privilege to touch lives

DEAR EDITOR,

The week before Christmas the library children's area was filled with its usual exuberance and the palatable feeling of holiday anticipation. While we are proud of the "aliveness" of this bright and inviting place, it needs to be said that there were people who infused us with some extra holiday magic this year.

Thank you to The Butcher & The Baker for supplying us with the cookies and icing that provided an hour of smiles to our visitors and after school children at our annual Christmas Celebration. Thank you Harriet and Ray Levy for sharing the joy of Hanukkah with your delicious latkes, origami and dreidel play, I cannot say enough what gifted

teachers you are and how fortunate we are to have you in our community. To the Brown Dog and the Lynch family, there is nothing more special than visiting the library in pajamas, curling up in a dimly lit story area and listening to a holiday story read by Buff Hooper, especially when followed by a bottomless dinner of pizza!

Each day of the year gives us the privilege of touching the lives of so many people and with your generosity you have gone above and beyond to do the same.

Thank you to all of you and everyone else who has collaborated and supported the children's area over the last year; it is you and all of our beautiful families that make this place so

amazing and vital to our community.

ELIZABETH AND THE YOUTH STAFF
Wilkinson Public Library

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