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HOME INSPECTOR: Liza Rockwood believes she is the only Hispanic female home inspector in the Niagara region. It is a trade she learned from her mother, who was a real estate investor.

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By Michele Deluca
Niagara Gazette (<http://niagara-gazette.com>)

NIAGARA FALLS —

AT A GLANCE

WHO: Liza Rockwood, owner of Home Inspections by Liza Rockwood

WHAT: New and used home inspections

MORE INFORMATION: Visit online at www.homeinspectionsbylizarockwood.com or call 791-4522.

Liza Rockwood disagrees with the most tried and true piece of advice given to real estate shoppers.

The three most important considerations when purchasing property these days are not “location, location, location,” she says.

In these challenging economic times, she believes that real estate remains the best investment a person can make, but the three rules have changed, according to the Ransomville home inspector.

“If you select the right property for the right price, that’s the key! Location, condition and price,” she said.

Rockwood, a native of Puerto Rico, moved stateside when she was 23, and worked in the finance and investment industry while buying her own real estate.

She decided to go into the home inspection business when she couldn't find a home inspector with as much knowledge as she had about her properties and her goal is to help homebuyers get over the fear they are buying a "lemon."

"I am the ticket out of a purchase contract," she said, "if they include an 'acceptable home inspection,' as part of the condition to buy the house."

She set her clipboard aside recently to answer a few questions about her home inspection business, headquartered in Ransomville but servicing the entire Niagara region.

QUESTION: You said you followed your mother's footsteps into real estate investing? You don't hear that a lot.

ANSWER: Mom worked for Citibank around 32 years but she always had real estate properties she rented out. I learned how and when to hire repairs out and when to do it myself.

Q: Do you own properties locally?

A: I just sold a three unit apartment building in Ransomville and I have a property overlooking Toronto in Youngstown, New York. Just recently I flipped a few properties on Grand Island.

Q: How did you get to this part of the world?

A: My husband is a federal agent. I kind of followed him around to where he had better opportunities. I kept getting transfers with my own company. I used to work for American General Finance. I was a manager for a couple of branches. Then I got interested in investments and stock market and then I worked for Bank of America investments after that.

Q: So, how did you get into the real estate business?

A: I bought my first property in 1995. I just started getting really involved as a landlord. I always kept my day job which allowed me to purchase the properties. Everywhere I went I bought apartment buildings.

Q: When did you consider a home inspections business?

A: I was getting very disappointed with the inspections I was getting. I started to realize I know quite a bit.

Q: What is it about you that makes you good at home inspections?

A: I love what I do and I know what I'm doing. I had to learn across the years of investing in my own property that you need to protect the biggest investment you're going to make in your life. Real estate is the best investment as long as you buy the right property for the right price.

Q: What did it take to get your license?

A: I went to Western New York School of Real Estate. They were the closest to me that offered the inspector course that prepares you to take the state tests. Then I took the test and passed it.

Q: First time?

A: Oh, absolutely. This was one of those times that I was thinking, 'is this really it?' But, I guess I really enjoy it so much that I think it became easy for me.

Q: You said you've inspected about 50 houses so far. What is the biggest mistake people make when buying a house?

A: They don't hire a home inspector. They think they might know enough when they really don't.

Q: What do you look for?

A: I start at the roof. As a side note, we are not required to get on the roof, but I will get on the roof. I check everything from the roof all the way down to the foundation ... everything you can see, everything you can touch, everything you can get into,, we inspect everything.

Q: Why do you think now is a good time to buy real estate?

A: Now the country is going through a really hard time, economically, but I feel that — as I've lived in San Diego, California and Miami, Florida — I really feel like Western New York has not been hit as hard as other places in the country. So, if now is not the time to buy, when is it? I want to be ready when people start feeling more confident and ready to buy these properties. I want to be there to help them get a good one.

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