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— Barry Plant Geelong’s TIM PALOUDIS

## BUYERS ADVICE

# You can pick neighbours

ALISON APRHYS

**A**S IF choosing the right property to meet your lifestyle and budget was not hard enough, buyers also have to look carefully at their neighbours before signing on the dotted line.

Anecdotes of avid readers moving into a street of nocturnal heavy metal bands, or a cat lover moving next to a family with six unrestrained bull mastiffs might sound amusing, but the reality can be hell for both sides.

One industry insider said that she received some sage advice from a paramedic friend.

“He said to always drive through a suburb at 1am on a Sunday morning to gauge if it’s a party suburb,” she recalled.

According to Barry Plant Geelong agent, Tim Paloudis, streetscapes are a good indicator.

“If all the nature-strips are neat and tidy, the gardens look well maintained, that’s a good sign that people care about their homes,” he said.

Neighbour Day founder Andrew Heslop strongly advocates getting out of your car and strolling around your prospective new suburb.

“You need to find a community that suits your needs,” he said.

“So as well as researching about houses, prices, transport, schools and other infrastructure, you need to spend time walking up and down the street at different times of the day to get a feel for what goes on there and feel for the people who live there.”

Maxwell Collins’ Lesley Bourke said she recommended prospective buyers serious about a property needed to undertake due diligence with research at the council in relation to demographics in area.

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### Top tips

**LOOK** at the streetscape, check that homes are well maintained.

**VISIT** at different times to gauge traffic and noise.

**PEER** over fences.

**INTRODUCE** yourself to neighbours for a chat.

**INVESTIGATE** local infrastructure

**VISIT** council to get demographic information.



■ JUSTICE CREW: Vlad Chudoschnik, with Trevor Pickering and Sam Purcell help solve disputes between Geelong neighbours for the Department of Justice. Photo: REG RYAN

## Bullying and harassment top disputes

**U**NSOCIABLE behaviour including bullying, harassment and attacks on character topped the list of complaints made by Greater Geelong residents about their neighbours, according to the Victorian Department of Justice’s Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria.

According to DSCV’s Geelong office, in 2010-2011, there were 286 calls for advice regarding a neighbour’s behaviour, with only 11 per cent being referred on for mediation.

The old saying ‘good fences make good neighbours’ is still relevant today, according to DSCV’s Regional Manager, Barwon South West Office, Vlad Chudoschnik.

He said that people who have complaints about barking dogs, fences, noises or other

issues can contact their local office for free and confidential assistance.

“The DSCV can help you resolve a wide range of disputes without having to resort to taking legal action,” he said.

“We offer practical strategies, mediation services, education programs and there’s no cost involved.”

Mr Chudoschnik stressed that it was vital for good community relations to not allow issues to fester.

“Early intervention is crucial, advice is only a phone call away,” he said.

“In normal circumstances we can organise a mediation meeting between parties within two weeks.”

Mr Chudoschnik said that it

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— CR JAN FARRELL

was encouraging that 89 per cent of complaints regarding a neighbour’s behaviour could be solved with a phone call to DSCV.

He added that mediation doesn’t have to be a last resort and that residents can seek mediation at any time, regardless of what other options are available or whether legal proceedings have started.

The report also revealed that while behaviour was the most significant issue requiring attention for Geelong residents, there were 114 calls regarding advice on settling arguments about fences, 62

regarding trees, 23 about property and 20 for animals.

Complaints about parking and drainage were relatively minor, receiving a mere eight and seven calls respectively.

Cr Jan Farrell who chairs the council’s submission review panel said it was important for people to work together to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

“I encourage residents to keep in mind the future when they may be neighbours, and don’t undermine that relationship,” she said.

People seeking advice from DSCV can call 5215 8591 or visit [disputes.vic.gov.au](http://disputes.vic.gov.au)