

north carolina/triangle edition

BROKER★AGENT™ magazine

broker/agent of the month:

Sally Creech

Prudential
Carolinas Realty

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Sally Creech

Loves Houses. Especially if She Sells Them.

november 2002



**broker/agent
of the month**

by Denise Sherman
Photography by Thomas Babb

"I like to sell any kind of houses, old ones, new ones, pretty ones, ugly ones," quipped Sally, an award-winning agent and broker for Prudential Carolinas Realty. "Of course, there's no such thing as an ugly house when I sell it!"

Sally's many listings include this wonderful home at 1543 Carr Street in Hayes Barton in Raleigh.

Sally Creech has sold a LOT of houses over the years. She holds the honor of selling the very first million dollar home ever listed in Raleigh; she also has the distinction of being named the top agent at Bacon & Company (now Prudential Carolinas Realty) in the early 1980s while earning an income of just \$35,000!

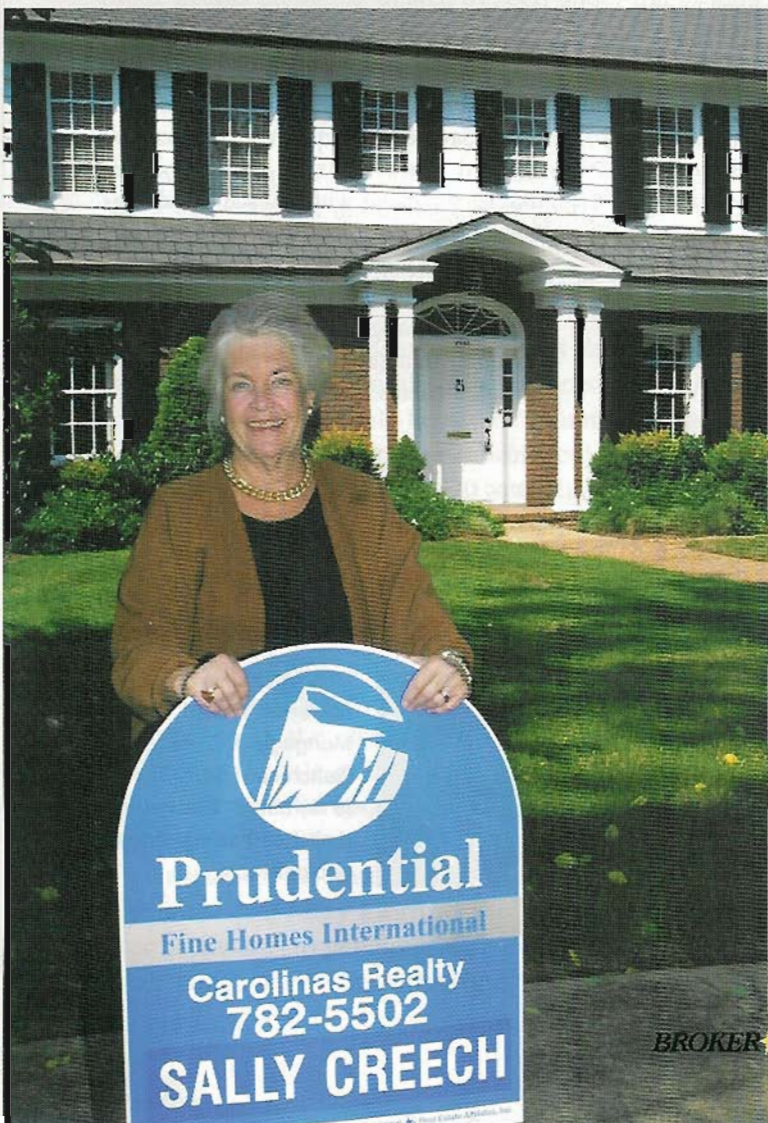
"I couldn't believe it when Dick Roseberry (area president of Prudential Carolinas Realty) told me that," laughed Sally. "But he showed me records to prove it. Those were the years when interest rates were at 19 percent and people were reluctant to buy homes."

Times (and interest rates) have changed since then, but Sally's award-winning streak has not. She holds the designation as a GRI (Graduate of the Real Estate Institute). She is among Prudential's elite with membership in the Leading Edge Society through the Chairman's Circle. She holds the highest honor at Prudential, the Legend Award, which is presented only to the top 1 percent of Prudential agents (to be eligible for the Legend Award, Sally was named to the Chairman's Circle five years).

Sally was the first recipient of the prestigious Zack Bacon Award, presented to the Prudential agent who best exemplified the qualities Zack brings to the real estate community: professionalism, personal integrity, high ethical standards, consistent, strong production and a sense of humor. The "award" is one of Zack's own shoes, bronzed, mounted on a trophy base and presented annually. The significance of the shoe? An indication that the award winner had mighty big shoes to fill! (Sally's feet fit perfectly).

Sally is a charter member of the Top Producers Council, an arm of the Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS® and had a sales volume of \$14 million last year. Her listings range in price from \$20,000 to more than \$1.5 million. And she's always on the lookout for opportunities.

"You never know where you're going to pick up a customer," said Sally. "I got a listing during my water aerobic class and even when I went to court to pay a speeding tick-



Mary Morrow (left) and Sally learned the real estate business together more than 20 years ago, now they have teamed up again at Prudential Carolinas Realty.

et! I've been out on the coast on the beach, talked to people from Raleigh and ended up listing their home. I used to meet new customers at my children's ball games. Wherever you are, you can find real estate customers." But Sally says she courts new customers with discretion. "I don't want to be one of those people that you hate to see coming!"

Sally's secret to success is plain old hard work. "Whatever it takes to get the job done, that's what I do," she said, "no matter how many hours it takes." Even after all these years, Sally is still amazed by the vagaries of real estate. "The longer you live, the less you know," said Sally, shaking her head. "Some properties you think just won't sell and they have contract within a week! Other 'desirable' houses will sit on the market for months!" Sally has had her share of interesting referral business. "On one divorce, we ended up selling seven homes!" she said.

No one is more surprised than Sally that she has earned a living in sales. Her father and grandfather were lawyers, her mother, a schoolteacher. "Nobody in my family had sold even a Midas muffler!" she said, with a laugh.

Sally is a Raleigh native, but only because her hometown of Benson didn't have a hospital. The family lived in Benson until she was three years old, then moved to Smithfield when her father became a judge. While she was a student at Smithfield High, Sally was invited to write a student column for the local newspaper, the *Smithfield Herald*. To this day she credits the newspaper with giving her the courage and confidence to pick up the phone and make calls—skills she would find enormously useful as a real estate professional.

History fascinated Sally, so she enrolled at Salem College, earned an undergraduate degree and then went on to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for a master's degree. Following in her mother's footsteps, she took a teaching job at her old high school in Smithfield, bringing history lessons to life. She later taught junior high and high school at Raleigh and eventually moved to Wilmington to teach at Wilmington College (the forerunner of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington).

In the midst of her successful teaching career, Sally married her childhood friend and neighbor William (Bill) Creech, a Raleigh attorney. "Some people marry the boy next door," said Sally. "Bill's mother lived across the street from us and he was a lot older than I was so I tell people I



married the man across the street!" The couple made their home in Raleigh, where Peace College offered Sally a teaching position. Just before classes resumed, however, she discovered she was expecting her first child. The sensibilities of the era required college administrators to shield young students from the sight of a pregnant professor, so Sally quit teaching for a few years. Soon the Creech household was enlivened by three active boys: Larry, Ezekiel ("Zeke") and Charles.

Bill loved politics and soon won a seat in the North Carolina State Legislature. One day, he brought home the news that real estate licensing laws were under review by the legislature. Sally had toyed with the idea of earning a real estate license; Bill urged her to take action. She decided to return to school. For four months, four nights a week, she studied real estate at the Raleigh YMCA, earning her agent and broker's licenses.

Sally missed teaching, so she taught evening classes at Kings College (a now-defunct business school) and went to work for Jim Ogburn at Ogburn Realty during the day. Real estate sales were slow at first. "No matter what any tells you, you will lose money the first year you are in real estate," said Sally. "I did so badly that first year!" Four years later, however, Sally was well on the road to becoming a top producer.

In 1977 she joined Zack Bacon's firm, Bacon & Company. In the mid-1980s, Zack sold the company to Merrill Lynch. It later became Prudential Carolinas Realty still owned by Zack. Through all the changes, Sally has remained with the firm as a top seller and listing agent.

These days, Sally teams up with her long-time real estate friend, Mary Morrow, to provide excellent service to their real estate customers and clients. Mary and Sally met at

Ogburn when they were both learning the basics of real estate sales.

Since then, Mary has enjoyed a long and successful career as both an agent and appraiser. She joined forces with Sally in 1996—a match made in heaven. Sally does the networking and prospecting necessary to get new leads; Mary or Sally will write up offers, then Mary tackles everything from offer to closing. When life gets hectic for Sally, Mary steps in to show properties.

"We feel we give personal service from start to finish—we are with our customers through the entire process," said Mary. "We can help negotiate repairs, find an attorney, insurance, inspections. Even after the closing, we try to follow up to make sure everything is right. Always, we keep the best interest of our clients in mind."

Mary and Sally are equally responsive to the needs of other real estate agents, even in competing firms. "We try to get along with everybody," said Mary. "You never know when you'll be on the other side of the table from a particular agent during a future transaction," added Sally.

A Sally Creech "For Sale" sign in the yard carries responsibilities for the seller. First, Sally insists that the house be priced right. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know if you have the house priced too high, it won't sell!" she said. "I don't always succeed, but I try to get the highest price for the seller that is realistic and reasonable."

Next, the house must be clean for showings. And details count: "If the windows are clean and the silver is polished, the house looks clean!" declared Sally. Those rules apply to all homes, but Sally admits to a soft spot for older homes with character, like many of those found inside Raleigh's I-440 Beltline, where she and Bill reside. "I like settled, established areas of town. Older homes have a lot more charm, a lot more flare, a sense of history," she said.

Sally has honed her real estate instincts on years of experience coupled with intimate knowledge of the market. She



Sally's office reflects her appreciation of fine art and antiques. She loves listing and selling older homes in the Triangle because "they have more flare!"

is always eager for showings because firsthand knowledge of the house may sell it—for her or another agent. And there's nothing like an on-site visit to put the house and its price in perspective. "A lot of our sales today are generated through the computer, but the computer can't tell you whether the house is next to a trash dump or a gas station. Real estate is a people-to-people business," said Sally.

Volunteer work is also a people-to-people business and Sally has provided leadership in many civic and charitable arenas. She is a strong supporter of the arts and has served as a docent for the North Carolina Museum of Art. She is a member of Raleigh Fine Arts and has served as a member of the board of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science.

Sally is affiliated with the Wake County Historical Society and is a former member of the Raleigh Historic Properties Commission. She is a sustaining member of the Jr. League of Raleigh and a member of the Paralegal Board at Meredith College. She has also served as vice chairman of the Salem College Alumni board. At her church, Edenton Street Methodist, she served on the Finance Committee. Like Bill, Sally enjoys the local political scene. She is a former precinct chair and former president of Democratic Women.

One of her most cherished activities is participation in the 20th Century Book Club, which was founded in 1911! Despite reading hundreds of books over the years, she credits just three with having the greatest impact on her life: the Presbyterian catechism, her Girl Scout handbook and, surprisingly, Machiavelli's *The Prince*. "It's not that I want to act like a Machiavellian character, but it's good to know that people can behave that way. You know what is possible and then how to handle it."

For her own life, Sally has a single abiding goal: "I'd like to be a pleasant force in this world and a positive one," she says, "a person who's made the world better for being here." ★