

LI Real Estate

Candice and Joseph Quevedo with their son. The family rents in East Islip as they house hunt.

BUYING DILEMMA

Buyers plagued by need for snap decisions, little room for negotiation **C8**

NEWSDAY / THOMAS A. FERRARA

JOSH GOETZ PHOTOGRAPHY



'30s MEETS '20s

Renovated Fire Island bungalow on the market for \$1.25M **C4**

BUYING IN OAKDALE

Waterfront homes, historic charm draw buyers **C16**

BY ARIELLE DOLLINGER

arielle.dollinger@newsday.com

LI Real Estate 51

By mid-May, Ridge Dufek and Danielle Hall had been shopping for homes for around two months.

Within that span, the couple put in offers on about 10 houses and lost each to another bidder, Dufek said.

"You've kind of got to make a decision on the spot," Dufek, 24, said. "You walk in, do you like it, do you not like it? OK, put the offer in because, you don't really have much time to think it over."

At the end of last month, Dufek and Hall finally went into contract on a two-bed, one-bath Islip Terrace house with a full basement and a yard, Dufek said. He declined to disclose the closing price, but said it was over their \$600,000 budget and \$30,000 over asking.

Today's Long Island homebuyers have to be aggressive, said Shawn Waller, a Babylon-based agent for Signature Premier Properties. A home listed on a Friday will likely be off the market by Monday or Tuesday, he added. Though activity might pick up a bit come spring and summer, some agents said, the industry is abuzz year-round.

"I'm noticing people are putting in offers sight unseen, which we hadn't seen since early pandemic; and I think we're going to get back to that, especially as the summer months come," Waller said.

The traditional criteria — saving enough money for a down payment, obtaining mortgage preapproval, showing proof of employment — are no longer enough to guarantee success in the home buying process. And as market conditions increase the drive to move quickly and decisively, Long Island buyers have less room to be picky, agents say.

"Honestly, the toughest part is, we have been very flexible," Dufek said weeks before winning a bidding war. "It's not like we have this exact picture that we're looking for; there's a lot of things that would work for us."

WILLING TO TAKE ON FIXER-UPPERS

Engaged to be married next year, Dufek and Hall have been bouncing between their parents' houses to save money for their own purchase. Dufek works in sales for home improvement company Universe Home Services. Hall, 25, is a dental hygienist.



Engaged couple Danielle Hall and Ridge Dufek outside an open house in Sayville on May 3. The couple, like many, had struggled to find a starter house for months, despite their low requirements — until the end of last month.

"We're both pretty good with our money, we save a lot, we both have decent jobs," Dufek said in April. "It just seems like something that should be possible and it just, it's been very tough."

Their goal was to buy "a normal starter house," with two or three bedrooms and ideally two bathrooms, Dufek

said. During their search, Dufek said a basement or garage for storage would be nice; so would a yard, in case the pair has a dog someday.

But nothing on the list had been a "hard stop," he said. The couple had also put in offers \$40,000 over asking on houses that needed renovation, Dufek said.

"I don't even care really if the house needs a lot of work," he said before he and Hall secured a home. "We're willing to do the work to fix something up."

The exterior of the Islip Terrace house he and Hall wound up buying needs some work, he said. There is just one bathroom, but there is a basement and yard.

The two remained open-minded in terms of location. Dufek, who grew up in Islip, said he and Hall looked everywhere from West Islip to Patchogue, and farther north to Islip Terrace and North Bay Shore.

"I don't think it should be that crazy to ask, to be able to look for a house some-



Candice and Joseph Quevedo with their son, in front of their East Islip apartment. The couple is ready for a bidding war.

‘I’m noticing people are putting in offers sight unseen, which we hadn’t seen since early pandemic; and I think we’re going to get back to that, especially as the summer months come.’

— Shawn Waller, Signature Premier Properties agent

where that I love and grew up,” he said.

In her nearly 35 years in the real estate industry, Douglas Elliman agent Lina Lopes has seen many markets — and in this one, she said, buyers are just looking for the “possibility of a home in general.”

“They’re actually not that picky, just looking to find a home that they can get an accepted offer on,” she said.

As long as today’s buyer finds a house that “somewhat fits their needs” and can be modi-

fied or adapted, the concern is primarily location, Lopes said.

“And then the rest they’ll either extend, redo the kitchen, redo what they need,” she added. “They’re not that particular.”

BREAKNECK PACE AND BIDDING WARS

Waller described a real estate market that does not stop for holidays, nor seasons.

“We put a house under contract Christmas Eve,” Waller said. “I was showing

people the day after Christmas; the 26th we were back out again showing more properties.”

Dufek and Hall have been working with real estate agent Tammy Ramsay, who said that buyers in the \$600,000 to \$800,000 range are “just in the worst market.”

“It’s still a very competitive market, there’s still excessive bidding wars going on,” Ramsay said.

In recent months, Felicia and Eric Rebele, both 35, put in an

offer of almost \$60,000 over asking on a house in Patchogue.

Verbally, the sellers accepted the offer on the condition that the Rebeles agree to an appraisal gap, meaning the pair would pay the difference between the appraisal and the mortgage in cash, Felicia Rebele said.

“We felt at that point that we had to agree to something, you know? To make us stand out more,” she said. “The other buyer was saying that they would waive the inspection, so we felt like we needed to one-up them.”

The Rebeles had refused to waive the inspection and were working to schedule it, Felicia Rebele said. But before the inspection could happen, the sellers’ agent delivered the news: the owners decided to take the other offer instead.

Since receiving mortgage preapproval in July, Felicia and Eric, who works in sales, have

‘It’s just crazy to me that we’re just giving away all our power, and we’re playing the game.’

— Candice Quevedo

routinely been putting in offers and getting outbid. Two years ago, after notice of an impending rent increase, the couple and their 3-year-old daughter moved out of a two-bedroom Holtsville apartment and — temporarily — into Eric Rebele’s father’s home.

“We expected to move out and save for a year,” said Felicia Rebele, who has an administrative job. “It’s just been going on longer.”

As she looks at houses in Holbrook and Ronkonkoma, Felicia Rebele compares the square footage of the apartment to the prospects at the \$500,000 listing price point. The two-bed, two-bath rental, which she estimated cost \$2,200 a month, measured about 1,200 square feet, she said.

“Some of these houses that I’m seeing are like 1,000 square footage,” she said.

The Rebeles’ criteria are few: price, location and three bedrooms.

“We should have more opportunities, because we’re not too picky,” she said. “I mean, I’m not looking for something that is an extreme fixer-upper, but I don’t mind replacing carpeting and doing painting and things like that.”

TRYING TO COMPETE BY SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Candice and Joseph Quevedo, both 35, have been renting a one-bedroom apartment in East Islip as they shop for houses. They and their toddler have outgrown their current living situation, Candice Quevedo said — for instance, her 1½-year-old son wants to play outside in a backyard.

The Quevedos have been exploring options from Valley Stream to Calverton, said Candice Quevedo, who grew up in West Babylon and works in Bay Shore. Their asks are conventional: a backyard and “a reasonable amount” of storage space

See HOUSE HUNTING on C10

BUYERS COMPROMISE TO KEEP UP WITH PACE

HOUSE HUNTING from C9

for Christmas decorations.

"My budget in other states would be considered like a normal budget, but for Long Island, it's considered a very low budget," Candice Quevedo said. "One of my previous real estate agents said that my price point is like the new price point for like, dilapidated houses, or houses that are in disrepair."

To prepare themselves for a bidding war, the Quevedos are looking at homes listed for under \$500,000.

"Now, instead of me being able to get a house that's relatively in good shape and we can just sort of move in, I now have to re-manuever all of my requirements," she said. "Maybe we don't do a garage, maybe we don't do a full basement, maybe we do a smaller backyard."

Though they set out to find a three-bedroom house, to include a guest room for visits

from out-of-state family, the Quevedos have tried to make that concession, too.

"You end up being so over-flexible to try to fit into the price points that are on Long Island, and the houses a lot of times are not, they're not even worth the value of where you're even starting, let alone the increased price," Candice Quevedo said.

In May, the Quevedos were on the precipice of becoming homeowners. On May 14, Candice Quevedo said she had scheduled an inspection of a three-bedroom home she described in a Facebook message as "cute but older."

She was right to anticipate a bidding war: it would cost her \$50,000 over asking.

"We want to be able to be competitive, and one of the ways is that you have to be able to just keep offering more and offering more money," Candice Quevedo said in April.

But New York State grants she

was counting on did not come through, and the house needed repair, she said. She and her husband backed out of the deal.

Months earlier, the Quevedos lost a house to a buyer they were told agreed to waive the appraisal, Candice Quevedo said. She had offered to waive the appraisal with a limit, setting a maximum of \$10,000 out of pocket.

To Candice Quevedo, shopping today seems to mean giving away one's buying power, she said. The process feels to her like an auction with secret bids, she said.

"We're willingly overpaying and we're willingly waiving away all of our, any protection that we have in place," she said of today's buyers. "We're waiving inspections, we're waiving the appraisals, and, it's just crazy to me that we're just giving away all our power, and we're playing the game."

Candice Quevedo herself

said she would not waive an inspection.

"I need to know that we're moving into a safe house," she said. "I feel like I wouldn't be a responsible parent if I didn't do the inspection to make sure that there isn't something serious."

ADVICE FROM AGENTS

When she works with buyers, real estate agent Cathleen Dodge tries not to discourage anyone. She asks new clients about their preferred style of home and any specifics they seek; but sometimes, it does not matter much.

"They come with certain expectations, and then I think those expectations are adjusted to the reality of what the market is right now," said Dodge, of Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty.

In a market still saddled with low housing stock and often exorbitant prices, Dodge said

she and her clients are "somewhat limited" by current conditions. Once a prospective buyer identifies a geographic area of interest and a realistic price point, Dodge shows them the available options.

"I obviously know my markets, and I do try to guide them, but I think really it's best learned when we're out there looking at the properties on the market," she said.

Dodge does not need to be the one to dash hopes; clients adjust their own expectations once they get familiar with the market.

"I guess what I'm trying to say nicely is that they can't get too particular about the specifics," she said. "I do ask them what style home they're looking for and this and that, and we do talk about those things, but at the end of the day, I'll show them what comes up in their price range and then they can make a decision."



HOME IMPROVEMENT SPECIALIST



**SIDING
WINDOWS
DOORS
ROOFING
AWNINGS
SUNROOMS
SCREEN ROOMS
DECKS & MORE**

FINANCING AVAILABLE

WHY WENDEL HOME CENTER?

A Trusted Name, Serving Long Island Since 1953.

Family Owned & Operated.



516-746-0460
www.WendelHome.com



\$500 OFF

Minimum Purchase of \$10,000

Must present coupon at time of estimate. Not to be combined with any other offers, prior purchases or discounts. Expires 7/31/25

\$250 OFF

Minimum Purchase of \$5,000

Licensed & Insured Nassau #H18D7900000 Suffolk # H-25761 NYC # 1139433-DCA

VISIT OUR SHOWROOM AT 49 E. JERICHO TPKE, MINEOLA, MON-SAT: 9-5