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## Home away from home

Homeowners rent to Derby guests seeking lavish lodging

By Chris Poynter  
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The Courier-Journal

For as long as the Kentucky Derby has been run, there have been entrepreneurs who've made money from it.

Vendors peddle Derby T-shirts and hats. Restaurants sell box lunches to take to the track. Families near Churchill Downs park cars in their yards: \$10, \$20, \$30 a pop.

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And then there's Pam Vitaz.

She's betting there are plenty of people willing to pay \$6,000, \$10,000, even \$20,000 to stay in some of the city's most spectacular homes in the Cherokee Triangle, Highlands and Old Louisville.

Vitaz started a business --

[rentmyhouse4derby.com](#) -- to match homeowners with those Derby guests.

Banker Matthew Levine, of Charlotte, N.C., discovered Vitaz's Web site and is renting a home in the Original Highlands for \$4,000.

He and several of his college and high school friends from around the nation -- New York City and Chicago, among other places -- will meet in Louisville this spring for their first Derby. "We started looking a month ago for hotels and found there was little or no availability," Levine said. "We were looking at paying \$400 or \$500 a night for a two-star hotel."

Levine, 23, said having his friends converge at a home is ideal.

"You have a barbecue in the backyard, and you have your friends all come over," he said.

Joe and Carole Canepari, who rented their home to Levine, said they were amazed at how quickly their house was snatched -- five hours after it was posted online.

"We thought what a great way ...let people come in and have a good time and to make a little extra money," Joe said.

The Caneparis plan to stay with friends, and since Levine is an investment banker, they aren't worried about the home being damaged, "especially with the kind of money they're coming in and spending."

### Marketing techniques

John Asher, vice president of communications for Churchill Downs, said people always have rented houses for Derby, but it seems Vitaz "has taken it to a new level."

Her Web site features 15 homes -- with the highest-priced house renting for \$75,000.



[+ enlarge](#)

Pam Vitaz is renting her house for the Derby and is helping others who want to do so. She has launched [rentmyhouse4derby.com](#) to match homeowners with guests. "I had a dream that Gwyneth Paltrow called me up and was looking for a house," Vitaz said, laughing. (Photos by Bill Luster, The Courier-Journal)

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### DERBY HOUSING

To rent a house, see [www.rentmyhouse4derby.com](#).

To list your house with Pam Vitaz, e-mail her at [pam@rentmyhouse4derby.com](mailto:pam@rentmyhouse4derby.com). For other home rental sites, see [Louisville.craigslist.org](#) or [eventhomerentals.com](#)

**FOR RENT:**




6,000 square foot mansion overlooking Cherokee Park. Five bedrooms. Swimming pool. Personal chef and valet. Available for Derby week, Wednesday through Sunday. Price: \$20,000.

1908 Italian Renaissance mansion bordered by Cherokee and Seneca parks. Secluded three acres with swimming pool, gardens and kei pond. 35,000 sq ft with two wine cellars. Price: \$75,000 for Derby weekend.

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Some Louisvillians have found different ways to market their homes.

Some post ads on craigslist.com -- a free bulletin board -- and some have used eventhomerentals.com, a national company that lists homes for rent at national events, from the Super Bowl to the Masters.

John Gilderbloom, a University of Louisville professor, is offering his three-bedroom "Painted Lady" Victorian home in the Highlands on eventhomerentals.com for \$2,995 Thursday through Sunday of Derby week.

"I'll make some money and pay the mortgage for four or five months," he said.

He paid \$200 to list his home on the site and provided 10 digital photos so potential renters can take a virtual tour.

"100 Year Old Historic Highlands Area," his ad reads. "Walking distance of Louisville's premiere Restaurants & Bars. Near Cherokee Park."

Brent and Becky Beanblossom, who live off Old Henry Road, are shopping their 4,450-square-foot house for \$2,000 a night on the same Web site.

Brent's brother, Brad, who lives in the Highlands-Douglass Loop area, rented his home last year for \$10,000 and is asking \$11,000 this year.

The Beanblossoms are eager to see if anyone bites on their ad.

"My goal is just to try it," Brent said. "I'm almost out to Oldham County."

He also wanted to test the market for future Louisville events -- the Breeders' Cup this fall and the Ryder Cup in 2008.

### An evolving process

Vitaz's business venture began in late January. While looking for a project to occupy her free time and make some money, she decided to rent her house for Derby.

About the same time, she reconnected with a high school friend who lives in California and is a Web designer.

The friend said he could design a Web site for her house. The project soon took off.

"It kept evolving and evolving and evolving," she said.

For \$50, she lists a house on her site. And, if she finds a tenant, Vitaz receives 10 percent of the rent.

Homeowners provide Vitaz with photos of their home and she writes a short description about the property to post online.

"Elegant older home built in 1908, professionally decorated with French and English antiques," reads the posting for a house on Spring Drive. "Three doors down from the Barnstable Brown party, THE place to be on Derby Eve. Great people-watching from the large front veranda."

Trish Barnstable Brown -- who with her sister throws the annual Derby bash filled with actors, singers and athletes -- said Louisville residents have called her from time to time, offering their homes for rent. But, Brown said, her Derby guests want hotel rooms because they're more convenient and they're only in town for two days, at most.

"People prefer room service, restaurants, bars and all that kind of stuff," she said. "If it was a longer stay, they would consider homes."

In addition to finding housing for guests, Vitaz also will help arrange transportation to and from the track.

If guests want a massage, Vitaz will find a therapist. If they want a restaurant reservation, she'll handle that, too.

She plans to steer all guests to locally owned businesses and restaurants, not chains.

"I'm in love with Louisville," said Vitaz, the mother of four children and the wife of Todd Vitaz, a neurosurgeon. "I'm all about the Keep Louisville Weird campaign and helping support local businesses." Vitaz is asking \$10,000 for her house, on Cherokee Road overlooking the park. She doesn't yet have a renter.

"I had a dream that Gwyneth Paltrow called me up and was looking for a house," Vitaz said, laughing.

### A financial boon



[+ enlarge](#)

Wendy Potempa held her 5-month-old daughter Aubrey in her dining room. Potempa is looking to rent her home for \$6,000.



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This home, which overlooks Cherokee Park, can be rented for \$20,000.

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Vitaz said the business venture is part fun, part financial.

"I have a personal goal to pay off my house," she said. "That is one major motivator."

Eric and Wendy Potempa, who also live on Cherokee Road, are planning to rent their home for \$6,000, Thursday through Sunday of Derby week.

The Potempas and their three children will move in with Wendy's parents in eastern Jefferson County while their house is occupied.

Wendy said uprooting her life for Derby isn't a big deal -- she and her husband will be at the track anyway. And, she said, she doesn't worry about returning to her beloved home to see it trashed. Anyone who can afford to pay \$6,000 isn't likely to wreck her house, she said. Renting the house also has other advantages, besides making money. It's prompted her to clean the house, top to bottom, and complete improvement projects that have lingered.

"That's a bonus for me," she said.

Reporter Chris Poynter can be reached at (502) 582-4475.

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