

## • Apartment hunter

**F**inding an apartment is easy. Finding one you actually want to call home is not.

Want ads don't always accurately reflect the property and amenities — and that's usually all you have to rely on.

Phrases like “Old-World charm” can just as easily mean no one's made improvements or updates to the apartment since 1940.

And “cozy,” most know, really means it'll never fit a party of five.

Chris Muellenbach understands that. That's why he started My Dwelling, a business that links prospective tenants with landlords or property managers.

The idea for the business came when Milwaukee's Muellenbach, 36, worked for Shoreline Real Estate Co. as a building manager and leasing agent. “The part I really enjoyed was the leasing aspect,” he says.

Two-and-a-half years later, after conducting research to find similar businesses that would serve as models and getting his broker's license, Muellenbach launched My Dwelling.

“In 2006, I went live and started looking for clients and apartments,” Muellenbach says.

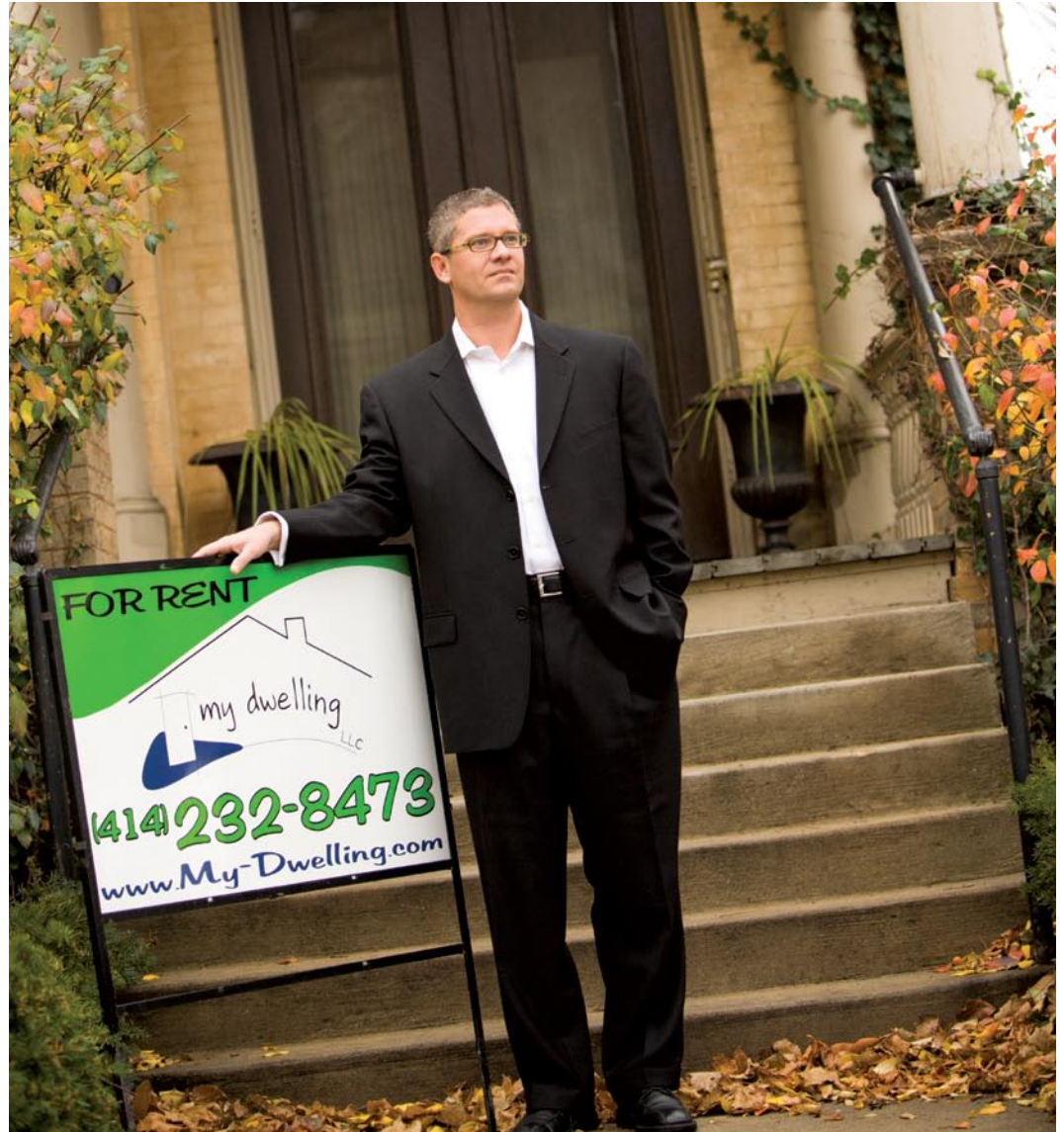
His clients are landlords, whom he meets with first and scopes out their property. If acceptable, Muellenbach provides a write-up and takes photos to advertise to prospective tenants — very much like a real estate agent selling a house.

“Tenants will call on specific apartments I'm advertising,” says Muellenbach, who shows the property at no cost to the tenant. “If that one doesn't work, I can show them others. The tenants love me. When they call, they don't have to call five different landlords to have five different viewings.”

He also helps tenants with the application or lease process, and he does background and credit checks of tenants for the landlords. “From there, the landlord and tenant carry on the relationship,” he says.

Muellenbach says his commission is typically 8 percent of the year's rent, which comes to less than one month's rent. But that's only if Muellenbach makes the deal. “If they secure their own tenants, they owe me nothing,” he says.

There's no price point, either; apartments can be any size and any price. But he is particular about how well the properties he represents are maintained. “I turn down properties if I don't feel I can rent them,” he says. “You can tell that just by the curb appeal. If it's a mess, I just won't touch it.”



*Right now, most of the My Dwelling rental properties — houses, condos or apartments — are downtown. But Chris Muellenbach's hoping word of mouth about his business will broaden his reach.*

Luckily, the Milwaukee apartment market, for the most part, has much to offer.

“I'm fortunate in that I'm working with some great landlords who have great properties,” he says. “The properties sell themselves.”

• **Armada invades Wave** Looking to see soccer stars of the future in action? Milwaukee Wave head coach Keith Tozer has hand-picked a team, the Armada, as a minor league professional affiliate of Milwaukee's top-notch soccer team. The Armada currently is playing an exhibition schedule with other semi-professional teams before select Wave home games — free of charge to Wave ticketholders. See the Armada at 3:30 p.m. at the U.S. Cellular Arena Feb. 13 and 18 and March 18.

— Jordan Dechambre-Childers