

"On the Homefront"

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Buyer Advice for Purchasing a Home

There's a lot of doom and gloom being spread in the media about the housing market and overall turbulent economy. But, if you're in a position to take advantage of falling housing prices, getting a loan and moving forward with a real estate purchase could, in the long run, add strength to your financial portfolio.

However, the rules for getting a loan have changed. Being aware of how this affects you before you find the home that you love, can help you ensure that you're able to buy it. Even though bidding wars aren't as prevalent as they once were, timing and being ready to initiate a well-planned offer are important to the successful closing of a home.

I spoke with New York real estate attorney, Edward Mermelstein, who specializes in connecting clients to real estate opportunities in the US, Russia, Ukraine, and other

emerging markets about buyer advice for qualifying for a loan and how not to end up with a property that's likely to be upside down.

Appraisal is a must. "First and foremost, make sure that the property appraises properly," says Mermelstein. The appraisal determines the true market value of the home. It also shows discrepancies such as if the seller lists an erroneous square footage, the appraisal should reflect the correct figure (which in some cases is less than advertised). Banks, especially these days, use the appraisal to make sure the home appraises at or higher than the requested loan thereby lowering the bank's risk if you default on the loan.

Save, save, save for that down payment. Everyone knows that tighter restrictions are being called for in the real estate lending market, but what that means for each person is different. "The reality of what was taking place about a year ago is totally different from what it is today," he says.

Mermelstein says understanding the bank requirements is vital. Buyers need to know that shopping for a home needs to fit their budget, rather than finding a wonderful place they'd like to live in and then attempting to leverage beyond their means. "Pretty much no income verification doesn't exist anymore. You can't expect to get a 95 percent or 100 percent mortgage on your property -- that's also gone," says Mermelstein.

Check your credit score. "If you don't have a very good credit score, it's going to be difficult in terms of borrowing. Be prepared to give enough information to document your employment and taxes," says Mermelstein. He adds, "Tax returns are seldom, these days, taken from the borrower; the banks will generally request the tax return themselves."

Set contingencies. Making sure that the appraisal comes in at the right price and making sure that you can get financing are two critical aspects of buying a home. Even with a loan approval, there are other factors that can lead to the denial/approval of a loan. Contingencies help to make sure that you don't get locked into a legally-binding contract to purchase a home that you can't get financing for or that doesn't meet the expected appraisal. There are numerous other contingencies that can be set; be sure to discuss them with your real estate agent. Prepare for worst case scenario. Many people use mortgage brokers to arrange their loans but some buyers are going straight to the bank. Mermelstein says if you do that, be sure to stick with the more solid banks "because later on if they do get taken over by somebody or do have financial issues, your loan may become difficult to work on."

He says if you end up in a situation where you need to renegotiate your loan, having your loan with a less-known bank could equate to trouble. "It's much easier to negotiate a loan if your lender still owns the loan. Once it goes into a pool of other loans it becomes close to impossible to negotiate," says Mermelstein.

Always go into the real estate market with the desire to learn as much as you can. Even those who have bought and sold multiple properties frequently discover some aspect of the transaction that causes them to research, talk to experts, and grow their knowledge.

Source: http://realtymtimes.com/rtpages/20090130_buyeradvice.htm



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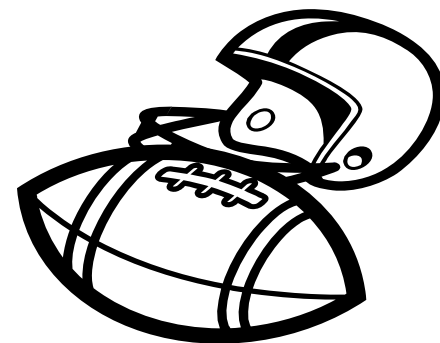
Mortgage Watch

Courtesy of Eric Hamilton Mortgage Consultant
Wells Fargo Home Mortgage
Information Only, Rates subject to change

CONV. 30 Year fixed	5.125%
CONV. 15 Year fixed	4.625%
CONV. 5/1 Arm	4.125%
FHA 30 year fixed	5.500%

What are you waiting for, buy NOW!

APR's vary with each individual loan.



Back to School means
Football...Good Luck to all
the High School Teams!

Back to school: Laptop or netbook?

Smaller netbooks are more portable than most laptops, but laptops have the edge in ergonomics and processing power.

If you're buying a portable computer for school or college use this fall, one of the decisions you'll face is whether to get a larger



laptop or a pint-sized netbook. As we've noted previously, each has its pros and cons—laptops being more powerful with bigger keyboards and mousepads; netbooks being smaller, lighter, and typically cheaper.

The best primary computer for most students is unquestionably a laptop. But it will likely cost you hundreds more than a netbook, especially if you opt for a lighter laptop, which is typically pricier than a comparably-powered, heavier one. However, the benefits outweigh the extra cost. A laptop's superior ergonomics are better suited for extended typing than a netbook's and its greater processing power is essential if you need to crunch a lot of data—in spreadsheets, for example.

However, if you already have a laptop or a desktop and don't own a smart phone with Web access, a netbook might be worth considering as a highly portable secondary computer. Given the ubiquity of free Wi-Fi on college campuses, a netbook can

serve nicely as a mobile connection to the internet and e-mail, as well as a note-taking device. If you do plan to take notes on a netbook, get a model that we rated better on ergonomics; models in our netbook Ratings (available to subscribers) range considerably in the ease of use of their keyboards, mousepads, and other features.

If you're prepared to buy two computers for school or college, there are other options. For example, you might buy a desktop for maximum power at minimal cost in the dorm, and a netbook for when you're on the go. A full-size desktop, with its separate tower, might be too bulky for a bedroom or dorm. An all-in-one desktop—which crams all the computer's circuitry into the monitor—is a better fit and costs less. And, as our desktop Ratings (available to subscribers) show, it should perform comparably to a full-size model.

Using two computers can complicate life a bit. For example, the latest versions of files might be split among the two computers. One way to cope with that is to back up all new files to a single external device, either a USB thumb drive or hard drive. A 16GB memory stick runs about \$30 to \$40; a 250GB hard drive can run \$100 to \$200. Even if you don't need to keep all your files on a single device, backing up all your computers regularly is important; see our advice on backup options. Students and parents: Share back-to-school computer plans, tips, and strategies below.

Source: estatesofsomerfield.com

Quote of the Month:

The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree I planted.

-- Lord Byron

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Areas of Practice

Real Estate, Personal Injury,
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**Fitness Starts by Challenging Your Body**

Now is the time to renew your fitness resolution and get your body in shape for summer. How about challenging yourself to lose weight and tone up?

Whether you've never exercised before or just haven't found a program that is right for you, at Bally Total Fitness(R) you'll find an exercise program that will match your lifestyle and goals, and most importantly, help you achieve success. Whether you want to lose weight or just tone up Bally Total Fitness offers programs that will provide the support, guidance, and motivation you need to help you stick to your plan and see results.

Enjoy the benefits of Personal Training.

Bally(SM) Personal Trainers are experts at creating an individualized program tailored to your specific needs and goals that will help you develop proper exercise habits and achieve sustainable results. Every workout is dynamic and interactive so that you'll get the maximum benefit from your exercise program. Not only will you see and feel results faster, Bally will help you stay motivated along the way with new ways to diversify and freshen up your workout routine.

Get moving with Group Exercise.

Bally offers a variety of innovative, fun and effective Group Exercise classes suitable for beginners and more advanced participants alike - each class includes at least one of the 3 essential components of fitness:

Cardiovascular & Weight Loss Fitness Classes to help you:

- * Burn more calories and fat
- * Boost your metabolism
- * Improve your endurance

Toning & Strength Training Fitness Classes to help you:

- * Reduce body fat
- * Develop and enhances muscle tone

- * Increase muscular strength

- * Improve muscular endurance

Yoga and Pilates Fitness Classes to help you:

- * Improve flexibility
- * Develop muscle tone and definition
- * Improve strength
- * Enhance coordination
- * Learn breathing techniques for relaxation
- * Reduce stress
- * Prevent injuries

There are so many Group Exercises classes to try for a new and exciting way to get totally fit, with so many benefits to help you:

- * Work out longer and more consistently with a professional instructor leading the way.
- * Make fitness fun by learning new exercises and techniques.
- * Stay motivated by working out with other people.
- * Bring structure and discipline to achieve your goals with a set class schedule.
- * Meet new people and make new friends!

Remember, the best exercises are the ones you enjoy, since you are likely to do those most often – so plan on doing what you like and having fun doing it!

Source: estatesofsomerfield.com

Did you know...

The tomato is the world's most popular fruit. And yes, it is a fruit, not a vegetable. Tomatoes are rich in vitamins A and C and fibre, and are cholesterol free.

**Another Did you know...**

A house fly lives only 14 days.

The oldest breed of dog is the Saluki.

Decrease Your Home's Carbon Footprint and Save

Let's face it, the earth needs our help and families everywhere are looking for ways to help out. Recycling, driving less and bringing reusable bags to the grocery stores are great ways to reduce your family's carbon footprint, but did you know there are things you can do to reduce the impact your home has on the environment, not to mention your wallet?

Hannah Keeley, lifestyle expert and host of the PBS program 'Hannah, Help Me!' offers energy efficiency tips that can yield big returns for your home, your budget and the earth.

Fill in the cracks.

Never underestimate the power of weatherproofing your home. Check all windows and doors for drafty areas. Caulking holes and cracks will keep your home from bleeding heat, not to mention prevent your hard-earned dollars and cents from leaking out of the house.

Or consider replacing your existing doors with more energy-efficient fiberglass options. Therma-Tru fiberglass doors offer five times the insulation value of wood, which will do a world of good in creating a more energy-efficient home.

Use less.

A seemingly obvious solution is to simply use less energy. Raising your thermostat a few degrees during the spring and summer months translates into big savings in both energy usage and utility bills. A programmable thermostat will automatically adjust your thermostat throughout the day, helping to control the temperature of your home even if you're miles away.

Lighting accounts for almost 20 percent of the average homeowner's monthly electric bill, but many people overlook this key opportunity to save energy and money.

To reduce lighting bills, homeowners can choose lighting controls from Lutron Electronics. An incandescent bulb dimmed by 25 percent will use 25 percent less electricity and last four times longer than a bulb that has not been dimmed. Even better, dimmers allow homeowners to set the right light level for the mood and activity in a room.

Consider a dual-fuel system.

Installing a part-electric, part-gas hybrid heating and cooling system provides more control over your home's energy usage by automatically sensing and operating in the most economical mode. For example, as outdoor temperature increases throughout the day, the Heritage Hybrid (TM) comfort system from American Standard Heating & Air Conditioning will use an electric heat pump to efficiently cool your indoor air. When the weather turns cooler and heating with natural gas becomes more efficient, the furnace takes over. With a hybrid comfort system, you can save some serious cash -- even when confronted with unpredictable utility costs.

Make smarter choices.

Choosing the right home appliances is vital as well. No matter which room of the house we're talking about -- the kitchen, laundry room or otherwise -- an outdated or inefficient unit can drain your bank account and increase carbon emissions. To combat this, look for Energy Star certified appliances that way you know you're getting the most energy efficient products available.

Thankfully, increasing your home's energy efficiency doesn't have to be hard work or a strain on your pocketbook. By making a few smart choices, you can sit back and rest, in comfort, knowing you are doing your part to help reduce your home's carbon footprint.

Source: estatesofsomerfield.com