

H YOUR HOME



Summer Vacation: Burglarproof Your Home Before You Leave

Summer will probably find your home empty more than any other season, between weekend trips to the beach and longer family vacations. To guard your home against break-ins while you're away, make it look like you haven't left, says The National Crime Prevention Council.

Put several household lights on timers, and set them to turn on and off at appropriate times to create the illusion that someone's home. Keep shades and blinds in their normal positions. In addition, if you're going on a long trip, stop mail and newspapers and arrange to have the grass mowed while you're gone. You may even want to put a radio on a timer.

Before you leave, also check all your door and window locks to make sure they're in working order — and use them. Each external door should have a sturdy, well-installed dead-bolt lock. As you head out the door, activate your alarm system if you have one. Then enjoy your holiday, knowing your home is secure. ■



HANDLING LOW OFFERS

Selling your house may leave you feeling vulnerable: Not only is your house a huge financial asset, but you have strangers peeping in your closets, appraisers judging your home's value and inspectors noting its flaws. A low offer in the midst of all of this can seem like a personal affront. However, no matter how well you have prepared your house or how certain you are that it's priced fairly, receiving a low offer is a possibility. Prepare yourself ahead of time to not take it personally. Instead of falling into a grudge match, do one of two things: Reject the offer, or counter it and move on.

If you do decide to counter the offer, try to get as much information as you can about why the offer came in at the price it did. While the buyer's agent will not disclose information that may put his or her client at a disadvantage, take any information you can get to help you structure the counteroffer. ■

Pre-approval Letters: Good Idea for Buyers

If you're thinking of buying a house, you've probably been advised to get a mortgage pre-approval letter from a lender. Despite the mountain of paperwork involved, it's a smart idea for many reasons.

You can call up a lender any time, answer a few questions about your financials and get a pre-qualification letter. To receive pre-approval, however, the lender will require the documentation to verify what you say. Thus, pre-approval carries more weight than the pre-qualification.

The information that lenders

verify also allows them to accurately calculate the maximum mortgage amount you qualify for. Knowing exactly how much money you can borrow is a great benefit of pre-approval; you may be surprised by the figure, which is difficult to translate from the monthly mortgage payments you think you can make.

Just as you will be more confident knowing you are able to obtain a mortgage, so will the owners of the home you want. A pre-approval letter is a good bargaining tool that may help you get a better price on the home of your dreams and may make you the winning bidder when several people are vying for the same home. ■



Sellers: Start Cleaning Up NOW

It's possible to get your home ready for sale quickly, but it's so much easier when you have time to plan. Whether you own a small condo or mansion, a clean, uncluttered home will sell quickly and for a higher price. You can start cleaning now. Here are three things the family can do to get the home ready for sale well in advance:

Clean the garage. Open old latex paint cans and allow the paint to dry. Then just toss them in the trash. Take any hazardous materials to an approved disposal center.

Sort through old clothes. Be ruthless! Have you worn something in the last 12 months? If not, donate it.

Pare down paper files. Keep essential business and personal records, but recycle duplicate copies and nonessential matter.

These chores can easily take up a weekend, so it's best to do them well in advance. ■

WHY USE A CRS?

Buying and selling real estate is a complex matter. At first it might seem that by checking local home guides or online sites you could quickly find the right home at the right price.

But a basic rule in real estate is that all properties are unique. No two properties — even two of the same models on the same street — are exactly alike. Homes differ and so do contract terms, financing options, inspection requirements and closing costs.

In this maze of forms, financing, inspections, marketing, pricing and negotiating, it makes sense to work with a professional who knows the community and much more. A CRS Designation behind a REALTOR®'s name means that person has extensive experience and training — and has been certified as a specialist in residential real estate sales. ■

HOMEOWNERSHIP RATE HITS RECORD HIGH

Census Bureau data show that there are more homeowners in America now than at any time in history. The 2002 annual homeownership rate was 67.9 percent, up 0.1 percent from the previous record posted in 2001. In the fourth quarter of 2002, a new all-time national homeownership record was set at 68.3 percent, up 0.3 percent from both the third quarter of 2002 and the fourth quarter of 2001.



"Increasing homeownership, particularly among minorities, is a priority for the Bush Administration," said HUD Secretary Mel Martinez. "The increase in new homeowners demonstrates that we are moving in the right direction toward reaching our goal of adding 5.5 million new homeowners by the end of the decade." ■

Do you know someone who is thinking about buying or selling a home? PLEASE MENTION MY NAME.

This newsletter is for informational purposes only and should not be substituted for legal or financial advice.

If you are currently working with another real estate agent or broker, it is not a solicitation for business.

