

In Touch With BOB

November, 2008

“Making Friends One Home at a Time”

Volume 3 Issue 3

Kristopher & Co. Real Estate 865-584-5599

Bob@BobEvridge.com

www.BobEvridge.com

865-660-0198

Elections, families — and thankfulness

As the month (and the year) come to a close, it is time to sit down with our families and remember why we are thankful.

I am especially thankful for all of the new friends I have made through real estate this year. I have met some of the finest and most interesting people in the world. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to help friends in accomplishing their dreams.

*This is your country. It is the greatest country in history and the world. One of the reasons is that we can change our government peacefully and make it meet the needs of the people. It can only be done through voting. It is your responsibility and mine to do so. **DON'T FORGET!***

At this writing, we don't know who the new president will be. We don't know the outcome of many political and economic issues. Whatever the results, we will get behind him and the rest of our government to continue the legacy begun over 200 years ago, until we change the government again, in two and four years, through our peaceful ballot.

Families all over America will soon gather together for fun, food, football, and, I hope, a moment of thankfulness for what we share as families and as a nation. May we always be mindful and grateful for the prosperity and freedom we enjoy.

Bob

Housing bill affects some reverse mortgages

If you are in good health and planning to stay in your home for a number of years, a reverse mortgage can be an excellent way to add some cash to your retirement.

Recently, Congress approved the 2008 Hope for Homeowners bill, making some changes in loan limits that might make reverse mortgages more attractive to seniors.

A reverse mortgage is a loan against your home that doesn't have to be paid back if you live in the house. You have to be age 62 or older to take advantage of the loan, which gives you cash for the equity in your home. In 2007, more than 100,000 such loans were made to seniors who

wanted to add a little gold to their golden years.

The new housing law, passed in July with a starting date of October, allowed for a new, higher national loan limit of \$417,000 on mortgages, but in some high cost areas that limit could be as high as \$625,000. This higher limit might make a

reverse mortgage more attractive to seniors with more expensive properties.

But the reverse mortgage is not just instant cash, it is also instant cash -- with strings. Homeowners pay a variety of fees before getting the mortgage (which can pay them in installments, lump sums or credit lines) and these fees can be pricey. The new housing bill reduces the maximum fee to 2 percent on the initial \$200,000 of the home's value and 1 percent on the balance thereafter with a cap of \$6,000. This fee may not always be this high so you should shop around before deciding on a lender. Other fees include closing costs, service fees, mortgage insurance premiums, and interest rates.

To qualify for a reverse mortgage you must discuss the loan with a nonprofit or public agency approved counselor. You can find a local housing counseling agency by calling 800-569-4287.

Remember, about 63 percent of reverse mortgage shoppers decide against the loan. There are some good reasons for that. For one thing, you must be healthy enough to stay in the home. If you leave it for 12 months to go to a nursing home, for example, the loan becomes due. You must also be able to keep the property up. If you can't do so physically or financially, the loan will also become due. In addition, the high fees often discourage loan applicants.



What is a REO?, see page 2



Ask the Expert



Q What is a REO?

Occasionally homebuyers will look at a property listed as REO, a term that might be a bit puzzling.

REO stands for Real Estate Owned and refers to the inventory of real estate that banks and mortgage companies own as a result of foreclosure.

Since REO properties are those that the lender has taken back, they often have unique problems. For one thing, such properties typically need repairs. Owners who lose their homes usually go through a period when they can't afford even simple repairs.

For another thing, it can take some time to negotiate a deal for an REO. You can expect that after you make an offer, the response will take longer than normal. However, you might be able to find some good bargains on these properties and buying one can be worth the wait.

Lenders maintain databases of their REOs. Google "REO databases" to find a list online.

On November 11 of 2008, we honor the men and women who have defended us, including veterans of Korea, Vietnam, and particularly our most recent group of veterans, those who served in Afghanistan and Iraq.

We don't want to honor them as a group, but as individuals. For each who put his or her life on the line, it was a very personal experience. For those recovering from the effects of war, it is very much an individual experience.

Our veterans today are everyday men and women. We know them as friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers. They have persevered and strengthened our country with their sacrifices and contributions, many of which were beyond duty's call. Veterans are our finest citizens.

In 2007 Gordon Mansfield, acting secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, reminded us of the solemn pledge of Abraham Lincoln made during his second inaugural address in 1865. He set fourth our obligation to care for those injured in body and spirit in their defense of our nation and for their families. In part, Lincoln said:

"As God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in ...to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace."

Thank You Veterans Everywhere!

Can you use solar power?

Thinking of installing some sort of solar power for your home? Wondering whether a home you might buy would accommodate solar?

One Web site can help you evaluate whether solar is feasible for your roof and help you compare costs.

Roofray.com cleverly uses satellite images to help users see for themselves how useful solar arrays might be. The easy solar modeling service even lets you compare utility costs over time.

Users simply type in their street address and nearly instantly a rooftop picture of their home appears. Then a few point-and-clicks later you quickly get an estimated percentage of potential for solar, power per square foot, the area of the solar arrays you drew and a total peak power estimate.

Have your utility bills for the year in hand and you can get an estimate of current costs versus solar costs.

Launched in August 2008, the Web site is up and running but some aspects are still being upgraded or even under construction. At this writing there is no useful help section, but check the blog link for updates on what features will be added.

Speaking of holiday safety

Prevent fires: Each year, holiday season fires take hundreds of lives, injure thousands of people, and cost millions in damage. To keep safe this year:

- * Add water to a live tree's stand every day. Discard the tree when it dries out.
- * Use holiday lights that don't have cracked cords or sockets. Check instructions for the number of strands that can be hooked together.
- * Don't leave candles unattended.

Travel smarts: Have the car serviced and checked out well before starting. Tell others where you will be and when to expect your return.

- * Don't forget the cellphone charger.
- * Carry jumper cables or a battery charger, a big flashlight and some hand tools. Have an empty one-gallon gas can, paper towels and disposable ponchos in your vehicle. Bring water and snacks for yourself and your passengers.
- * In a cold climate, have blankets and extra clothes available. Have a small shovel in case you get stuck in snow.
- * When parking, put valuables away.

Shopping savvy: Park in a well-lighted area and secure your vehicle.

- * If you carry packages to your car, don't lock them in the trunk and leave. Drive to another store or to another parking space before continuing to shop.
- * Wear shoes with non-slip soles.

Food safety: The American Dietetic Association says there's no need to cool leftovers before you put them in the refrigerator. Warm food won't raise the temperature in the refrigerator.

If you leave food out at room temperature, guests could later snack on it and get sick.

Hope for Homeowners

Q How does the 2008 Hope for Homeowners legislation help homeowners?

A Many homeowners trapped in high-cost, variable rate mortgages are suffering because their payments are going up and becoming unaffordable. Since property values are going down, many of them have actually lost equity and they can't refinance. Some of these people may now be able to cancel their old mortgage loans and replace them with fixed-rate loans for up to 90 percent of the home's current value. Not everyone will be eligible for this because the banks that made the loans would have to accept a loss on the old mortgage. Banks would benefit by avoiding a costly foreclosure.

Q - Can you tell me who is eligible for this program?

A - The main eligibility rule is that homeowners must be able to pay their new, refinanced mortgage based on HUD rules of mortgage financing. Besides that, eligible borrowers are those that have to spend more than 31 percent of their monthly incomes on their mortgages as of March 31, 2008. The loan must have originated no later than Jan. 1, 2008. The homeowner must show he did not intentionally miss mortgage payments. Finally, the home that you want refinanced must be the only home you own.

Q - When does the program start?

A - The law goes into effect Oct. 1 and runs through September 2011. But if you think you might be eligible for the program, you want to have your eligibility assessed as soon as possible. Contact your local HUD-approved counseling agency or Hope Now Alliance (888-995-HOPE).

Q - What can homeowners do to increase the chance that they will be eligible for the program?

A - Remember lenders can choose which loans to refinance. You can check with the lender who has your mortgage, but don't expect a quick response and don't expect a windfall. The lender might take weeks to decide if it will choose your loan to refinance.

One thing you do NOT want to do is get behind on your mortgage payments. According to Dan Seiver, a finance professor, "Turning yourself into a financial basket case is not going to work. If you turn into a complete deadbeat, the servicer is going to just foreclose and dump (your property.)"

Another thing you can do is closely track your expenses and income and project your cash flow for six months. This should give yourself better control of your finances.

Q - What if I refinance and then sell my home?

A - Congress has not created a windfall freebie for homeowners in trouble. If you sell during the next five years, you have to agree to share half the profits from the resale with the government. Remember, by refinancing under this scheme, you refinance 90 percent of the value of the house. You could say, therefore, that you have 10 percent equity. But this equity must be repaid. In the first year after a sale, the homeowner would have zero equity from a sale. The amount rises 10 percent in each succeeding year and caps at 50 percent from a sale in year five and thereafter.

Q - Where can I read about the housing bill?

A - http://banking.senate.gov/public/_files/HousingandEconomicRecoveryActSummary.pdf. The FHA's Web site at <http://www.fha.gov> is a place to watch for updated information. The entire 694-page bill is at http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/financialsvcs_dem/

HOME DESIGN



3-dimensional wallpaper

Swedish designer Hanna Nyman is developing a series of 3-D textured wallpaper. Users can peel back sections of the flowered wallpapers to create a custom look. The wallpaper may not yet be commercially available. Contact the designer at hannanyman.se

Gotcha

A strong young man at a construction site was bragging that he could outdo anyone in a feat of strength. He made a special case of making fun of one of the older workmen. After several minutes, the older worker had enough.

"Why don't you put your money where your mouth is," he said. "I will bet a week's wages that I can haul something in a wheelbarrow over to that building and you won't be able to wheel it back.

"You're on, old man," the braggart replied. "Let's see you do it."

The old man grabbed the wheelbarrow, nodded to the young man, and said, "All right, get in!"

It happened in Texas

After digging to a depth of 10 feet, New York scientists found traces of copper wire. They concluded that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 100 years ago.

Not to be outdone, a California archaeologist dug 20 feet. Shortly after, a headline in the LA Times read: "California archaeologists find traces of 200-year-old copper wire." They concluded that their ancestors had a high-tech communications network a hundred years earlier than New York did.

One week later, a Texas newspaper, reported: After digging 30 feet in his pasture, Bubba Mitchell, a self-taught archaeologist, found absolutely nothing. He has concluded that 300 years ago, Texas had already gone wireless.

The only thing that stands between a person and what they want in life is the will to try it and the faith to believe it possible.

Rich Devos

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Anonymous

There is more to life than increasing its speed.

Mahatma Gandhi

Move out of your comfort zone. You can only grow if you are willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new.

Brian Tracy

Be careful of the environment you choose for it will shape you. Be careful of the friends you choose, for you will become like them.

W. Clement Stone

The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between political parties either, but through every human heart.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

Marcel Proust

Money-giving is a good criterion of a person's mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill people.

Dr. Karl Menninger

We aren't what we ought to be. We aren't what we're going to be. We aren't what we want to be, and we aren't what we will be. But thank God we aren't what we were.

Anonymous

Believe in yourself, and there will come a day when others will have no choice but to believe with you.

Cynthia Kersey

Why the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree may last longer than yours

It's not easy to choose a specimen that will become the most famous Christmas tree in America. Each year in the fall, David Murbach surveys growing areas from a helicopter to make his choice for the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree. It must be huge and beautiful.

For his own tree, Murbach doesn't make the selection by helicopter. He buys from a street vendor about two weeks before Christmas. Outdoor trees stay fresh longer because it's cold, Murbach says, but cut trees dry out much faster when they are in warm interior rooms.

He doesn't search for the perfect tree, because one with a flat side can be put against a wall to save space.

Rather than asking for a fresh square cut, Murbach asks the vendor to cut the tree trunk to a point, making more of the trunk available to water in the stand. The tree drinks more, stays fresh and holds its needles longer.

It is now customary to light outdoor Christmas decorations on Thanksgiving Day or shortly thereafter. There are beautiful artificial trees that could be lighted indoors at that time.

If your decorating choice is a real tree, it's better to wait a while before buying one. Let it soak in water over night before setting it up. The fresh-tree aroma makes it more festive.

The Rockefeller Lighting Ceremony is typically held in the third week of November. If you want to see the ceremony in person or on television, call (212) 632-3975 for this year's date.

It's not too late to get yours

Good protection predicted for 2008 flu shots

Though October is the recommended month for flu shots, November and even December can provide protection. January is the peak month for influenza, but cases continue to appear as late as May, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The 2008 formula protects against three new strains of the influenza virus. It includes the two Australian strains that showed up late last year and the type B virus first seen in Florida in 2006.

Each year, up to 35,000 Americans die from the flu and its complications. Getting a flu shot significantly reduces the risk of being infected.

Everyone who wants to avoid one to two weeks of misery should get a shot. Children under age 5 and adults with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, chronic bronchitis or heart disease are at high risk for complications. Immunization is especially important for them and for people who work in hospitals, nursing homes and clinics.

The flu shot usually causes no reaction. Some people experience tenderness at the injection site. A few report traces of flu-like symptoms for a day or two, but you can't get the flu from a flu shot.



"I think this politician can be bought."

Alternative heat sources

Wood stoves and pellet stoves are in style as demand increases

You can still see wood stoves in cabins, family rooms and workshops. More than ever, they are appearing in beautiful homes and finding their way into the living room. Whether or not there is a fire burning behind their glass doors, they are a handsome room addition with their brass legs and attractive firebox designs.

They save heating costs. With high energy prices, they especially save money if the owner has a lot of trees or can find trees to cut up. In that case, sweat is the main price of heating.

Dealers say sales of wood stoves are up 250 percent over last year.

Pellet stoves are becoming the alternative heat source of choice. They run partly on electricity and use sawdust capsules the size of rabbit food as the main fuel.

They are clean burning and convenient. After pouring pellets into the hopper, the fire lights when a button is pushed. At Home Depot, sales of pellet stoves are about six times the level of 2007 sales.

The national average price for pellet fuel is about \$250 per ton, according to the Wall Street Journal. It takes about three tons annually to heat the average home if the stove is its main heat source.

Open fireplaces are cozy but pull heat out of the house and up the chimney. Gas-burning inserts are a better choice. All stoves and inserts must pass EPA standards for low emissions.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration predicts that the average household will spend 20 percent more this winter on natural gas, propane and electricity. The price of heating oil could rise by 31 percent.

Get real, get better: Do one thing at a time

Multitasking is not a four-letter word: It has 12 letters. In spite of that, it's a word that has developed a bad reputation.

Workers used to be proud that they could talk on the phone and read email at the same time. People they were talking to knew they weren't paying full attention, and relationships were tarnished.

Dave Crenshaw, in his book, *The Myth of Multitasking: How 'Doing it All' Gets Nothing Done*, technology has evolved, but the brain has not. It still does one thing at a time, rapidly switching back and forth making it less-effective at both tasks.

When people work on two things at once, they often have to retrace their steps in order to correct mistakes. No time saved there.

Edward Hallowell, MD an attention deficit specialist says it's like playing tennis with two balls. Your game is not as good as it would be with one ball.

Talking on a cellphone while driving is one of the worst multitasks. Studies show it takes longer to get where you're going. It's dangerous, and has resulted in many accidents. That is why some states have outlawed talking and driving at the same time.

How to avoid overindulging at the big feast

It's the holiday season, a time to eat, drink and be merry. But with a strategy of your own, you could avoid having to loosen your belt mid-way through and wondering how you will lose the typical 6 or 7 pounds you could gain this year.

These common-sense tips can help.

- * Don't go there hungry. Eat before you leave home so you won't overload your plate because you feel starved.
- * Watch the alcohol. It's high-calorie and impairs judgment. The more you drink, the more you'll eat.
- * Check the table or buffet line to determine what you really like and what you can skip. Focus on fruit and vegetables, unless the vegetables are swimming in cheese. Look for good foods that aren't high in fat. Skip the bread at first so you have more room for the good stuff.
- * At a buffet, fill your own dish so you can choose what you want and your dish won't be overloaded.
- * For baked potatoes and sweet potatoes, avoid the butter, cheese and bacon. Look for low-fat sour cream or yogurt.
- * When you're finally ready to eat, start with the fruits and vegetables. Eat slowly. Be sociable. Visit while you eat so you won't just be shoveling in the food.
- When it comes to dessert, take the smallest piece. If you must sample two desserts, just take a few bites of each. After dinner, take a walk and invite family members to go with you. It's fun, burns a few calories, and helps to relieve that full feeling.

Great American Smokeout! November 20

In spite of all health warnings, more than a quarter of Americans still smoke cigarettes or cigars. If you're among them and you want to quit, as almost all smokers do, The Great American Smokeout on Nov. 20 provides an ideal target date.

For tips and advice on how to quit, visit www.quitsmokingsupport.com/americansmokeout.

Make scenes with Photosynth

Microsoft has released a service that turns multiple photos of a scene or site, like a building or gallery, into a 3-D scene you can virtually walk through on the Web.

Photosynth allows anyone to create a "synth" using digital pictures they already have. Just figure out which ones overlap. Even pictures taken by different people with different cameras can be used. The software analyzes the pictures, figures which ones overlap in what order, and creates a 3-D synth.

The service is free and is entirely based on the Web at photosynth.net. At the site, you can view your own synths and all the synths created by other users.

Photosynth works using a small plug-in you install. It only works with Microsoft Windows or Firefox. No Macs, please.

It takes some skill to get a set of photos the service can match up well, which Microsoft calls being "synthy." After you upload your pictures, the service does its best with each set to create the scene.

November 2008

- Traditional birthstone: yellow topaz, citrine
- Mystical birthstone: pearl
- Ayurvedic birthstone: topaz
- Flower: yellow chrysanthemum
- Chinese Floral Emblem: gardenia
- Sun Signs: Scorpio / Sagittarius

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			Use Common Sense Day			1 Back to standard time!
2 Cookie Monster Day	3 Plan Your Epitaph Day	4 	5 Guy Fawkes' Day	6 National Men Make Dinner	7 Notary Public Day	8 Tongue Twister Day
9 Go To Art Museum Day	10 Forget-Me-Not Day	11 	12 National Sunday Day	13 World Kindness Day	14 World Diabetes Day	15 Clean Out Refrigerator Day
16 Road Traffic Victims Day	17 Homemade Bread Day	18 Mickey Mouse Day	19 Education Support Professionals Day	20 Great American Smokeout	21 World Hello Day	22 National Adoption Day
23 National Cashew Day	24 D. B. Cooper Day	25 National Parfait Day	26 National Cake Day	27 	28 Buy Nothing Day	29 National Chocolates Day
30 National Mousse Day			 FANTASY OF TREES CONVENTION CENTER			
AMERICAN DIABETES MONTH						

Hassled and harried?

Get more done with this good advice

Facing a day's work or one big project can be daunting. With so much to accomplish in a limited time, the early plan is a vital starting point.

Making a list is a well-known strategy. It sounds simple, but deciding what to include can be tricky.

The all-day list shows tasks, large and small, that you want to accomplish that day. Numbering them in the order of importance or when you will do them can help. It's OK to include small tasks. You won't forget to do one, and crossing them off makes you realize that you're moving forward.

The project list is different. It helps you think on paper. Adviser Brian Tracy says working from a detailed list keeps you on track. The visual record of accomplishment and constantly referring to it can increase your productivity by 25 percent or more. Be disciplined in your approach, he cautions.

For a project, Tracy says you should regularly ask yourself these questions:

What am I trying to do? Clearly define the goal and outcome. If you are working with others, make sure everyone

knows the desired results.

What are my assumptions? Alec McKinzie, author of *The Time Trap* says, "Errant assumptions lie at the root of most failures." What are your assumptions about the market, the actions of others, and the underlying motives of key players?

What if what you believe turns out to be not true? Always be willing to question your most cherished assumptions. Decide what you will have to do differently if your current approach fails.

A written plan of action, says Tracy, is the key to high productivity. Every minute you spend planning will save you as many as 10 minutes in execution.

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
 Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.
 Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
 Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.
 Patience and determination alone are omnipotent.

Calvin Coolidge



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