

A Tough Place to Buy Your First Home, But They Did!

A Success Story for Yvonne Fish and Family

by Yvonne Messmer

Yvonne Fish and her daughter Christine, son-in-law Nathan and granddaughter used to live in a two-bedroom rental in Portland. It was pretty small and life was not comfortable for the four of them. Then Christine got pregnant and they decided it was time for change.

Yvonne has worked for the BIA for the past several years. The Portland housing market has been a difficult one in which to buy a house because of inflated housing prices. Housing just costs more in a big metropolitan city.

To a first-time homebuyer who doesn't have a lot to put down on a home, this may seem like an impossible market to buy in. That is why there are organizations like Portland Community Land Trust (PCLT) and HOST Development. The NAYA (Native American Youth and Family) Center also has started homebuyer programs that help first-time homebuyers realize their dreams.

In this past year, NAYA and PCLT teamed up on a pot of funding they received for a special program – and that is where Yvonne met her partners.

Yvonne's family attended a short informative meeting put on by NAYA and PCLT that described the special program. Even though this family didn't know how to buy a home or what step came next, they decided that homeownership was their goal.

They signed up to take a homebuying class. This gave them a good foundation from which to work. They started to understand the concepts, who their partners might be and the language everyone was speaking.

Then they signed up for the NAYA and PCLT program and also for the Siletz Down Payment Assistance Program. NAYA and Siletz have worked together for the past three years with Siletz Tribal members who live in the Portland area.

NAYA and PCLT's special program allows participants who qualify to purchase their first home at a drastically reduced price. The home can be located anywhere in Portland. Essentially, PCLT purchases the land and the buyer purchases the home, which makes the purchase price much more affordable.

Finding the Right Home

Next on Yvonne's list was finding the right home for her and her family. They needed to be close to Yvonne's work, shopping and transit lines. This is when PCLT introduced Host Development to Yvonne's family.

HOST (Home Ownership a Street at a Time) is a non-profit corporation in Portland dedicated to providing home ownership opportunities for working individuals and families. One of the available homes HOST had at the time just happened to fit Yvonne's needs. In fact, it thrilled the whole family.

After going to classes, signing documents, viewing homes, making phone calls, always watching their budgets and paying their bills down, this family was

ready to close. I recently interviewed Yvonne about her experience. I think this will give you insight on the path this family chose to take and the benefits they received.

I know there have been several partners involved in your transaction. Can you tell me who they are?

Homestreet Bank – loan to purchase the home

HOST Development – built the new green home and provided \$5,000 closing cost assistance

NAYA – homebuyer education and \$70,000 down payment assistance

PCLT – transferred the home into the land trust and reduced purchase price

CTSI – \$15,000 down payment assistance

I know your new home is brand new. Can you tell me a little about it?

The house has four bedrooms and two bathrooms. There is one bedroom and one bathroom downstairs; three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, totaling 1,636 square feet, including a utility (laundry) room upstairs. The house came equipped with a dishwasher, microwave oven, refrigerator, stove and a gas fireplace. Best of all, it's totally green, meaning it's environmentally friendly and used energy-efficient building materials

Is your new home close to services and your work?

It's great, even closer (in time) than my previous house. The TriMet bus stop is at the beginning of the street. I take one bus and the MAX. There is a major food store chain and drug store, plus an auto parts store and a gas station within a mile. Access to the I-205 freeway is about two miles

Was this a confusing process for you and your family? If so, was there help from your partners getting through the maze?

Not so much confusing as it was overwhelming because you don't realize all the things there are to do. A good tip is to make a list to help you remember and accomplish everything. I had enormous assistance from all partners involved in this achievement. They made countless calls and sent e-mails to one another that helped accelerate the process significantly. I believe all partners formed a total support group; they were available anytime to answer questions or to give direction/advice.

How long had you lived in your last home?

Too long – 21½ years without any improvements to the house in all those years from the owner. And to top it off, rent went from \$300 to \$500 to \$800 and finally \$900 a month.

Are you glad you are now a homeowner?

Actually, thrilled would be a better word. It was like receiving a windfall or perhaps winning the lottery. One month you're living in a house that leaks every

time it rains; a basement that floods when it rains hard, making it impossible to do laundry; plus one of the leaks goes right on the phone outlet. All four of us lived in a two-bedroom house that had one closet and one bathroom. And then suddenly you're moving into a brand new, never-lived-in four-bedroom house, each with its own closet, two full bathrooms and that has a fenced community play area for the kids with benches and a picnic table. Timing is everything. I wouldn't have believed a year ago I would be moving to a new home. I also am looking toward having more secure circumstances for years to come.

What do you consider the three best things about being a homeowner?

Security, knowing that this is my very own home, rent won't be changing and I don't have to be worried the landlords may ask me to move.

Building a future for my extended family and having equity, which will mean security.

I can make changes to my home without consulting or getting permission from anyone.

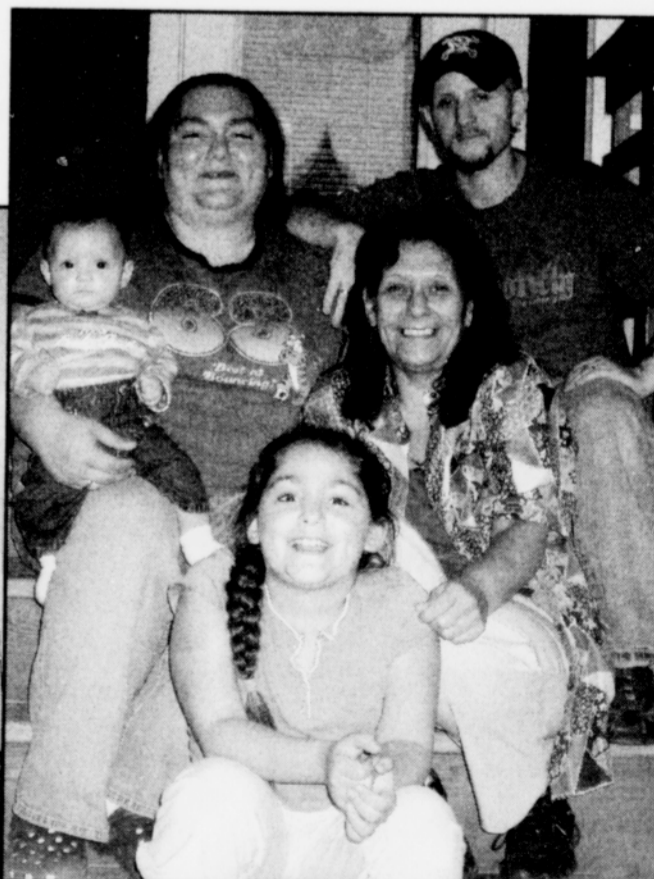
If you could give others advice, what would be the three most important things to do before they start looking for a home to buy?

1. Devise/revise a budget for the entire family.
2. Pay off as much debt as you can.
3. Start a savings account to put money away faithfully every month toward your future.

How important do you think it is for people to have good credit, pay their bills on time and live within their means?

Extremely important – it should be your top priority if you want to be heading for a better life and security by moving toward the goal of owning a house. A good way to start is by composing a list of priorities that focus on how to achieve homeownership.

Right photo: Yvonne (middle right), daughter Christine, son-in-law Nathan and the grandchildren sit on the front steps of their new home (below).



If you choose to sell this home and buy another one someday, do you think you and your family will feel comfortable and capable of doing that?

Absolutely. I have been given all the necessary tools through attending classes and involvement with knowledgeable people and agencies that were there for me, I learned essential information and gained confidence in myself.

What was the first thing you and your family did when you got your new home?

We set up house rules:

Everyone needs to be responsible for picking up after themselves.

We made a pact to share house duties such as dishes, laundry, clean the bathrooms, be sure to conserve energy by keeping the lights off if not using them, the doors/windows shut so heating/cooling isn't wasted.

We made a list of all the things we had and needed at our new house that we didn't have at the old house.

Yvonne's closing comments:

Everyone (in our family) is extremely happy that we now have our own home and we wish to thank everyone who was a part of this amazing endeavor. It is possible to achieve your dream, don't give up and be appreciative of those who are willing to assist and are able to help you reach your goal. Thank you all!

If homeownership is one of your goals, please contact me in the Tribe's Salem Area Office. I can help you understand what you need to do to reach your goals. There might even be additional programs you can access once you are ready to buy.

Getting ready by paying off bills and having good credit is absolutely essential. Everyone can get there by making the right choices. All me today at 503-390-9494 or toll free at 888-870-9051.