Potential condo buyers need to ask questions

G.E. Bud Felton,
Sales associate
Century 21 Columbia Realty

If you are becoming interested in condominiums, I hope you may find the following information helpful to you. It is the result of my being a condo owner for nearly 14 years, of being involved in the management of condos for nearly 10 years, and of being a Realtor involved in the sale of condos for more than seven years.

What follows is a list of questions asked most frequently and answers to them.

• How do condos compare with houses in price?"

Condominiums vary in style, size, quality and price just as single family homes, but the price of a condo has to cover the cost of the amenities and services included with the living unit.

For example, a condo could be a very good buy at a considerably higher price than a house of the same size. Buying a condo is much more than buying so many rooms, or square feet; buying a condo is buying a lifestyle, and it is that lifestyle that its residents find attractive.

• Who do condos best suit?"

Most condo buyers are "empty nesters," or those who have raised their families. People who are seeking relief from some of those nagging chores, expenses and responsibilities that go with raising children.

Most of all, condo buyers are people who are seeking freedom from painting houses, doing yard work, cleaning gutters, thawing pipes and repairing roofs. It becomes very easy for condo owners to travel without concerning themselves about their home.

Often, young professionals without families as well as other singles and couples find condos attractive. Another prime motivation for folks to buy condos is the strong desire for security that condos offer through the nearness of one's neighbors, through the design of the complex (locked entry halls, attached garages, etc.), and through the comfort that senior adults enjoy in knowing their home will be maintained regardless of their age or health.

• Are children allowed? Is there an age limit?"

In many condos, children are not excluded but, in most cases, it is not advisable to attempt to raise children in a condominium. I am a grandfather who loves kids, but I try to point out the impracticality of moving families into most condos. Many younger children naturally run, yell, slam doors, need to be surpervised with no fenced yard. The typical teen-ager has their stereo with them everywhere, and turned up to ear-shattering volume.

Many teens also enjoy working on cars, which involves revving the engines from time to time to hear the exhausts rattle. How popular can they be in a condominium full of adults? A house can better offer these freedoms for growing families.

• "Condo fees: What does it cover? How is it determined? Can it be raised?"

Condo fees are shared common expenses charged to each unit, and collected monthly. The fees cover such items as garbage service; water and sewer; fire insurance on the buildings; liability insurance to protect the association and the officers; management and accounting; and maintenance of the grounds, buildings and all other common elements.

The fees often include a small amount to be set aside in reserves. This is a practice all associations would be well-advised to follow, whether or not it it required by their by-laws or declaration. It does provide for deferred maintenance so special assessments don't become necessary at some time in the future.

Oregon law says, "Unless otherwise provided in the declaration, the common profits of the property shall be distrubted among, and the common expenses shall be charged to, the unit owners according to the allocation of undivided interest of each unit in the common elements."

To attempt a simple explanation, this means if a unit contains square footage equal to 2 percent of the total square footage of all units, the fees for that unit would be 2 percent of the entire budget.

Annual budgets are presented to all unit owners for their approval at the annual homeowners' meeting, and fees are then computed as necessary to meet that budget for the ensuing year. Obviously, fees can be increased by the membership's approval of an increased budget. However, most condos are very reluctant to raise fees, and only do so when it becomes

Turn to CONDOS, Page 9.