

# HOUSING

The Portland Observer

## Dream Home: Avoiding the heartaches

Home prices are up. Sales are at record levels. Inventories are tight. Sellers rule. In some Western markets you must compete with suddenly-rich, stock-option holders shopping among scant inventories

In the Northeast, a late economic rally is releasing a surge of pent up demand. Near-record low mortgage rates are drawing many first-time home buyers into the market, but you've got to prepare yourself for the search.

### Get ready

For starters, examine your credit reports, correct missing information, clean up errors, and question other discrepancies. Three major companies keep tabs on your credit habits, and you can add a statement to each report to explain blemishes you can't otherwise cure. "It's easy to have mistakes creep into your credit report, especially if you have a common name," says San Francisco-based Ray Brown, co-author of the bestselling "Home Buying for Dummies." "It is better to control a situation before it becomes a crisis," he says.

Visit a lender or mortgage broker to get prequalified or preapproved (the terms are somewhat interchangeable) for a mortgage to determine how much you can afford. Get any guarantees in writing.

The guarantee not only gives you the security of shopping for a home

you can afford, it tells the seller you are a serious buyer. Mortgage money people will also acquaint you with the various mortgage programs available. "The preapproval is subject to verification of credit, income, employment, appraisal, and a survey of the property. Get preapproved only for what you need. If you get preapproved for an ego-satisfying amount, the seller will say 'Hey, he or she can pay more (than the asking price) for my property,'" says Peter Miller, Silver Spring, MD-based author of "The Mortgage Hunter." To further assure that the funds are in place, consider a guaranteed mortgage rate lock, that assures you of an interest rate even if the market turns up.

Once your funds are squirreled away, consider floor plans, architectural types, and amenities you'll need in a home. Just as preapproval helps you eliminate unaffordable homes, knowing what physical attributes you need helps eliminate homes that don't meet those needs.

A home is not an island. Where you want to live is as important as the house itself. Consider the kind of neighborhoods and school districts,

you want surrounding your home.

### Get set

Obtain several referrals to real estate agents from friends, family, co-workers, or anyone else you trust who has recently bought or sold a home.

Interview each agent and get a copy of his or her activity list for the past year. "It tells you where they are working geographically, what type of properties they work on, if there's emphasis on working for buyers or sellers, and if there was any interruption in service. You want someone who is there day in and day out," Brown says.

### Go

Now that you are prepared to look for your dream home, use the shotgun approach and scatter your efforts. Hire an agent who will have access to the multiple listing service, or MLS. An agent gets first dibs on most resale homes for sale.

Read newspaper and magazine classifieds regularly, so you know when new listings and open homes pop up. Visit open homes to get a feel for what the market is yielding. The Net is also a good way to shop for new homes.



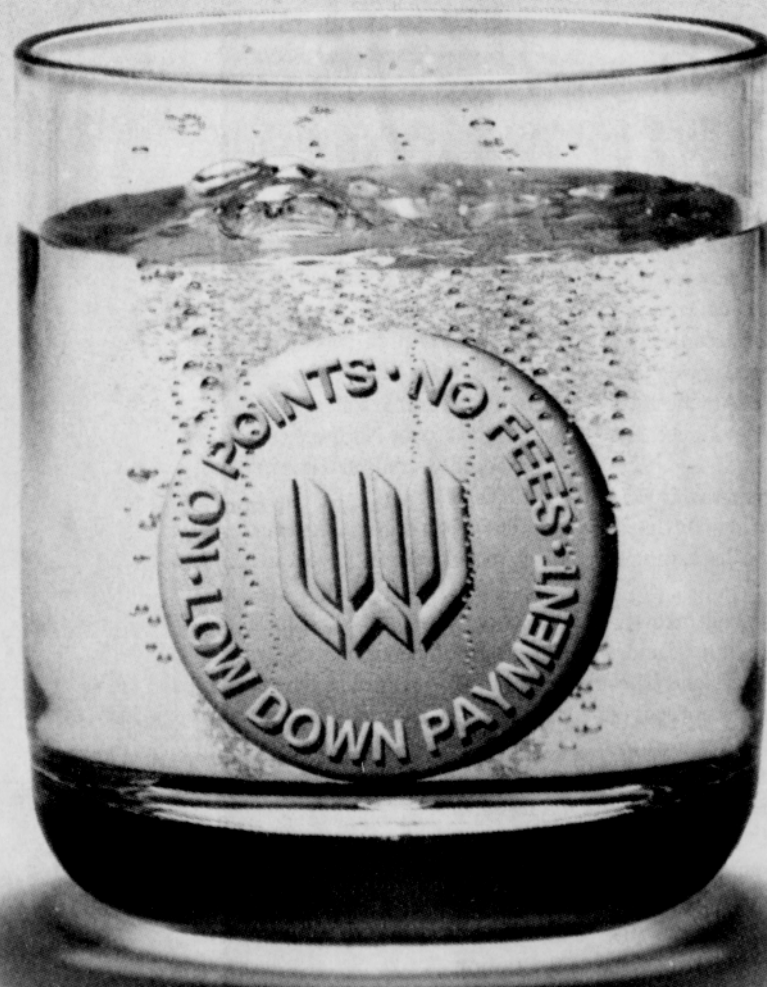
## NCDC Receives NAHRO Award

The Northeast Community Development Corporation (NECDC) is the recipient of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment officials' (NAHRO) 1998 Award of Excellence in Housing and Community Development in Project Design for New Projects. The award, which recognizes outstanding achievement in housing and community development programs throughout the nation, was presented to Helen Pittman, Vice Chair of NECDC, during NAHRO's recent National Conference and Exhibition in San Antonio. The Authority received the award for Walnut Park Town Homes.

"NAHRO is proud to recognize the achievements of these public agencies that use creativity and innovation to develop programs with an ongoing commitment to excellence," said NAHRO President, Deborah M. Erlanson, PHM. "Those agencies like the NECDC are accomplishing remarkable achievements and increasing the level of service to their communities and their residents. They are setting standards to be followed by other agencies around the country." Walnut Park was once renowned as one of the worst crime neighborhoods in Portland. With the donation of a series of vacant lots, the development of the Walnut Park Townhomes became the cornerstone of NECDC's revitalization efforts there.

The 1998 NAHRO Awards of Excellence recognize outstanding achievement in housing and community development programs in five categories. The awardees are chosen from 316 NAHRO Agency Awards of Merit in Housing and Community Development winners across the country. **Project Design** includes efforts such as new housing design, housing modernization, enduring design, and landscape design. **Program Innovation: Resident and Client Services** includes innovative use of programs such as special activities for children, anti-drug programs, social services, and self-sufficiency. **Program Innovation: Affordable Housing** includes special programs for home ownership, public/private partnerships, innovative financing. **Program Innovation: Community Revitalization** includes innovative use of programs in areas such as economic development, neighborhood preservation, and creative financing. **Administrative Innovation** recognizes innovative methods in areas such as maintenance, community relations, and interagency cooperation.

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