

The African American Homebuyers Fair

So you think you want to buy a home? Work with the experts and do your research



Dozens attended the African American Homeownership Fair



Sprinavasa and Jesse Brown liked the first house they viewed and eventually bought it



Brown Clown points out the way way to go to your own home



African American Alliance for Homeownership aah.org, is at 825 NE 20th Ave. Portland



Innovativechanges.org offers financial education at the Lloyd Center



Impactnw.org helps one achieve and maintain long-lasting self-sufficiency



Hownw.com programs provide home buying assistance based on income

By Helen Silvis
Of The Skanner News

If you dream of buying your own home, but are not sure how to go about it, you're not alone. Dozens of hopeful Portlanders turned out Oct. 26 to the 2013 African American Homeownership Fair to find out how to get started.

"We've thought about it, but we have some work to do," said Herb Anderson at the fair with his partner Edwina and their son Mekhi. "We've heard some great ideas on how to build our credit, and hopefully with some of this help we'll be buying a home within 18 months. This is really useful."

A program from Innovative Changes, for example, helps drive up your credit score by issuing a small loan and reporting all your on-time payments. Nancy Yuill, staffing the booth offered a range of tips for improving your credit.

"Paying your bill on time is very important," she says. "And a rule of thumb is to keep your borrowing below one-third of your credit limit."

Sponsored by the African American Alliance for Homeownership, the fair was held in the atrium of Legacy Emanuel Hospital. Banks, real estate agents and housing experts were on hand to offer services and classes that prepare buyers to make one of the most important decisions of their lives.

Sprinavasa and Jesse Brown say they are glad they made the leap. The couple won last year's raffle prize: a \$1,000 down payment. This year, the pair returned as new homeowners, to encourage other buyers to take advantage of the help available.

"We came last year and ultimately attended a homebuyers class with the African American Alliance for Homeownership," Sprinavasa said. "It was a great relationship. We felt like we had a team of experts supporting us. We found out about resources we didn't know about. We found a bank and a real estate agent, and now we own a house."

The Browns laughed as they admitted they liked the first house they viewed, and eventually bought it.

The time spent taking a class and working with AAAH was well worth it, Sprinavasa said.

"Even though the housebuying process was very stressful, having experts support us helped us stick with it."

The Anderson family and Rusimbana and Iddi Birahma were among several participants who said they were surprised and excited to learn about savings match programs that can help qualifying homebuyers double their savings.

"Some programs offer almost 100 percent of help with the down payment," said Ron Jackson a veteran and retiree who attended with his daughter Rachel Jackson.

"This is the first-time I've been actively looking," Rachel Jackson said. "I'm learning that there is a lot of help out here from down payment assistance to educational programs that help you buy."

Rachel, a Ph.D. student studying IT management, hopes to buy her home next February or March, while her father is aiming for May.

Angeleac Williams came along with her friend Ebony Chesterfield.

"People are tired of paying rent when they can buy for the same money," she says.

Ebony Chesterfield said she rents from Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, and already knows that she qualifies for several programs. She was learning a lot from the experts, she said.

"There's a lot of money out there to help you buy a home and to help you keep a home," she said.

"I might work with Wells Fargo because they have a new program that starts in November. They have a good program."

If you didn't make it to the fair, but need help to buy or refinance your home, contact the African American Alliance for Homeownership or another accredited housing nonprofit, advised Jesse Brown.

"Be dedicated. Stay patient. Research, research, research."

And Sprinavasa Brown added, "Don't be afraid to ask questions."



Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, pcricore.org, is at 6329 NE MLK Blvd



Portlandhousingcenter.org offices are at 3233 NE Sandy Blvd. 9 am-5pm, Monday to Friday



Habitat.org helps families break poverty and build long-term financial security



Oregonhomeownersupport.gov helps avoid or limit the impact of foreclosure