

MORTGAGE LENDING UPDATE

By David Griffin

Past President of Mortgage Bankers Association of Middle Georgia

HomeFirst Homebuyer Classes

As we discussed last week, HomeFirst Housing Resource Services, 682 Cherry Street, Macon, 478-803-2373, provides the public with the following assistance at little or no cost: pre-purchase credit and budgeting counseling, guidance in affordable mortgage products, mortgage delinquency consultation services, pre-qualification analysis, home maintenance education, reverse mortgage counseling for seniors, and homebuyer education workshops. The following information is from their website, homefirstga.org.

"HomeFirst offers a monthly Home Buyer Education Workshop that introduces participants to the steps to homeownership and provides advice from seasoned professionals who represent various stages of the home buying process. The classes are usually held the first Saturday of the month from 9:00 am until 5:00 pm. Workshops are geared towards individuals and couples interested in purchasing a residence for themselves and their family.

The cost of the class is \$30.00 per individual or \$50.00 per couple which covers the costs of program materials and lunch. You will receive a Homebuyers Education Workbook at the time of payment which is yours to keep as a reference.

Participants must pre-register for the class, provide proof of income and identification and purchase the homebuyer education workshop resource guide. You may pay the fee and receive your workbook Monday through Friday between 8:30 am and 5:30 pm anytime prior to the date of class. Please bring a government issued ID and proof of income at that time. The guide includes very detailed information on topics to be discussed in the workshop, a glossary of terms and handouts (samples of required documents) from local professionals. It also serves as a resource guide once the home buying process begins.

We cover an array of topics during the workshop. The comprehensive agenda includes the entire home buying process from choosing what neighborhood is best for you to what is the purpose of a home inspection. Participants will learn to: evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of homeownership; understand the steps involved in buying a home; prepare budgets and understand their credit; become knowledgeable of mortgage and financing options; identify purchase and sale contingencies that benefit the buyer; understand the importance of a quality home inspection; develop home maintenance schedules and safety tips; and understand other important topics relevant to homeownership

At the end of the workshop, participants are given a certification of completion. This certificate can be used to qualify for various First Time Homebuyer Programs from local, state and national organizations. In order to receive your certificate of completion, you must be in attendance for the entire workshop.

HomeFirst's certified professional counselors also offer free, one-on-one, confidential, follow up counseling for attendees of their homebuyer programs. These sessions are designed to support information that participants learned in the class and identify challenges that would prevent the client from becoming a homeowner. Clients have the option to schedule multiple sessions and are expected to meet as needed with a counselor. Topics vary, but the following are the ones most consistently discussed: home pre-purchase process, overcoming minor credit issues, budgeting and savings, lifestyle adjustments, and the mortgage pre-qualification process

HomeFirst's counselors discuss these topics thoroughly and provide real life examples and solutions. Many clients are expected to create a budgeting plan to restore troubled credit. The goal of these follow up counseling sessions is to ensure that all clients understand their responsibilities and are making the right decisions during the home purchase process.

HomeFirst's Financial Literacy Program is included in the workshop and we also offer stand alone workshops and classes for community based organizations, churches, schools and other groups that benefit the communities we serve. Financial literacy is a crucial step in the home buying process. Understanding credit and budgeting can determine your success as a homeowner and might be the deciding factor for purchasing and maintaining your home. The goal of our financial literacy program is to teach current and future homeowners ways to manage their finances in an effort to prevent mortgage default.

Our financial literacy program will cover the following topics: basic financial planning (overview and avoiding pitfalls), cash management, savings strategies, banks & other financial institutions, credit, investing, taxes, insurance, record keeping, consumer rights & responsibilities, identity theft, consumer fraud, and finally, retirement and estate planning."

David Griffin has been financing homes in Macon, Warner Robins and all of Middle Georgia since 1983 and is a member of the Mortgage Bankers Association of Georgia, mbag.org. For an archive of past articles visit the Consumer Information section of mbag.org. (9/14/10)