Ready to put out the welcome mat?

Four tips that will help you navigate the homebuying process

With the holidays over, some people are gearing up to make their next purchase - a home. The homebuying season is in full swing. Below are four tips to help you make the best homeownership choice in 2017

1. **Strengthen your credit score before looking for a mortgage.**

The majority of people don’t know their credit score until they begin to look for a home or a mortgage. Since finding the right house takes an average of one to three months, it could pay off to use the time to strengthen your credit score, especially if it means getting a lower mortgage rate. The benefit varies from lender to lender, but a strong credit score can cut as much as half a percent from your rate. A housing counselor from UHDC can provide guidance on what to do to boost your credit score while shopping fora home.

1. **Shop around for the best mortgage.**

Not every lender offers the same mortgage rate, so shopping around is essential. Yet, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, nearly half of people who apply for a mortgage don’t shop around. The price of failing to do so can be quite significant after several years. As important as it is to obtain the best mortgage rate, it’s also crucial to be aware of fees charged by mortgage lenders. These fees go by various names —another reason to work closely with a housing counselor from UHDC throughout the process.

1. **Choose your house carefully.**

With a mortgage-approval letter in hand, it’s time to find your home. A market with low housing supply requires a buyer to look for a “diamond in the rough”—a not-so-perfect house that could be rehabbed to make it suitable. That doesn’t you should settle for a house that doesn’t meet your basic needs. Keep your list of must-haves front and center, but make sure they are not really “nice-to-haves.” UHDC Housing Counselors can help you with options like building or buying and give you pointers on choosing a real estate agent that will help you find the right home.

1. **Negotiate, negotiate, negotiate.**

If real estate is location, location, location, then homebuying is negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. Unless you’re buying in the most heated and competitive markets, there is always room for negotiation. Here’s where selecting the right real estate agent pays off. Whether it’s the price of the house—probably the most important item to negotiate—the portion of closing costs to be paid or whether a warranty for major appliances is included, presenting the seller with a list of requests is important. Remember, the seller wants to sell and you want to buy. Home purchases that are mutually beneficial are made in the middle. Following these tips and working with the team at UHDC will help you successfully find your “home sweet home.”

UHDC was incorporated in 1971 as a 501 (c) 3 to promote and assist the development of affordable housing. We have been a HUD-approved Housing Counseling agency since 1977 and charteredwithNeighborWorks**®** America in2002. For more information about housing counseling, homeownership and/or financial education classes offered by Universal Housing call 479-968-5001 or visit us in person at 301 E. Third in Russellville, Arkansas. UHDC is an equal opportunity housing provider and employer.