



## Dear Friends and Clients:

Spring has arrived with sun and fog, and lots of wildflowers. I found the roads and freeways were packed during Easter Week. Richard & I did a 100K bike ride in Gilroy in April celebrating my 64th year. I am amazed how life just keeps getting better and better.

Real Estate in Santa Cruz has continued to improve this year over last. Check out the statistics on the back page, with the Average and Median price ranges up over \$100,000. Newspaper and Internet articles say that "one area that is heating up is California — the most overvalued market in the nation. The increases in California are more generally due in part to investors taking up the tight supply and tech millionaires willing to pay premium prices." That's us folks.

Locally we are seeing houses sell really quickly with multiple offers, or sit for a number of weeks and then get multiple offers. Any way you look at it, there is more demand for housing than houses available. The inventory remains at record lows, while interest rates threaten to go up in the next year. This encourages buyers to pay cash or pay over full price, and there are some bidding wars in order for buyers to get into the market now rather than waiting for later.

Thank you for taking your time to support me by voting for the **Good Times Best Realtor 2014**. I am very grateful and excited to say I did win Best Realtor 2014. There are a lot of other Realtors out there, so to be named the Best in Santa Cruz is truly an honor. But I couldn't do it without you!! Thank you!

If you have any real estate questions, or need the names of service providers that are tried and true, please give me a call, text or email. I would be happy to assist you.

Best Regards, *Lauren*

## 10 DO-IT-YOURSELF PROJECTS YOU CAN FINISH IN A WEEKEND!



**Paint.** Paint your entire house or just the trim, interior or exterior. Or, paint an accent wall inside. Can't afford new cabinets? Paint the old ones. The key to painting is in the preparation work, including taping around windows and cutting in around the ceiling.

**Change hardware.** This is one of the easiest projects you can do to freshen your

kitchen or bath. Before you start, make sure new hardware fits existing holes, or you'll have to fill old holes and drill new ones.

**Reorganize a closet.** You can buy a closet-organizing system at a home improvement store and install it, or you can create your own system with shelving you buy or already have.

**Boost your curb appeal.** Paint your front door or go all the way and paint all the trim and the garage door as well. Add fresh house numbers and a new mailbox. Plant new flowers and shrubs.

**Turn a closet into a mudroom.** Many homes come with hall closets. Consider removing the closet doors and adding hooks and shelves to make a space that better suits your family's needs.

**Update lighting fixtures.** Changing one chandelier for another of the same size is easy, though some fixture changes are best left to professionals.

**Build a stone or brick path.** In many cases, all you need are the stones and some sand. Look for stones on Craigslist to cut the cost of the materials.

**Replace a showerhead.** You can quickly give a bath a spa-like look with a rain shower head. Plus, you'll cut your water usage with a more efficient model.

**Add organizing tools inside your cabinets.** Adding pullout drawers requires some skill and tools, but inserting wire shelves or a lazy Susan for spices takes no skill and increases storage capacity.

**Wheel out the pressure washer.** Power wash the exterior of your house, your driveway and walkways to remove mud, dirt, mold and other grimy buildup.

# HOW TO GET A MORTGAGE WITH FLAWED FINANCES



payment, to attract borrowers, notes a November 2013 report by Lending Tree..

## Homebuyer

**Solution:** Depending on your situation, you might be able to find a way to buy a home with a low down payment. So check out these different strategies to see if any of them could help you get closer to your homeownership dreams.

- *Conventional Loan:* If you have a good credit score of 700 or above, you can get a conventional loan with a down payment as low as 3 percent.

- *FHA Loan:* The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan option might be the right choice if you have a low credit score. With an FHA loan, your credit score only needs to be 500 to qualify for a 10 percent down payment loan. Keep in mind, however, that only a few banks offer this type of loan to borrowers.

- *VA Loan:* The Veterans Affairs (VA) loan has similar criteria as the FHA loan, says Small. But it's geared toward past or present military personnel. The aim of the VA loan program is to provide home financing to eligible veterans where private financing isn't generally available.

- *State-Sponsored Down Payment Assistance:* Another option for borrowers are down payment assistance programs sponsored by certain states, municipalities, and non-profit organizations.

These loan programs are a just a few of the options available to borrowers struggling to come up with a down payment. Make sure to conduct thorough research to ensure you're picking the right option for your needs.

**General Tip** - Work with a direct lender or mortgage banker.

Getting a mortgage is an expensive proposition - and without guidance from a qualified professional you could pay substantially more than necessary. If you've got financial issues, going to a regular bank might not be the right solution for you. Instead, you should work with a direct lender or mortgage. Why? If you work with them directly, mortgage bankers and direct lenders might be able to make exceptions to some of their guidelines.

**Your finances don't need to be perfect to buy a home. Find out how you can still become a homeowner.**

## Problem #1 - High Debt-To-Income Ratio (DTI)

DTI is your debt-to-income ratio - a percentage calculated by dividing your monthly payment on long term debt by your gross monthly income. Lenders and investors like to make sure a borrower is not going to fall behind on their payments.

**Homebuyer Solution:** "Consider cutting back on items that will reduce your perceived ability to pay monthly debt," suggests Gloria Shulman, founder of Centek Capital Group and a Southern California mortgage broker with 30 years of experience. "A good place to start is your choice of vehicle. Instead of financing that fancy new car that is a depreciating asset, consider buying something used with either lower monthly payments or cash."

Or if you're in the midst of paying off your car, Anthony Pili, vice president at Greater Hudson Bank in Bardonia, NY, suggests another strategy for lowering your DTI. "If you have a car loan with 12 months remaining, refinance it for an additional 36 months to lower the payment.

## Problem #2 - Low Credit Score

Lenders see a low credit score and worry that you're not a reliable borrower - so this could negatively impact your odds of being approved for a loan. And if you still qualify for a loan, a low credit score could still cost you.

**Homebuyer Solution:** "Get copies of your credit report; write down the most important aspects of your financial situation and your homeownership goals," says Dana Anghel, loan officer in Sandy, UT. In addition to assessing your credit, you should make all payments on time, clear up active collections against you (with the help of your mortgage lender), and keep your credit balances below your 50 percent max balance.

## Problem #3 - Low Down Payment

For many aspiring homebuyers, buying a home seems out of their reach. A major factor deterring them is the traditional 20 percent down payment. While that's been the standard for quite some time, saving that much cash today can be a real challenge.

But thankfully, 20 percent is not set in stone as the only percentage that will get you a mortgage. Lenders are lowering minimum requirements, including the down

# Mortgage rates to remain historically low

No shocker here. While mortgage rates are expected to rise throughout the year, they not only will remain historically low by the time 2014 comes to an end but also will be much lower by comparison during the spring buying season.

The theme here is simple, and one that should remain constant for some time to come: When the economy falters, mortgage rates tend to ease off. When the economy grows – when we see strong job numbers and a growing gross domestic product, for example – mortgage rates will firm.

A lot of factors come into play when predicting mortgage-rate movements, making it no easy task – especially over an entire year. Yet HSH.com Vice President Keith Gumbinger gave it a shot at the start of the year, predicting conforming 30-year fixed-rate mortgages between 4.375 percent and 5.625 percent for 2014.



## TOP KITCHEN TRENDS OF 2014

Over the past few years the trend of modernizing your kitchen has been apparent with technology-driven appliances and innovative materials.

**Modern kitchen innovation that gives a hint of the past:** There has been a re-emergence in kitchen design to bring back old world finishes and blend them with modern innovation. Modern countertops can take on a vintage appeal with beveled edges and details.

**Commercial-quality kitchen amenities in your humble abode:** Turn your kitchen into that commercial kitchen you always wanted with amenities that show off your inner culinary chef.

**Kitchen accessories aren't just for show anymore:** Years ago, kitchen accessories played a minor role in function. Today, kitchen brands are realizing that homeowners want form, function, and beauty all in one.

**Organize your kitchen drawers like never before:** Drawers are commonly used to separate items like spices and utensils. But did you know you can also use your drawers to store bread in their very own customized bread boxes? Instead of organizing just a few items in your kitchen, organize your kitchen drawers around the way you and your family use the kitchen.

**Lighting your kitchen in eco-friendly ways:** Just like the evolution of your home, lighting plays an integral role in ensuring your kitchen experience is safe, enjoyable, and helpful for all your kitchen activities. While traditional fixtures such as pendants and under-cabinet lights aren't new – using eco-friendly LED

lighting inside cabinets, drawers, and below the base cabinets are more helpful.

**Decorative tile becomes the showstopper:** There used to be a time when you walked into a kitchen and all eyes went to the appliances. While appliances are still a major opportunity to wow guests, decorative tile is the perfect crowning glory.

**Filtered water delivered in a gorgeous way:** Over the years water filtration has become more important as water. Kitchen plumbing manufacturers are finding new ways to eliminate the clunky add-on water filter on the outside of your faucet, or under your sink

**Affordable countertop surfaces that give the look of luxury:** Countertops can be a very expensive portion of your kitchen. There are several countertop manufacturers that understand homeowners want the look of granite, stone, and marble without the hefty price tag.

**Creating connections between your lifestyle and cooking:** We live in a wonderful design age where kitchen manufacturers are realizing the importance of connecting how we all live in our homes, the way we interact with our appliances, the way we prepare food, and the way accessories should interplay with our senses. It's still true: The kitchen is the soul of our home and where come together with family and friends!





RESIDENTIAL BROKERAGE

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### REFERRALS

Call me with your referrals! A closed escrow as a result will entitle you to **DINNER FOR TWO** at the restaurant of your choice

## My Current Listings

**427 Belle Monti Court, Aptos** - Serene custom home on Seascape Golf Course. Elegant custom remodel with top of the line amenities. Vacation living at its best!  
**\$1,250,000**

**203 Ventana Way, Aptos** - Exquisite luxury home with high end amenities would be great vacation getaway. Gourmet kitchen, 2 master suites and Radiant heat.  
**\$1,125,000**

**230 Rio Del Mar Blvd G, Aptos** - Sweeping ocean views of the entire Monterey Bay. Remodeled 2 BR/2 BA includes all furnishings needed for vacation rentals.  
**PENDING \$839,000**

**154 Browns Valley Road, Corralitos** - Original Corralitos Community Free Methodist Church Sanctuary, built in 1889. Includes Parsonage.  
**\$650,000**

**215 Dufour Street, Santa Cruz** - Immaculate Westside Charmer. Features high ceilings, skylights, Maple wood floors & hot tub. Close to the beach.  
**\$625,000**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY!

**Capitola Kite Classic:** May 04, 2014  
Capitola Beach

**Santa Cruz Greek Food Fair:** May 16 - May 18, 2014 - 223 Church St. between Cedar & Center, Santa Cruz, CA

**Sanctuary Celebration:** May 17, 2014  
Santa Cruz Wharf

**22nd Annual Santa Cruz Blues Festival:**  
May 24 - May 25, 2014 - Aptos Village Park

**9th Annual Capitola Rod & Custom Classic Car Show:** June 07 - June 08, 2014  
Capitola Village

**20th Annual Woodies on the Wharf:**  
June 21, 2014 - Santa Cruz Wharf

## Santa Cruz Association of Realtors®

### SANTA CRUZ COUNTY SINGLE FAMILY STATISTICS

2014	INVENTORY	NEW	SOLD	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
JANUARY	409	157	119	\$739,844	\$609,950
FEBRUARY	439	167	105	\$657,917	\$598,000
MARCH	487	225	113	\$657,301	\$635,000
2013	INVENTORY	NEW	SOLD	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
JANUARY	460	144	103	\$548,101	\$485,000
FEBRUARY	468	182	124	\$551,648	\$449,000
MARCH	476	203	161	\$599,218	\$585,000
2012	INVENTORY	NEW	SOLD	AVERAGE	MEDIAN
JANUARY	738	219	103	\$460,735	\$425,000
FEBRUARY	754	217	122	\$536,252	\$499,950
MARCH	763	231	169	\$545,623	\$483,000



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