

If You're a Veteran, You Owe It to Yourself to Consider Using a VA Loan

As I've mentioned before, I'm not a mortgage broker — frankly, I don't think real estate agents should be in that business — but I know enough about VA loans to

REAL ESTATE TODAY



By **JIM SMITH, Realtor®**

say that any veteran purchasing a home with a mortgage should ask their lender whether a VA loan might be right for them.

This is particularly true for veterans with a 10% or greater disability, because for them the VA funding fee is waived, making a VA loan an easy choice over a conventional, FHA or even a jumbo loan.

A VA jumbo loan is one that is in excess of the conforming limit, which varies by county (the limit in Jeffco, for example is \$493,350). You may think that the VA loan limit is that amount, but that's merely the limit for 100% financing. You can borrow much more than that amount — up to \$1.5 million — as long as you put down at least 25% of the difference between the purchase price and the VA limit.

The following useful information about VA loans was gleaned from the VA's website:

VA home loans are provided by private lenders, such as banks and mortgage companies. VA guarantees a portion of the loan, enabling your lender to provide you with more favorable terms, including:

- ◆ No down payment as long as the sales price doesn't exceed the appraised value.
- ◆ No private mortgage insurance premium requirement.
- ◆ VA rules limit the amount you can be charged for closing costs.
- ◆ Closing costs *may* be paid by the seller.
- ◆ The lender can't charge you a penalty fee if you pay the loan off early.
- ◆ VA may be able to provide you some assistance if you run into difficulty making payments.

You should also know that:

- ◆ You don't have to be a first-time homebuyer.
- ◆ You can reuse the benefit.
- ◆ VA-backed loans are assumable, as long as the person assuming the loan qualifies.

You must have satisfactory credit [Wells Fargo requires a credit score above 600], sufficient income, and a valid **Certificate of Eligibility** (COE) to be eligible for a VA-guaranteed home loan. The home must be for your own personal occupancy [not for a rental or

investment property]. The eligibility requirements to obtain a COE are listed below for service members, veterans, spouses and other eligible beneficiaries.

VA home loans can be used to:

- ◆ Buy a home or a condominium unit in a VA-approved project
- ◆ Build a home
- ◆ Simultaneously purchase and improve a home
- ◆ Improve a home by installing energy-related features or making energy efficient improvements
- ◆ Buy a manufactured home on land
- ◆ To refinance an existing VA-guaranteed or direct loan for the purpose of a lower interest rate
- ◆ To refinance an existing mortgage loan or other indebtedness secured by a lien of record on a residence owned and occupied by the veteran as a home.

Fortunately, a VA regional loan center — one of only nine in the country — is located in Lakewood, at 155 Van Gordon Street. They should be able to provide you with the required Certificate of Eligibility.

Eligibility (visit <http://benefits.va.gov/homeloans> for more information) varies by the type and length of your military service, whether you are disabled or a surviving spouse who has not remarried.

Whether a VA loan is right for you is not always easy to determine, so Golden Real Estate has partnered with Wells Fargo to host a **VA Homebuyer Workshop this Thursday, November 30th, from 6 to 7 pm, at VFW Post 1, 841 Santa Fe Drive, Denver.** RSVP to **Bernie Bernfeld** at **303-273-6373**, or call or text me at **303-525-1851**.

Bernie specializes in VA loans for Wells Fargo and would be happy to answer your questions if you can't attend the workshop.

iPhone's Siri Can Make Your Driving Safer, As It Has Mine

As an active Realtor, you can imagine how many phone calls and text messages I receive, even while driving. The iPhone's "Siri" feature was designed to allow users access to phone, text and other functions — *safely* — even while driving. (Yes, I know it's illegal.)

By turning on "Hey Siri" in Settings, I'm able to leave my iPhone in my breast pocket or on the console. Incoming phone calls are not a problem, because, with Bluetooth activated, I just press a button on my steering wheel to answer. For making calls, all I do (without taking my eyes off the road or hands off the wheel) is say, "Hey, Siri, call so-and-so" or "Hey, Siri, dial [number]." I don't need to hold the phone near my mouth, as

Siri can hear me and respond from across a room!

When I hear my text message alert, I say, "Hey, Siri, read text message." The iPhone reads the message and asks if I want to reply. If I say "yes," it takes my dictation, reads it back to me and asks if I'm ready to send it. I can also say, "Hey, Siri, send a text message to so-and-so." and the iPhone replies, "What would you like to say to so-and-so?", takes my dictation, reads it back to me and asks if I'm ready to send it. If I reply "no," the message is saved for editing and sending later. Try it, you'll like it and be safer.

My bicycle has a phone holder on its handle bars, which allows me to use these same features there, too.

Here's an End-of-Year Special for New Clients:

As regular readers of my column already know, Golden Real Estate has two moving trucks available for free to buyers and sellers. We've also made it available to other agents' sellers as an enticement to accept our buyers' offers on their listings.

This past weekend, I was trying to think what a real estate firm like ours could offer as a "Black Friday Special," and I came up with the following deal for new clients.

For the month of December, we're not only going to provide free use of our moving truck to buyers and sellers, we're going to provide the labor, moving boxes, packing materials and gas for the truck. The only

limitation is that your move be within the Denver metro area — and that we earn a commission!

Our free moving trucks have been so popular that last year we purchased a second one. In addition to providing them for clients, we make them available to local non-profits, including several churches which participate in Family Promise of Metro Denver's program that provides temporary shelter to homeless families.

We figure our trucks save our clients and our non-profit friends thousands of dollars per year, versus the cost of the typical moving van rental.

We look forward to serving you, too!

Jim Smith

Broker/Owner

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We welcome the opportunity to meet with you in your home to discuss your real estate needs. Call Jim Smith at 303-525-1851

Winter's a Good Time to Sell a Home, But It Can Be a Good Time for Buyers, Too

By JIM SMITH, Realtor®

I've written in the past about how winter can be a great time of year to sell a home, as there's often less competition for buyers' attention due to lower inventory. Also, buyers who may have failed to secure a home earlier in the year are still out there, and still getting auto emails with new listings (yours?) that match their search criteria.

But let's look at winter from the *buyer's* perspective for a moment. Here are some reasons that buyers might want to include house hunting in their holiday shopping plans.

First of all, it's likely you'll be competing with fewer other buyers, particularly in the weeks leading up to Christmas. This could make it easier to land the home you fall in love with.

Second, homeowners who put their home on the market during December may be a bit more motivated to sell for reasons that may or may not be disclosed.



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For example, there could be a job relocation, or they may have tax considerations making them want to consummate the sale before year's end. Check the days on market for each listing. If the home was listed in the summer or early fall, the seller may be in a position to settle for less now that it's December.

You, as a buyer, may have tax considerations of your own. Some of your mortgage closing costs are tax deductible, so you may want to close in December

How Can Applying Feng Shui Principles Improve Your Home?

Perhaps you've heard of the ancient Chinese art of Feng Shui (pronounced Fung Shway). As explained at www.dummies.com, "It enhances your environment according to principles of harmony and energy flow. Whether you're aware of it or not, your environment — and your relationship with it — are constantly affecting you. Consequently, your best bet for a healthy, happy, and successful life is to make your environment work for you through the practice of Feng Shui."

I have only a passing familiarity with it, and find that some of its principles are, dare I say, a little "woo-woo," but other principles make eminent sense and I believe that I have benefitted from applying them.

For example, it is believed that open drains, including open toilet seats, allow energy (or "chi") to be drained from your home, so Rita and I are diligent about keeping the lids down on our home's (and office's) toilets. Besides, it looks better, don't you think?

to get those deductions a year earlier.

On the other hand, if you close on a home in January from an elderly seller who has a senior property tax exemption, *that tax exemption applies to you, too, for the entire 2018 tax year.* (That benefit is based on who owned the house on Jan. 1st.) Weigh this against other tax considerations before deciding whether to close on that house in December versus January.

I advise sellers to do the same while their home is on the market.

Clutter is a big no-no. I remember when I owned an office building on Capitol Hill in the early 1990s, it had a side yard that was filled with debris and trash. I paid little attention to clearing it out since it wasn't visible to passers-by, but a Feng Shui consultant urged me to clean it out, and when I did, I was noticeably more successful in attracting tenants.

One principle that makes sense to me, but that I tend not to practice, is that of keeping my desk clear of clutter. I know I feel better when I *have* cleared my desk. I remember being told during a tour of RE/MAX International's executive offices that co-founder Gail Liniger had a strict rule that every desk must be cleared before leaving work each night. It's easy to imagine the psychological effect of that practice, and it sounds like it could be rooted in Feng Shui principles.