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Kiss The Cook!

Easy Oatmeal Cookies

by Marie Gianoulakis

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 1/2 cups of all-purpose flour | 1/2 tsp baking soda |
| 1/2 tsp salt | 1 cup vegetable shortening |
| 1 1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar | 1 egg |
| 1/4 cup milk | 2 cups of granola cereal |
| 3/4 cup of raisins | |

Preheat oven to 350°.

Sift flour, baking soda and salt – set aside. In large bowl, thoroughly mix brown sugar with shortening, beat in egg and milk then add flour mixture. Fold in granola and raisins. Drop teaspoons of batter onto a greased cooking sheet. Bake for 12 minutes or until cookies are lightly golden. Remove and allow to cool. Enjoy!

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New Location For 2007 'Celebration' ... Your House!

Next February, you could win a mortgage-free year without having to leave the comfort of your home.

For the past several years First Integrity has held a drawing for customers who have used our services the previous year. The grand prize winner enjoys a mortgage-free year (we make his/her mortgage payments for 12 months, up to \$10,000).

Registration for the drawing took place at our "Celebration," held at the Airport Marriott each February. The winners' names were drawn at the end of the event. You had to be present to win.

Because of everyone's busy schedules and "iffy" weather conditions in February, less than half of our customers have actually had the time to attend the "Celebration" each

year. So, we're changing the way the mortgage-free year prize is awarded. Instead of holding the "Celebration" at a hotel and having you come to us, we'll come to you!

Next February (2007) we'll place the names of all customers who have used our services in 2006 into the drawing. Once the grand prize winner's name has been chosen, we'll bring the check to his/her front door!

Awarding the prize in this manner will be more convenient for our customers. It also means everyone who has worked with us the previous year will be entered into the drawing, not just those whose schedules allow them to attend the event.

Tell your friends, family and co-workers about our special prize drawing in February.



Buying a Home in a Buyer's Market

by: Joseph Bayer, President

We all have heard the phrase change is constant. The housing market has gone through some major changes recently. The good news is that housing stock is in good supply. Also, to the delight of buyers, interest rates have dropped.

Today's buyers are finding they have multiple options for homes in areas of their choice. No longer are buyers forced to make snap decisions because of a limited supply of homes on the market. In other words, it is a good time to be buying a home.

However, do not be confused, a greater increase in the housing supply does not mean that St. Louis area values have deflated. St. Louis has long been insulated from unsustainable huge upward swings in values. Housing in St. Louis is affordable.

One insurance company, Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation (MGIC), is very focused on housing trends throughout the country. In their

latest report on 70 national markets, the St. Louis market received a STABLE rating.

MGIC views our market economic outlook as "positive with job growth ..." Another plus for the St. Louis market is our "modest" 8% rise in the median sales price, which is \$200,000. To put that into perspective the median sales price in Chicago is around \$287,000, while San Francisco is nearly \$800,000.

Now some will say their median incomes are higher in those areas; true, but not that much higher. Housing in St. Louis is a true value.

With supply being high and interest rates being low, this market may be the perfect time to be "moving on." If you would like to know if a move makes good sense for you, contact your First Integrity Loan Officer or e-mail us at info@firstintegrity.com.



The Best-Kept Secret For First Time Home Buyers Just Got Better!

We've added the MyCommunity Mortgage™ program through Fannie Mae (FNMA) to our First Time Home Buyer's Program. Combined with the Missouri Housing Development Commission's (MHDC) First Place Mortgage Program*, it's now even easier to stop paying rent and purchase a home with no money out-of-pocket!

First Integrity Mortgage Services is among a select group to be named both a Fannie Mae and MHDC Certified Lender ... so the loan process will be hassle free and there will be no surprises at loan closing.

* Missouri residents and properties, only. Must be owner occupied. Eligibility based on income, credit score and other factors, some restrictions apply.



Score Rams Tickets ... Just Find Our Hidden Clue

You could win two tickets to see the Rams play the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday, Nov. 5, at noon. Just find the NFL football reference hidden somewhere in this newsletter, and be the first to e-mail us the answer at info@firstintegrity.com.



Reassessment — You Have Rights In Appealing Your Home Valuation

Every two years, state law mandates that the value of residential and commercial property be reassessed for tax

purposes. And, every two years there are homeowners who feel their assessment and/or tax burden is unfairly high.

Next year (2007) is a reassessment year. What can homeowners expect?

“Unfortunately, people may be paying for the wonderful housing market we have had the past two years,” said Barb Kiskiras, a certified real estate appraiser for 15 years.

Your home’s assessed value is determined by sales of comparable homes in your area, the condition of your home, square footage and other data. Home improvements also have an effect. “If you have taken out any building permits it will likely affect your assessment,” said Kiskiras.

The taxes you pay on your home are determined by taking 19% of your home’s estimated market value and multiplying it by your local tax rate.

The good news is, most assessors’ offices have taken steps to better communicate with homeowners regarding the reassessment process. St. Louis County actually has a public advocate available to help homeowners with appeals. The county will also come to the home of a disabled person if he/she can’t get to the assessor’s office.

Other counties and the City of St. Louis may also have programs to assist consumers.

In addition, a new regulation mandates that if an assessment goes up more than 15%, a physical inspection must take place (walk the perimeter of the home ... no more drive-bys). And a new state law – the Homestead Preservation Act — allows residents age 65+ on fixed incomes to file papers requesting a tax break on assessment based on income and assessment increase.

Should You Hire An Independent Appraiser?

Some home owners hire an independent appraiser to appeal their reassessment. Others choose to handle the process themselves. Kiskiras recommends the following steps before hiring an independent appraiser:

- 1 Call the assessor’s office or go online to determine if the property information listed on your home is accurate, i.e. total square foot living space, number of bathrooms, lot size, style foundation (slab or full) and exterior construction finish (brick or frame).
- 2 Get the same information on those sales the assessor has selected to compare your home.
- 3 If there are homes you believe should have been used (e.g. your neighbor’s house) get the same information from the assessor.
- 4 Drive by the homes to determine if their location is similar to yours.
- 5 If you strongly disagree with the chosen properties, and if it is financially feasible to have outside help challenge the call on your assessment, hire a licensed/certified appraiser OR challenge the assessment yourself during the initial informal hearing process (be prepared to negotiate).
- 6 Remember the public advocate in the St. Louis County system can also be of help.
- 7 Remember this challenge is about a property’s value, NOT its taxes.

You can e-mail Barb Kiskiras at bjk28@sbcglobal.net.

Links to area assessors’ Web sites:

St. Charles County: <http://www.saintcharlescounty.org/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=1029>

St. Louis County: <http://revenue.stlouisco.com/ias/>

Jefferson County: <http://www.jcao.org/myinfo.htm>

Lincoln County: <http://www.lincoln.mo.us.landata.com/>

St. Louis City: <http://stlcin.missouri.org/assessor/lookup.cfm>