

Ron's Homeowner News™

Courtesy of Ron Mitchell ☞ Macdonald Realty Ltd. ☞ (604) 617-9642

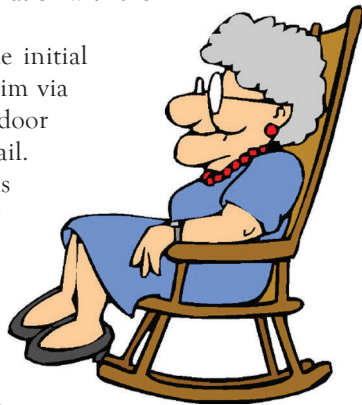
September 2011

Canada's Worst Scams

Ready for a shock? A recent study has found that seventy percent(!) of all scams are directed specifically at senior citizens. Yes, that means that by and large crooks purposely target older Canadians! Preying on the elderly – how low can some people get?

Since being well informed is the best preventative measure, I did a bit of research and will now share with you what I learned. Even if you don't fall into the "target group" it's still good to know – you can share this information with the seniors you care about.

Fraudsters make the initial contact with their victim via telemarketing, door-to-door solicitation or direct mail. Sometimes the crook is someone the senior already knows. The scammer will first work hard to win his victim's trust. He will be friendly, confident, act like a professional and pretend to care for his intended victim. He will then claim that whatever he is pitching is risk-free and that the rate of return (probably outrageously large) is guaranteed. This should be setting off some alarm bells. There will be a very tight deadline by which the victim must act. He may insist that the special deal is only available today and pressure the intended target to act fast. More alarm bells should be going off at this point. The idea is to bait the victim into making a hurried decision before he or she has the time to think about it or consult with someone else.



Depending on what is being pitched, there are additional ways to sniff out fraud:

Investment opportunities. Many seniors have anxieties about their financial future and scammers like to exploit this by offering "great" investments with "huge" payoff potential and "no" risk. Before plunging in with both feet, verify that the person offering the opportunity is properly licensed and how long the company he or she works

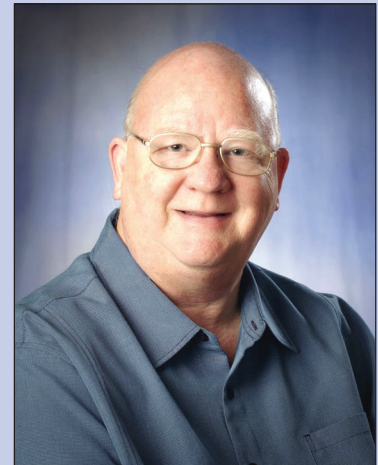
for has been in business. Then check the investment – has it been registered with the appropriate securities commission? Are all filings up-to-date? Also, it doesn't hurt to get a second opinion from your accountant or other trusted professional. Don't rush your decision. If it's a genuine opportunity, it will still

be there tomorrow – real deals don't disappear overnight.

Lottery and sweepstakes. "You won the sweepstakes! There's just a small processing fee (or tax) you need to pay in order to get your award..." This scam shouldn't be too hard to spot: Did you enter the sweepstakes? No? Then how can you win it? They say someone else entered on your behalf? Who? Call and check.

Fake charities. Counting on the good nature of people and their willingness to help those in need, crooks sometimes pretend to work for a charity. If you are

(continued, Page 2)



For me, the most rewarding part of being a Realtor is being able to help people through one of the most important financial decisions they will ever make. My top priority is always my clients' satisfaction. My job—to make sure that every transaction I am entrusted with is handled with the utmost care and professionalism. As my client, you will feel like you are my only client, and my goal is that you are not merely satisfied with my service, but that you become an enthusiastic fan. I look forward to helping you with your next real estate transaction—just give me a call, or send me an e-mail.

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Basic Elements of a Listing Agreement

A listing agreement is a contract that a seller signs with an agent when embarking on a home sale adventure. There are a few different types, with the Exclusive Right to Sell being the most common. Here are some of the details you will find in it:

Price

Prior to signing the listing agreement, you and your agents will go over a Comparative Market Analysis which will help you determine your listing price. The price that your home will eventually sell for may be higher or lower, depending on the current market, your home's appeal, and how well the negotiating goes with the buyer.

Property Included/Excluded

Real estate law recognizes two types of property: real and personal. Real property is the land and everything permanently attached to it (house, plus its various systems and fixtures), and personal property is everything else (furniture, appliances, etc.). Unless otherwise specified, all real property is included in the sale and all personal property is excluded. If you wish to make any exceptions, that should be clearly spelled out in your listing agreement (and later in your sales contract).



no set amount that agents charge, so the commission is negotiable between you and your agent. When commission is earned is another important detail. In a typical listing contract the agent has earned his or her commission when either (a.) a purchase contract is signed between you and a willing, able and ready buyer, or (b.) a willing, able and ready buyer makes an offer to purchase your home for the full listing price and under the terms you specified in your listing agreement. What does this mean? It means that when you list your home, you should be ready to go through with the sale. If the agent finds you a buyer, but then you change your mind and decide not to sell, the agent has effectively earned the commission and will likely expect to be paid.

MLS

In your listing agreement you will want to authorize your agent to place your home in the Multiple Listing Service (MLS). Serious buyers have their agents check the MLS for new listings regularly, and by having your home featured here you greatly increase your chances for a quick sale.

These were just a handful of details typically found in a listing contract. If you have questions or would like more information, you know who to call!

(continued from Page 1)

contacted by an organization you've never heard of, check with the appropriate state agency to see whether it's properly registered. Then ask the charity's "representative" to provide you with information about the organization's activities and how they spend the money collected. Ask for a copy of the financial documents they file with the tax authorities. Legitimate charities will be glad to share this info, and will not pressure you to hurry up.

Predatory lending. Targeting seniors who are experiencing financial difficulties, some savvy crooks offer loans that are designed to enrich themselves and push the victim further towards financial ruin. A typical scenario involves talking the senior into taking a home loan under very unfavorable terms, then when the poor victim defaults, foreclosing on the property. To avoid this trap read the loan documents carefully and don't sign anything you don't understand. Consult with your financial advisor or someone knowledgeable you trust. There are approved housing counselors who can help with advice, usually at a very low (and sometimes no) cost. And do not be talked into making false statements on a loan application! Anyone who suggests doing this is a crook and should be avoided like the plague.

Agent Duties

More than being just a facilitator of your real estate transaction, your agent is your ally. As a Seller's Agent he or she will owe certain duties to you, called fiduciary duties, and they include good faith, loyalty and fidelity. This means that your agent is working for you during the sale, and that his or her job is to look out for your best interest (not the buyer's). Details of this will be spelled out in your listing contract.

Commission

Two things will be important to specify with regards to the commission: how much and when. Normally how much is expressed as a percentage of the listing price. There is

ATTENTION FUTURE SELLERS:

The special report ***The Seven Most Common Mistakes Sellers Make*** reveals surprising details about expensive selling mistakes and how ***you*** can avoid them. I have obtained several copies of this report, and I am making them available **FREE** to the homeowners in our community.

If you are planning on selling your home soon, order your copy today - there is no cost and no obligation!

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How to Not Spend a Fortune on Pet Care

Each year Americans spend a whopping \$18 billion on their pets. Yes, we sure love our furry friends. But it's not necessary to spend a lot of money to show love, so let's review a few ways to cut down on the ever increasing costs of pet care.

Pick a vet before you need one. Pet emergencies can cost a fortune unless you've established a good relationship with your local vet, and understand her emergency policies and costs. Ask your friends and neighbors to recommend a good veterinarian, or ask the animal loving employees of your local pet store.

Spay or neuter. First, this is ethically the right thing to do. Secondly, your pets will be better behaved so you will enjoy them more. And thirdly, spayed or neutered animals are at a significantly lower risk of many different types of cancer, so they will live longer and require fewer trips to the vet's office.

Don't overfeed your pet. Overweight animals are prone to heart disease, diabetes and other ailments, and have shorter life spans than their leaner cousins. Check the package label for the proper amount of food recommended, or ask your vet. Also, don't overdo the treats. Not only is it thrifty to feed your furry friends properly, but it also helps them live longer and healthier lives.



Pick the right food. An Animal Dietitian I spoke to (yes, there is such a thing) told me that high quality foods seem to cost more, but are often healthier for your pets. Cheap generic brands can contain

animal by-products that can cause a variety of health problems over time, and thus result in unnecessary vet bills.



Don't overdo the shots. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, annual shots are not always necessary. There are vaccines that remain effective for two or three years, so check online or talk to your vet.

Perform basic pet care yourself. Learn how to clip your cat's or dog's nails and save money. Giving your pooch a haircut is also not very hard. A pair of clippers will cost you about \$20, and will pay for themselves many times over.



Ask for discounts. If you have several animals, take them in for regular checkups together as many vets give "group" discounts. Was your pet once abandoned or a stray? There are vets who offer discounts to people who rescued their animals. If you are a senior citizen, ask for a senior citizen discount. And for routine medical services try your local humane society, pet store or animal control office as they often sponsor special events where routine veterinary care can be obtained at discount rates.

Look for free stuff. Science Diet and Iams offer free samples of their foods, as do other companies. Free advice is also abundant, on the web and at your local pet store (where friendly animal-loving employees are always happy to share their knowledge).



Q: How hard is it to sell a home these days?

A: Properly priced homes that are nicely cared for will always attract buyers. The key are those first two words though – properly priced. It is the market that sets the value of a home, and this can sometimes be hard for sellers to stomach. I empathize; when a person takes good care of the home, and invests time and money on improvements, it can be very disappointing when no one is willing to pay the value that the owner sees. But buyers do not have the same emotional attachment to a particular property that sellers do, so they make offers based on the current market conditions. Sellers who price their houses accordingly can expect to find a buyer reasonably quickly; those who cannot divorce themselves from their emotions will have a much tougher time in our current market.

Have a tough real estate question? I am here for you:

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Greater Vancouver home sales trend towards Buyers' market

August marked the third consecutive month that home sale activity in Greater Vancouver was below the 10-year average for the month. In contrast, home listing activity in the region has exceeded the 10-year norm every month since the beginning of the year.

MLS® statistics continue to indicate that we're in a balanced market, However, with a sales-to-listings ratio of 15 per cent, Greater Vancouver is in the lower end of a balanced market and has been trending toward a buyers' market over the past three months.

In August 2011 there were 108 homes sold compared to July 2011 when 109 homes sold. The average price in August 2011 was \$495,329 down 1% from July 2011. There are 644 active listings with 16.7% selling ratio.

During August there were 31 townhomes sold compared to 42 in July 2011 with the average sales price in August of \$290,000 down 7.8%. There are 197 active listings with 15.7% selling ratio

During August 2011 there were 24 condos sold compared to the previous month when there were 21 sales. The average price in August was \$214,450 down 1%. There are 233 listings with 10.3% selling ratio

Year over year, prices are up. However, in the detached home category, benchmark prices have come down slightly in the past two months.



September 2011

ARCHITECTURE CORNER

DUTCH COLONIAL

Easily recognizable by its unique roof, the homes we now call Dutch Colonial first appeared on our continent in the 17th Century. These homes weren't really Dutch – they were built by the people of German (*Deutsch*), French, Flemish and Dutch origins, who lived in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. The style is a combination of building traditions the settlers brought from Europe, so Dutch Colonial is really an eclectic North American style.

The main characteristic of a Dutch Colonial home is its "barn roof," which in architectural terms is called *gambrel*. It's a symmetrical two-sided roof, with each side having two slopes. Side gables also have a characteristic shape, thanks to the roof. This style is further characterized by small porches supported by columns, rectangular doors, double-hung sash windows, dormers, and one or two chimneys located at one or both ends of a home. One interesting feature sometimes found on these homes is the central double door, which is divided horizontally. The top portion of the door could open to let the air in, and the lower portion could stay closed to keep the livestock out. The walls are either stone or brick, though shingle and clapboard siding wasn't uncommon either.

During the early 1900's, when other revival styles were becoming popular, the Dutch Colonial style was brought back as the Dutch Revival. The homes of this later period were more modern and more ornate. Unlike their predecessors which were mostly country homes, newer Dutch Revival houses were often built in cities.



Cornmeal Fried Chicken

PREPARATION TIME
10 minutes

COOKING TIME
20 minutes

PERFECT PARTNER
buttermilk biscuits



After frying the chicken, strain the oil to remove food particles; cool thoroughly. Place the oil in a covered container and store in the refrigerator for up to 1 month for the next time you fry chicken.

SHOPPING LIST

• chicken • buttermilk
• cornmeal

ON HAND

• flour • salt • pepper • oil

Cornmeal Fried Chicken

INGREDIENTS

- Vegetable oil for frying
- 1/2 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts (4 ounces each)
- 1/2 cup buttermilk

SERVES 4



- Save on cleanup time by draining chicken on a wire rack lined with paper towels. Also, spread paper towels underneath the rack to catch drips.

- If you rarely use fresh buttermilk, keep dried buttermilk powder on hand. It will take 1/8 cup dried buttermilk plus 1/2 cup water to yield the 1/2 cup buttermilk needed for this recipe.

Make Ahead

Double the recipe to have extra fried chicken on hand for a cold picnic lunch. Wrap chicken in paper towels, then loosely in foil to keep it crispy and not soggy.

VARIATION

Spice up this never-fail traditional recipe by adding 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper to the batter in step 2.

1 Pour 1/4 inch of oil into a large heavy skillet. Heat over medium-high heat to 350°F or until a cube of white bread dropped in oil browns evenly in 1 minute.



2 Combine cornmeal, flour, salt and pepper in shallow dish; mix well. Dip chicken in buttermilk, turning to coat.

3 Roll chicken in cornmeal mixture, coating evenly. Place in hot oil. Do not allow pieces to touch.



4 Fry chicken, turning several times, for about 20 minutes or until golden brown and crisp. Drain on a wire rack. Serve immediately.