Housing agency announces $40M homebuyer program

BY PAGE IVEY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA — South Carolina housing officials said Wednesday they have $40 million to help teachers and first responders buy a home.

The State Housing Finance and Development Authority program will offer down-payment assistance and low-interest mortgages to teachers, firefighters, police and correctional officers and EMS workers who meet income criteria.

"You've got quality people out there that have steady jobs and good money, but the banks are so tight because of the economy that they can't get the money that they need," said Jarrod Bruder, executive director of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers Association.

Customers will apply for the loans just like they would any home mortgage, but the money for the loans will come from bonds the housing agency has sold as part of the federal housing recovery act of 2008. Maximum income levels and maximum home values vary depending on where a person lives and the number of people living in the home. Beaufort County has the highest income an individual can make and still qualify for the program at $79,000 and the top price of $285,000 that can be spent on a home.

People with an income of less than $20,000 can still qualify for the program, if they can afford the payments and have a credit score of at least 620.

"We're still not going to put you into a house that you can't afford and have you default on it," authority spokesman Clayton Ingram said.

Loan rates for the agency's mortgages, which typically would be about a full percentage point lower than market rates, are now about even with the market at 5 percent to 5.25 percent, Ingram said.

But the real benefit of the program, he said, is the downpayment assistance of up to $7,000. Middle-income borrowers must repay the money, but it can be forgiven after five years for low-income borrowers.

"A lot of people can make the regular house payments, but they can't save up the downpayment to take advantage of what right now is a fairly good market," Ingram said.

Mortgage lender John Hinks Jr. of Hinks Mortgage Co. said he prefers doing state housing loans for his customers because the agency won't make loans that borrowers cannot afford. He and his wife used a state housing loan to buy their own home.

"Most of the time with first-time homebuyers, I try to go through state housing first and foremost to see if they fit the mold," Hinks said. "The interest rates are low, it's a 30-year fixed, there's no gimmicks to it."

ARRESTS

Seneca Daily Journal

Carl Edward Trimmier, 49
210 Spider Oak Ln., Seneca
Booking Date: 2/26/10
South Carolina Highway Patrol
Driving under the influence-1st offense

William Dee Barnes, 45
330 Briar Creek Rd., Walhalla
Booking Date: 2/26/10
Seneca City Police
Driving under suspension, license not suspended for dui-1st offense; hit and run, att. vehicle, duties of driver involved in accident, property damage; driving under the influence-1st offense

Ruben Mantiel, 34
410 W. South 4th St. 49, Seneca
Booking Date: 2/27/10
Seneca City Police
Possession of more than one drivers license/no scdl

Brandi Hope Lawless, 33
204 Frewmar Ln., Piedmont
Booking Date: 2/27/10
Oconee County Sheriff
Resisting arrest; oppose, resist or assault law enforcement officer serving process; public disorderly conduct

Matthew Grady Hart, 22
110 Yellow Wood Ct., Simpsonville
Booking Date: 2/27/10

Charles Lee Hensley, 22
524 Tractor Dr., Gray Court
Booking Date: 2/27/10
Seneca City Police
Open container of beer or liquor

Matthew Chase McJunkin, 22
4814 Edwards Rd., Taylors
Booking Date: 2/27/10
South Carolina Highway Patrol
Driving under the influence-1st offense

Maria Kay Stubbs, 26
1005 S. Church St., Walhalla
Booking Date: 2/27/10
South Carolina Highway Patrol
Driving under the influence-1st offense; transport alcohol in motor vehicle with seal broken

Howard Lee Henderson Jr., 22
106 S. Spearman Dr., Greer
Booking Date: 2/27/10
Seneca City Police
Disorderly conduct

Elizabeth Rodreguez Diaz, 26
707 S. Piedmont St., Westminster
Booking Date: 2/27/10
Westminster Police
Westminster Municipal bench warrant; magistrate's court commitment order (sentenced) under 90 days

FOR INFORMATION on land

3/4/2010

Depleted uranium likely unfit for Utah

BY BROCK VERGAKIS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY — More than 10,000 drums of nuclear waste that have been buried in Utah likely include some radioactive material that's too hot to be buried under state law, according to an environmental group's report released Wednesday.

The U.S. Department of Energy has been disposing of depleted uranium from a nuclear weapons complex near Aiken, S.C., since 2003 at EnergySolutions Inc.'s facility about 70 miles west of Salt Lake City. It also has disposed of some material at the Nevada Test Site, about 65 miles north of Las Vegas. The report commissioned by Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah says that out of the original 33,000 drums from the Savannah River Site, as many as 5,600 could include material that violates state standards for the disposal of low-level radioactive waste.

That's because the material includes radionuclide technetium-99, a man-made product that results from the fissioning of nuclear fuel in a reactor to make plutonium for nuclear weapons. State law only allows for certain levels of the material to be disposed of in Utah.

HEAL Utah Executive Director Vanessa Pierce said it's impossible to determine how many of the disposed drums include depleted uranium that never should have been here, but the DOE and the state can act to prevent additional waste from being disposed.

"First we need to deal with the problem immediately at our doorstep, then we need to deal with the skeletons in the backyard," Pierce said. "It is inexcusable for regulators at all levels to have just ignored the issue of whether it's safe to dispose of this type of material."