

# Real Estate

ST. CHARLES COUNTY

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## Uncle Sam has a deal for you!

"There is no such thing as a free lunch," my mother caution when as a child I would get excited over the latest fabulous free offer on television or on the back of my cereal box.

Mom usually was right; there was always a catch or the prize wasn't nearly as nice as it looked in the picture.

While a mothers' wisdom often is good to follow, Uncle Sam has showed that in some cases there actually is a free lunch. Essentially, Uncle Sam is giving away money to all first-time home buyers who purchase a home between now and Dec. 1, 2009.

The economic stimulus package passed earlier this year contained an \$8,000 tax credit for first-time home buyers. The government defines first-time buyers as anyone who has not owned a home in the last three years.

Yes, this is better than a free lunch; it is free money! Unlike the bill passed last year, this tax credit does not have to be repaid. You

must live in your new home for three years, or you will have to pay the credit back. That's right, when you fill out your taxes for 2009, you can deduct 10 percent of the purchase price of your home up to \$8,000 from the amount you owe the government. If you don't owe that much in taxes, you will get the rest back from Uncle Sam in a tax refund.

As good as this sounds, some of you who are thinking about buying a home may need the money now rather than waiting until tax time. The state of Missouri may have an answer for you. The Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC), the state agency established to help finance home ownership in Missouri, has a program to get you your money now.

The MHDC will make a second mortgage available to qualified home buyers. The second mortgage can be up to 6 percent of the home's purchase price or a maximum of \$6,750. If the loan is paid

back by June 2010, the homeowner pays only a small service fee and no interest is charged on the loan. The MHDC programs are available for households with incomes up to \$79,800.

This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. How often in your life has someone given you free money? We are living in extraordinary times, and the government is taking extraordinary steps to see us through the current economic challenges.

If you are thinking of buying your first home, I have only one question: What are you waiting for? If you have secure employment, adequate income and good credit, there has never been a better time to buy that first home.

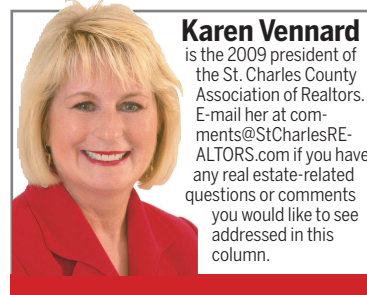
Market conditions and government actions have driven interest rates to historic low levels. Long-term mortgages can be obtained at rates we haven't seen in a generation. A fixed-rate loan at 5 percent or less is now a reality. Plus, today's market challenges have

resulted in a larger selection of homes to choose from at affordable prices.

Some so-called experts say you should wait and make sure we have "hit bottom" before you jump into the market. Yes, you could wait and see what the future holds; but I am going to tell you something they won't. They cannot predict the future any better than you or I can. If they could, they would have more money than Warren Buffet and Bill Gates combined.

Besides, the only way you will actually know when the market is at its lowest point is when we look back at history after prices and interest rates have begun to rise again.

If you are worried about whether a home is a good investment, be glad that you live in the Midwest and particularly in St. Charles County. After years of significant increases in home values, prices have fallen in St. Charles County and across the nation. Here in St. Charles County, the median home



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price at the end of last year had fallen only 4.3 percent from its high point in 2006.

Your home remains the best long-term investment available to your family. Nothing available from Wall Street, your bank or anywhere else can match the long-term benefits of home ownership.

So what are you waiting for? Record-low interest rates, a large selection of affordable homes and free money from Uncle Sam make this a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to buy. Call your Realtor today and start packing.

## Real Estate Briefs

### Staging your home

The O'Fallon Parks and Recreation Department is offering a six-week program designed to teach homeowners how to get their home ready for the market.

Cost is \$60 for O'Fallon residents and \$65 for nonresidents. Participants should bring photos of their house to the first class, scheduled from 6:30-8:30 p.m. April 13 at the Renaud Spirit Cen-

ter, 2650 Tri Sports Circle.

Register at [www.renaudspiritcenter.com](http://www.renaudspiritcenter.com) or call 636-474-2732; or register in person at the parks office, 400 Civic Park Drive, or the Renaud Spirit Center.

### Loan seminar

O'Fallon homeowners who would like to apply for the city's home improvement loan program can learn about the resources

available, the qualifications needed and how to fill out an application during a seminar at 3 p.m. April 14 in the multipurpose room in O'Fallon City Hall, 100 N. Main St.

O'Fallon's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) office provides no-interest loans of up to \$5,000 to a limited number of qualified, low-to-moderate income O'Fallon homeowners. The

loans can only be used for home repair and to address code violations.

Applications are available for pickup, by mail or on the city's website. Completed applications will be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at City Hall through May 29.

Applications may only be made once a year and are reviewed by

the city's CDBG administrator. If funds remain after eligible low-income applications are met, candidates from moderate-income housing will be considered.

For more information about the loans and who may apply, visit [www.ofallon.mo.us](http://www.ofallon.mo.us) or e-mail CDBG Administrator Jessica Hawkins at [jhawkins@ofallon.mo.us](mailto:jhawkins@ofallon.mo.us) or call Hawkins at (636) 379-5411.