

PHFA's statewide network of approved housing counselors advise people, at no cost, to properly prepare them for their first home purchase. Foreclosure counseling also was provided for families struggling to meet their mortgage obligations. Nikki Holcroft is a PHFA-approved counselor who was honored this year with a prestigious Best Counselor award.

A *passion* FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP COUNSELING

“I’m basically your local Suze Orman.” That’s how Nikki Holcroft describes herself.

Her career as a housing counselor began during the mid-1990s, in connection with her church, when she started advising people about budgeting and their credit worthiness. Working in the local banking industry in community development certainly helped. It gave her the experience to understand how banks approach their mortgage decisions. That, in turn, helped her to educate people interested in homeownership but new to the homebuying process.

After 25 years in banking, Nikki made consumer and homeownership counseling her new career path in 2001 when she signed on with Genesis Housing Corporation in Norristown. It was a smart move because Nikki and Genesis share a commitment to properly educating consumers about their housing decisions. Her counseling sessions usually revolve around credit classes, money management, and homebuying basics, which Nikki describes as the three spokes of the personal finance wheel. All three are critical for homebuyers to properly prepare for homeownership and to ensure a solid financial foundation.

Most of her days include two or three counseling sessions, each two hours long. While some counselors might insist that an hour is long enough to gather the information needed, Nikki disagrees. The extra time allows her to dig a little deeper and really get to understand her clients’ personal financial challenges. Working into the evening is common, too, so that Nikki can provide classes at a time that works for her Genesis customers. It’s this sort of commitment to doing the job right that earned Nikki one of PHFA’s Best Counselor awards in the fall of 2010.

Recognition from PHFA was a nice surprise, she says. But it’s not why Nikki is committed to her counseling clients. The real payoff comes when they tell her that they’ve been to others for advice, but no one else took the time to truly help them understand the credit rating process and the ins and outs of homebuying. With Nikki’s help, they tell her, they understand it now.

“I want to help people find solutions,” she says. And she does.

