



AROUND *the* HOUSE A NEWSLETTER FOR HOMEOWNERS & HOMEBUYERS

July 2021

Vol. 6, Issue 2

BUILDING WEALTH THROUGH HOMEOWNERSHIP

If you're thinking about buying a home, or if you're currently a homeowner, that home purchase can be a great way to build wealth, even during the pandemic. Experts say the key to building personal wealth through homeownership is to buy at a younger age, buy in the right location, and properly maintain that property over the years.

PHFA has a statewide network of housing counseling agencies. Housing counselors are trained and certified to help you as you consider a possible home purchase. They provide independent, expert advice customized to your needs and targeted to address your individual housing concerns. Their sole responsibility is to help you and your family identify obstacles to housing and determine how to eliminate those obstacles. Plus, these services are free! For example, if your goal is to improve your credit score as you prepare for a home purchase, a housing counselor can help. If you are looking for resources to provide down payment and closing cost assistance, they can identify programs to help you with that. Owning a home requires maintenance and periodic repairs. A housing counselor has knowledge about housing preservation programs that include weatherization and energy efficiency loans and grants.

If you'd like to hear more about the types of housing and personal financial education services offered by our counseling agencies, you can contact an agency near you. All our approved counseling agencies are listed by county on our website at PHFA.org. To learn more about building wealth through homeownership and about housing counseling services, watch for future issues of this newsletter.



Nikki Holcroft (left), a counselor at Genesis Housing Corporation in Norristown, works with a client.

Check out our podcasts about homebuying ("Close to Home") and money management ("Master Your Money") on [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#) and [PHFA.org](#).

SUMMER MAINTENANCE TIPS

Your home is a big investment. So, to protect it, you need to do routine maintenance before little problems grow into big ones. In this issue, we'll look at exterior issues on your home to inspect this summer. Here's our Top-4 list of trouble spots for you to keep as a yearly reference:

1. **Inspect your roof.** You don't necessarily have to climb up on the roof to check it out. You can usually do a visual inspection from the ground.
2. **Paint or seal exterior wood.** Decks need regular staining or sealing, usually every two years. Wood on the side of your house may need to be repainted, too. Check for peeling.
3. **Trim trees and shrubs near the house.** You want air to be able to circulate freely around your home.
4. **Inspect caulking around doors and windows.** Look for damage or wear. Scrape out old, dry caulking and apply new.

Some of these tasks are best done on a ladder. If you aren't comfortable climbing a ladder or if you are over age 60, hire a handyman. The expense will be small compared to a hospital visit.

Scroll down on [PHFA's YouTube channel](#) to see videos about Home Repair and Maintenance.

It's hard to get answers to financial questions from someone who isn't trying to sell you a product or service. Our Money Guru will get you the information you need without messing with your karma.

The Money Guru



THIS ISSUE: Everyone always tells me to put money away, but it's hard on my income. And unexpected expenses always come up. Any suggestions on how to save money when I never seem to have extra?

THE GURU: The secret here is to start small. Most people can put away \$5 a week. Over time, that small amount will surprise you with its growth. Over a year, even without interest, you'll put aside \$260. In two or three years, that will be a nice emergency fund. When unexpected money comes in, since it is above and beyond your salary, add it to this special account. Then add in some interest if you put this in a savings account, and now your money will really start working for you.

Remember, grasshopper: starting small is better than never starting at all.

WHAT DOES FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE LOOK LIKE?

As we celebrate our nation's independence this month, let's take a look at the topic of financial independence. We tend to think of financial independence in terms of impressive wealth, not having to work, and living a life of luxury. In reality, few people are financially independent by that definition. What if we looked at financial independence as the ability to make our own financial decisions and live in a manner that we choose? Looks a little different now, doesn't it?

Think about what financial independence might look like for you. Maybe it's having a satisfying job that provides a decent wage and benefits that let you live comfortably. Maybe it's having emergency savings that would cover three-to-six months of expenses during a crisis. Maybe it's buying a home so you don't have to rely on landlords and you build wealth at the same time. Whatever it is, the key is putting a plan in place and sticking to it!

When setting financial (and other) goals, use the word "**SMART**," use the SMART acronym to guide you, in which each letter reminds you of a needed action. SMART goals are **S**pecific; saying you want to save for retirement is good, but not specific. SMART goals are **M**easurable; what is the target amount? SMART goals are **A**ction-oriented; a goal to save means you have to *open* a savings account and *make* deposits. SMART goals are **R**ealistic; refer back to not having to work and living a life of luxury. SMART goals are **T**imely; set a time within which you want to achieve them. Finally, make sure that any goals are **Y**ours (or **SMARTY**), too! Following someone else's goals may prove disappointing in the future.

Tell us your homeownership story

We'd like to hear how owning a home has positively changed your life. What does homeownership mean to you? Tell us your story and send us a photo, too. If we pick your story for sharing in a future issue of *Around the House*, we'll send you a \$25 Visa gift card. So, please, only submit if you are okay with us sharing your story and photo. Check out other PHFA homeownership stories on our website at PHFA.org.

Send **YOUR** story to AroundtheHouse@phfa.org



Natalie & Jake, Harrisburg homeowners and PHFA customers.



**Need help with housing?
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Customer Solutions Center • 1-855-U-Are-Home (827-3466)

Mon – Fri 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

AskPHFA@PHFA.org

