

AROUND *the* HOUSE

A NEWSLETTER FOR HOMEOWNERS & HOMEBUYERS

April 2021

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Free annual credit reports

Due to COVID-19, consumers have WEEKLY access to their free credit reports from all three major consumer reporting bureaus (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion) through April of 2022. While this report doesn't include your credit score, it does provide you the opportunity to look for mistakes in your credit report that may unfairly harm your score. You can request a copy from AnnualCreditReport.com through one of the following ways:

- Online: Visit AnnualCreditReport.com
- Phone: Call (877) 322-8228



You can request all three reports at once or you can order one report at a time. By requesting the reports separately (for example, one every four months) you can monitor your credit report throughout the year. Once you've received your annual free credit report, you can still request additional reports. By law, a credit reporting company can charge no more than \$13.00 for a credit report.

Explaining Escrow



When you receive your monthly mortgage statement, you will see funds being deposited into your escrow account. So, what is escrow? It's an easy way to manage property taxes and insurance premiums for your home. You don't have to save for them separately. Let's look at your monthly mortgage payment. Your mortgage payment consists of principal payments on the house and interest to your lender. The remainder of your payment is deposited into your escrow account for payment of real estate taxes and insurance premiums, such as hazard, flood or mortgage insurance (MI). The escrow payments accumulate and are used to pay these bills as they are due. Check back next issue and we'll discuss what is an escrow shortage and how it affects you.

Handy Hank Says...

Ask Hank your home maintenance questions



THIS ISSUE: Hank, in the off-season, I don't like leaves and sticks to blow into my outside AC unit. I don't want to cover it because that will hold in moisture and cause it to rust prematurely. Any suggestions?

HANK: I've never been a fan of AC covers for the reason you mention. Every fall, I simply put some fiberglass screen over the top of my AC unit. I hold it in place with a bit of rope around the unit. Not too fancy, but it keeps the leaves out while letting moisture evaporate.

Today's Brain
Twister

Related to personal money management, what is the "snowball effect?" Answer on Page 2

It's time to check your benefit status

Did you know that both you and your employer each pay a 6.2 percent Social Security tax on earnings up to \$142,800 (2021) and a 1.45 percent Medicare tax on all earned income? If you're self-employed, you'll pay the entire 12.4 percent Social Security tax and a 2.9 percent Medicare tax!

(Cont'd)

April is National Social Security Month, and it's a great time to review your benefits status for all you have paid into Social Security and Medicare. Why is this important? The information that's being reported to the Social Security Administration (SSA) by your employer and the Internal Revenue Service directly affects benefit projections. As Social Security benefits play a key role in retirement income security, you want to make sure that the projections are correct.

Check out SSA's web portal at *My Social Security* to review your reported benefits. You can create your free account at SSA.gov.

SPRING 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 spring. Here's our Top-6 list of trouble spots for you to keep as a yearly reference:

1. **Clean gutters and downspouts.** Blocked gutters can mean water in your basement or garage.
2. **Schedule an air conditioning service.** Now is the time to take care of this *before* it gets hot. Sometimes you can save money by having your AC and your furnace serviced at the same time.
3. **Check your screens.** While we're talking about staying cool, this is a good time to fix any screening that has rips and tears.
4. **Sharpen any tools.** If you didn't do this over the winter, sharpen any tools you'll need this spring. Get your clippers ready for the season.
5. **Buy gas for your lawnmower.** You'll want fresh gas to help your mower run its best.
6. **Feed your lawn.** If you want your grass to do well this year, have your lawn aerated by a lawn service and then spread some fertilizer (consider organic). That lets air and food get down to the roots of the grass.

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.

Check back next issue when we'll discuss summer maintenance.

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? How has owning your home affected your family? Tell us your story, and we'd love to get a photo of you enjoying your home, 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



Laura, Norristown
PHFA Homeowner

BRAIN TWISTER ANSWER: When you pay off one bill, you take those funds along with the normal payment you were submitting and apply to another bill. Once that bill is paid off, you do the same with your next bill. This allows you to pay off debt instead of spending the "extra" funds from the bill that you no longer have on something else. It works!



Need help with housing?

Assistance is a call or a click away!

Customer Solutions Center • 1-855-U-Are-Home (827-3466)

Mon – Fri 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

AskPHFA@PHFA.org

