

HOUSECALLS

Wishing you a Happy and Healthy New Year



It's 2015 !

How to beat the 'grandma scam'

The caller simply said, "Hello, grandma." He said he was in jail in a foreign country and desperately needed bail. He wanted \$2,500 and he said he was scared and needed it quickly.

But he wasn't the grandson. He was a scammer, part of a worldwide crime epidemic that robs people of about \$3 billion a year, according to cbsnews.com. Con artists say about one in 50 people fall for the scam that calls on a grandparent to rescue a child who says he is alone, afraid, in jail and desperate. In some scams, the caller pretends to be a family friend or family member calling about the grandchild in danger.

Panic is the scammer's main asset. According to the FBI, scammers pressure people to act quickly. If people stay calm, they could easily determine that the call or email is a scam. The FBI advises people never to wire money or use a prepaid card because of a request made on the telephone or by email.

If you receive such a call, ask questions:

- The grandchild's full name.
- Names of family members.
- Call parents or relatives to verify.

Finally, have a family code word that only a family member would know.

Getting the best value for your dollar:

Existing homes prices sparkle!

To get everything you want in your new home -- including a great price -- look to a sale of an existing home, experts say.

Sales of newly constructed homes have led the market in recent years, but as builders focused on high-end construction, the price gap between new construction and existing homes has widened.

One Florida couple, quoted in The Wall Street Journal, said they spent \$273,000 for an existing home, but to get everything they were looking for in a new home, they would have spent \$50,000 to \$60,000 dollars more.

Builders have focused on larger homes because well-heeled buyers were the most reliable market segment, according to Zillow. Entry-level and mid-range buyers stayed away from the home market because of job, mortgage and other economic considerations.

It's not surprising that the median price of new homes increased by 24 percent from 2009 to 2013, mainly because builders were building more expensive houses.

During the same period, the median resale price posted only a 14.7 percent gain.

New construction is good for the overall economy. The National Association of Home Builders estimates that each new single-family home creates three full time jobs for a



year. While home construction typically accounts for 5 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, it has contributed as little as 3.1 percent recently.

But today, sales of new homes are slowing to about 65 percent to 70 percent of their annual average since 2000, according to Zillow.

More entry- and mid-level buyers are in the market and they are buying existing homes, not new.

Price is a main concern, but location also plays a part. Buyers often want to live closer to city centers, while most home construction takes place in the suburbs.

Economists for the National Association of Home Builders say the price gap between new and existing homes is

starting to narrow, but it will take time for it to get closer.

Recently, 31 percent of new homes sold for \$200,000 or less, Commerce Department data show. That means builders are picking up a larger share of the less-expensive home market.

Builders say it also suggests that the first-time home buyer is finally coming back into the picture, which will push median prices down over time.

Ask the Expert



Should we get a mortgage now or wait for interest rates to fall?

Interest rates on the 30-year fixed-rate mortgage change all the time, so today's rate probably isn't the same as last month's or next month's.

If you've found the home you want, you might as well take the plunge.

Rates are very low right now.

On January 3, 2014, the average interest rate for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage was 4.63 percent nationwide. By December 16, the rate fell to 3.80 percent and remained close for a week or more. It was the lowest level since June 2013 according to the mortgage-information website HSH.com.

When interest rates drop, here's how to take advantage of them:

First, figure out what the best rates are in your area.

The gap between the lowest and the highest rate a mortgage applicant is offered averages about 0.30 percentage points, according to mortgage lenders.

On a \$400,000, 30-year fixed-interest rate loan at 4.03 percent, borrowers will pay \$145,000 in interest over the first 10 years of the loan and \$289,969 in interest over the life of the loan.

With a 3.73 percent interest rate, borrowers will pay

Looking forward to 2015!

Out with the old year and in with the new.

Time to get excited. There is so much coming our way in 2015. More challenge. More work. More fun. More success.

New Year is a fantastic time to start with a new energy and new attitude. Make it great!



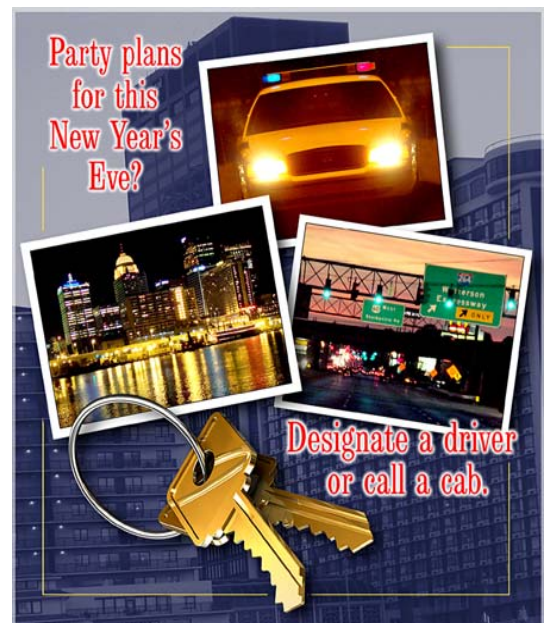
\$11,464 less in the first 10 years and \$24,717 less over 30 years.

Following the \$400,000 example, a person with a FICO score higher than 740 on a scale that ranges from 300 to 850, who is paying 20 percent down, could get a mortgage at 3.75 percent interest from an online lender or 4.07 percent from local lenders. Some banks charge less if you have a savings account or brokerage account with them.

Once you find a rate that appeals to you, figure out how much you'll pay per month and whether that amount is manageable.

Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every New Year find you a better person.

*Benjamin Franklin's 1755
Poor Richard's Almanac*

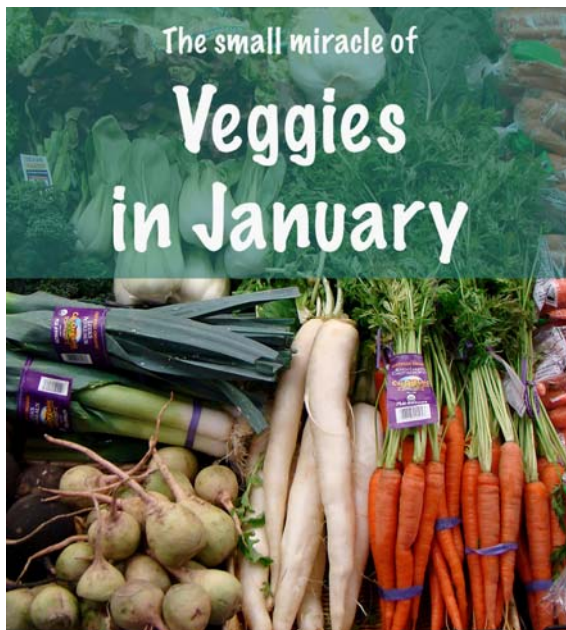


Cooking in the frozen north in 1916 (and for the whole scope of human life before that) didn't take much creativity.

There wasn't much to eat and none of it was fresh. Cooks would boil some water, throw in some steely, solidified bread (hard tack) and some chunks of salt pork. Dinner. Bon appetite.

Even in the early 20th century, most of the world had no fresh food in the winter. Vegetables would save for a while, at least root vegetables would, but most vegetables couldn't be transported. They would rot during the trip. Ice filled train cars didn't help since the vegetables would be soggy and tasteless as soon as they were thawed. Even meat did not survive the freezing process of the time.

But in 1916, a naturalist in Labrador, Canada, one day joined the Inuit for



some ice fishing. Air temperatures were so extreme, many degrees below zero, that, as the Inuits pulled the trout from

holes carved in ice, the fish froze in seconds.

When the naturalist and his family sat down to dinner, they were astonished. The fish, when thawed, tasted fresh caught -- an extraordinary treat in the frozen north.

During the next 10 years, Clarence Birdseye experimented with flash freezing and preserving foods. Eventually coming up with the technical process for freezing and transporting the food. Suddenly you could have peas in Denver in January. Or fresh trout in Dallas. Or a fresh steak in Boston.

In 1929 he sold his company General Seafood to Postum Cereal Company, which changed the name to General Foods. Today if you see some peas and carrots called Birdseye, you will know the story of an advance in cooking.

Source: How We Got to Now by Steven Johnson, 2014, Penguin.



Computer bug hides for 19 years

Those pesky Windows updates.

Do you sometimes wonder if they are trivial and designed just to annoy you?

Well, here is a story that might clarify how important those updates are.

Microsoft has just released a patch to Windows 95 operating system -- and to every version of its desktop operating system since then. That's 19 years worth of operating systems. In all that time, a major bug was 'sitting in plain sight,' according to C-Net. The bug is so serious that it earned a vulnerability score of 9.3 out of 10.

Dubbed WinShock, the vulnerability could allow a hacker to run code remotely on an infected computer. Like many operating system vulnerabilities, the user would first have to be enticed to click on a link or open an attachment.

Still, it appears even the legions of evil hackers did not discover the security hole before it was patched in November 2014.

On the underground information market, this vulnerability, if detected could have been worth six-figures, says an IBM researcher.

Moral: Update your computer.

Bald Eagles gain in numbers, heal their damaged reputation

The Bald Eagle thrives.

Just 40 years ago, you could not say the same thing as majestic bird dropped out of sight, its number shrinking to under 500 pairs nationwide.

Today there are more than 10,000 mating pairs in the U.S. and there is so much interest in the eagle's welfare that web cams of their spectacular nests abound.

"The population continues to grow and doesn't seem to be slowing down," according to Center for Conservation Biology's Director Bryan Watts. It's been growing by about 10 percent a year since the 1980s.

In 1963, the population was estimated to be 487 nationwide.

The reason for the bird's rebound is often attributed to the removal of insecticide DDT and conservation efforts that put it on the endangered species list.

But, human attitudes toward the bird have changed as well. The birds were once hunted for their feathers and even



persecuted.

Since the eagles often preyed on farm and game animals, they were seen as pests. In the 1800s and 1900s and for hundreds of years before that, the birds were considered to be of poor character. Benjamin Franklin considered the eagle to be lazy, according to Frank Bildstein of the Hawk Mountain sanctuary

in Pennsylvania. The birds were even depicted in early movies as being child killers.

By the 20th century the enthusiasm for killing Bald Eagles, along with environmental factors, had devastated their populations and human attitudes began to change.

Today, raptors are seen as part of the chain of life and hunting or killing them is illegal and, most people think, it is morally wrong.

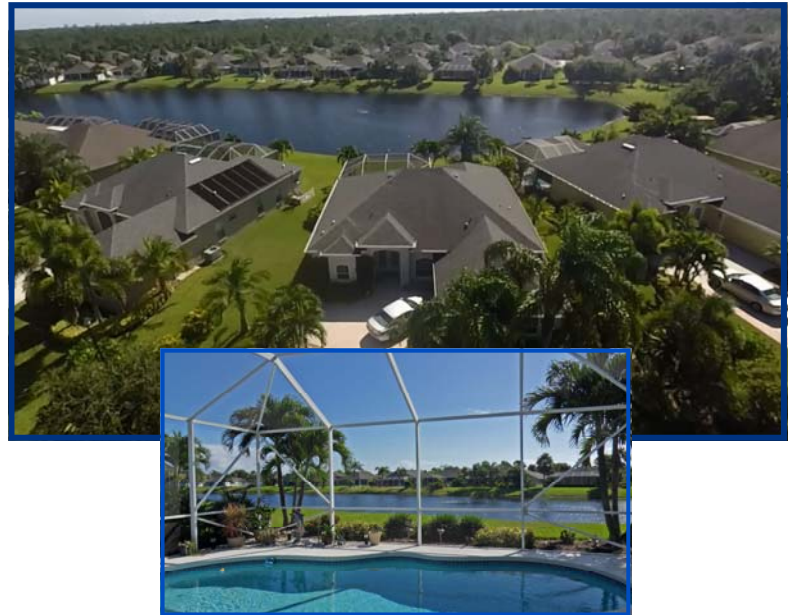
For the first time in decades, spotting a Bald Eagle is possible, even in populated areas, and the sighting is usually a cause of excitement, experts say.

Featured Listing (Just Sold!)

Lakeside Pool Home in the Pines

A newer lake front 4 bedroom, 3 bathroom pool home in the highly sought after Pines subdivision of Jensen Beach, FL. This is an immaculately maintained and updated home with private lake views. Upgrades include granite counter tops, a double convection oven and a convection microwave, Bosch dishwasher; A new Trane 18 SEER multi stage air conditioning unit; Miami/Dade approved storm shutters. New PGT tinted windows; and much more. There's an elegant formal dining room as well as both a living and family room in a desirable open free flowing configuration. The spacious master suite has a separate tub and shower as well as dual vanities. The fourth bedroom is separate and can easily be used as an in-law suite. Backup generator outlet in the lanai.

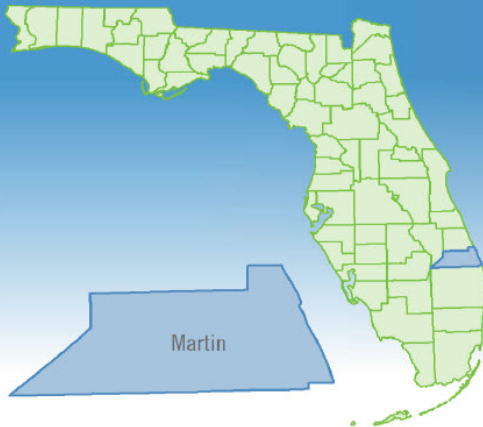
Sold for \$360,000
(Over Appraised Price)



Martin County Townhouses and Condo Report for November 2014

Click on the Image for the full report

Monthly Market Detail - November 2014
Townhouses and Condos
Martin County



Summary Statistics	November 2014	November 2013	Percent Change Year-over-Year
Closed Sales	91	79	15.2%
Paid in Cash	54	55	-1.8%
New Pending Sales	105	106	-0.9%
New Listings	127	169	-24.9%
Median Sale Price	\$115,751	\$100,000	15.8%
Average Sale Price	\$147,413	\$137,770	7.0%
Median Days on Market	78	71	9.9%
Average Percent of Original List Price Received	93.0%	90.6%	2.6%
Pending Inventory	172	160	7.5%
Inventory (Active Listings)	490	641	-23.6%
Months Supply of Inventory	4.7	6.1	-23.9%

View all Market Reports for Martin County, Saint Lucie County, and Florida (statewide)

Click on the name of the region above to view the reports.



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