

Bar Association seminars to help public with information on foreclosures, alternatives

By Donald Rodrigue

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MARTIN COUNTY — Area homeowners facing potential foreclosure will soon have a chance to gather information on all possible solutions under one roof.

The Martin County Bar Association is holding two free seminars in March to help those navigating the sometimes turbid waters of home foreclosure, says Association President Preethi Sekharan.

"We are hoping to provide the public with important information," she said. "There are a lot of misconceptions out there, and we are hoping this will be a very informative seminar and of benefit to the public."

Funded by a \$2,500 grant from the Florida Bar Association, the seminar will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. on March 16 and 24 at the Chastain campus of Indian River State College. South Florida attorney W. Trent Steele, who has offices in Hobe Sound, Palm Beach Gardens and Port St. Lucie, will be coordinating the seminars.

"We are going to have a number of speakers talk about the pre-foreclosure and the foreclosure process," Steele said. We want to help people understand what they can do to avoid foreclosure, as well as other options available to them when they are in a difficult situation."

Steele is particularly excited about a new program for Florida homeowners who've had problems getting their bank or mortgage holder to respond to phone calls about mortgage problems. Implemented by the Florida Supreme Court in late 2009, the Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program was created to stem the tide of foreclosure filings in the state court system.

"One of the problems many people have is they can't get anyone on the phone at the bank," Steele said. "This court-ordered program requires the bank to have somebody on the phone who can help them discuss the various options available with a mediator present in order to see if their foreclosure problems can be avoided."

Steele emphasized that the upcoming seminars in Martin County are open to anyone who resides in the 19th Judicial Circuit of Florida, which covers Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties. Attendees will learn about various programs such as Deed in Lieu of Foreclosure and Cash for Keys, as well as receive information on short sales and the Home Affordable Foreclosure Alternatives and Home Affordable Modification programs.

"What's wonderful if you can qualify with a program like HAMP, is that they will crop your mortgage to up to 30 percent of your income and lower the interest rate as low as 2 percent," he said.

Both Steele and Sekharan say homeowners may still have options even if they've already been told to get out of the home.

"By providing such seminars to the public, we're hoping to get information to them to help them navigate the waters of foreclosure better," Sekharan said.



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