

Around the Water Cooler

<http://h20cooler.wordpress.com/2009/06/24/fix-your-mortgage-workshops/>

Fix your mortgage workshops

In home on June 24, 2009

Every three months, 250,000 new families enter into foreclosure, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association.

To help people facing concerns with their mortgage, the Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund, Inc. and Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago teamed up to host two Fix Your Mortgage workshops in May and June. The City of Chicago, The MacArthur Foundation and the Home Ownership Preservation Initiative also sponsored the events.

At-risk homeowners who attended received free counseling and application assistance for President Obama's "Making Home Affordable" loan modification program, <http://makinghomeaffordable.gov/>. It is estimated that about 30,000 Chicago area homeowners qualify to have their monthly mortgage payment reduced under this new program.

Michael W. van Zalingen, director of home ownership services for Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago, said the state has over 100,000 foreclosures but does not have enough housing counselors to provide meaningful services. Real estate lawyers can help fill that gap — as they did at the two events, he said.

"It was really inspiring," he said. "It was wonderful and refreshing because I've been really depressed about the foreclosure crisis ... This really made me feel like we can do something about this."

A total of 932 people were counseled during the two events, and 526 of them qualified for Obama's loan modification, van Zalingen said. Estimates say that there will be 10 million more foreclosures nationally over the next five years, he said.

"There will be a need for real estate lawyers to develop this kind of expertise," he said. "I think that it's important to make sure attorneys have the skills, but also are able to provide these events on an ongoing basis."

Henry S. Shulruff, senior vice president – business development for Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund, Inc., said about 30,000 people in the Chicago area may qualify for the modification.

“We’ve taken big steps toward helping many people,” Shulruff said. “There a lot more people that could be helped. ... The spirit of volunteerism that Illinois lawyers have shown has been tremendous. They have stepped up to the plate in droves to help out. It is refreshing and very encouraging to see how much lawyers are willing to help those in need in their community.”

These events have been a great opportunity for the real estate bar and the not-for-profit sectors to work together and use their knowledge, training and resources to help people, Shulruff said. He said several hundred lawyers were trained to assist at these two events.

“When we first came up with this idea we thought, one, that it’s a great idea; and two, we thought there was the opportunity to create a format that could be duplicated in other parts of the state or throughout the country...,” he said. “These events, as far as we know it, are the first of their kind and they were really successful. We have since been talking to other organizations in other parts of the country, other bar associations and bar-related title insurance companies that want to duplicate this format.

“One of the keys to making this work is having the lawyers properly trained. Michael has done a great job conducting seminars and training and last week we recorded an on-demand program, a CLE seminar on negotiating loan modifications and the Obama plan and that’s available through www.atgf.com.”