

Home builders, sellers get cre

By Karell Skewinski
hankrate.com

Time was that when you heard of a home being offered for sale with a discount or some other generous bonus, your first thought was, "OK, so what's wrong with it?" But with prices leveling off and properties now staying on the market much longer than they used to, it's becoming more common to find lucrative incentives offered on both newly built and existing homes.

Of course, everything depends on whether you're house hunting in a real estate market that has cooled. But if you're in the right place at the right time, you could wind up getting considerably more than you bargained for — in the best possible sense — when you make an offer on a home.

Free vacations offered

Tom Stevens, president of the National Association of Realtors, says home builders started offering incentives in cooling markets such as certain parts of Florida, Las Vegas, California and the Northeast. "Home builders were among the first to react with various incentive programs and promotions to help keep their properties moving and to reduce unsold inventories," he

said.

High-end kitchen cabinets and counters, upgraded bathrooms, generous hardwood flooring packages, finished basements and professional landscaping are just a few of the common gratis offers Stevens has heard of. "And good old-fashioned discounts and cash incentives ranging between \$25,000 and \$50,000 are out there, too," he said.

Three-quarters of the 369 home builders recently surveyed by the National Association of Home Builders said that they are now including once-expensive extras at no additional cost to help sell homes. One-third reported that they are now also absorbing such costs as financing points on mortgages to help move unsold properties. Several even admitted to offering free vacations.

Real estate analyst Jack McCabe, of McCabe Research and Consulting in Deerfield Beach, Fla., said that desperate developers in South Florida, for example, are now offering potential buyers a host of generous incentives, in one case even the free use of a yacht. "Our area's incentives really vary by market and product type, so we're seeing just about everything today — points and closing costs being paid by sellers, upgraded trim and generous

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mortgage rates dip for fifth straight week

Rates on 30-year mortgages fell for a fifth consecutive week as sales of both existing and new homes in July declined, confirming a cooling housing market.

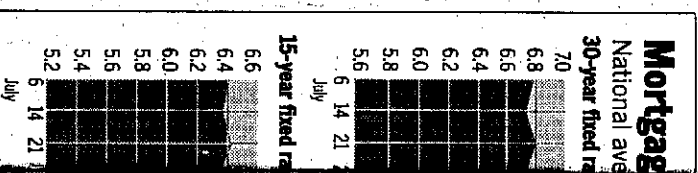
The mortgage company Freddie Mac said Thursday that 30-year fixed-rate mortgages fell to 6.48 percent this week, down from 6.52 percent last week.

That was the lowest level for 30-year mortgages since they averaged 6.43 percent the week of April 6.

Mortgages had risen since then, hitting a more than four-year high of 6.80 percent the week of July 20 before falling.

Analysts view the rollback in rates as further evidence that the economy is slowing.

Sales of new homes dropped in July by the largest amount since February while the inventory of unsold homes climbed to a record high, the Commerce Department



reported Thursday followed news that the National Association of Realtors that sold owned homes in July to a 2 1/4

kitchen appliance packages, one year of (paid) condo fees, big-screen plasma TVs being thrown

in for free, even vice both to an whenever you

IN BRIEF

CAMARILLO

Firm picked to manage project in Las Vegas

S.L. Leonard & Associates will oversee the design and construction of the POST Modern Museum in Las Vegas.

The \$32 million renovation of the 1933 post office and federal courthouse will include 13,000 square feet of cultural, civic and educational exhibition space that also will be used for receptions, special events and conferences.

The museum will focus on Las Vegas history from the 1940s through 1960s, including

the development of casinos, politics and organized crime.

S.L. Leonard & Associates is a project management firm that is also working on the construction of the new Camarillo Library, the Working Artists Ventura development, the University of Judaism Library and Chapel expansion, American Cancer Society's Los Angeles Hope Lodge and multiple affordable housing projects.

—Mail submissions to Jenni Mintz at the Ventura County Star, P.O. Box 6711, Ventura, CA 93006, fax to 650-2950. For details, call 645-1049.

FREDDIE MAC
5.375
6 MONTH 6
FIRST CALL
Our lowest rate

*Annual percentage yield (APY) is current as of 07/31/06 and is only. Rates are subject to change without notice. Minimum 10% deposit is \$95,999. A penalty may be imposed for ear

VENTURA COUNTY STAR 8/25/06