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in 2013.

"Our tagline for 5401 North is 'not just a place to live – a place to live better,'" says Ric Rojas, president of Level Homes. "Our goal is to create a place where families and individuals can pursue diverse interests without ever leaving the community. We'll have concerts and movie nights at our urban farm, and we're working with Wake Tech to establish a microbrewery where craft beer making classes are taught. We're also coordinating cooking classes with vegetables grown from our community garden. Parents can walk their kids to River Bend Elementary School right here in the neighborhood, and River Bend Middle School, also in the neighborhood, will open in 2017. North Raleigh Christian Academy and Rolesville High School are easily accessible, and Wake Tech is next door. We're very excited about 5401 North, and we invite everyone to come see what we're all about."

A model unveiling was held in late 2015 at 5401 North for area Realtors to tour The Corolla, a 4 bedroom, 3 bath Level Homes model of 3,026 square feet. Megan Fry of Model Home Interiors was on hand at the event to review the ease of home personalization with DIY (Do It Yourself) projects in which DIY-savvy buyers can customize their homes through front door colors, interior wall accent colors, lighting choices and interior finishes. Standard features in all homes in the Level Homes Signature Collection include 10-foot first floor and 9-foot second floor ceilings, hardwood flooring in first floor living areas, gourmet kitchens with stainless steel GE Profile kitchen appliances, semi-frameless shower enclosures in master baths, exceptional outdoor living spaces and an extensive energy-efficient package that adheres to Environments for Living Gold Standards. The Signature Collection is available exclusively at 5401 North, further contributing to the unique character of the community.

"Since our model home unveiling, we've received a lot of attention from both consumers and Realtors," says Lorraine Kelley, Level Homes New Home Sales Counselor for 5401 North. "Everyone is amazed by the progressive concepts of our commu-

nity. A master-planned 'agrihood' is something people in the area have wanted for a long time. I'm delighted to be a part of it!"

Keller Williams' Broker Irene Mistretta was so impressed with 5401 North when she attended the model unveiling that she and her husband now have a home under construction there. "I fell in love with the character of the homes at 5401 North," says Mistretta. "The floor plans and the standard features are excellent. The proximity to everything – Our daughter's school, and virtually everywhere



A home at 5401 North, The Corolla, is a four-bedroom, three-bath Level Homes model of 3,026 square feet.

we go is terrific – We'll just jump on 540 and go! And the price point is fabulous too... You can't find homes with this degree of craftsmanship at this price anywhere else in North Raleigh. So far it's been a smooth process with sales, construction and the design center. We're looking forward to closing on our home!"

Homes at 5401 North are priced from the low \$300s to the mid \$400s. Visit the 5401 North Discovery Center at 7712 Midtown Market Ave. in Raleigh and check them out online at 5401North.com. Call 919-521-5910 to learn more about 5401 North and for Discovery Center hours of operation.

**SMART** from previous page**Take your time in shopping for the right lender.**

Since the financial downturn, the federal government has become increasingly involved in the mortgage market. The result is that government-backed mortgages now represent the bulk of all home loans made in the United States. Meanwhile, there's been a decline in the number of mortgage brokers — intermediaries between consumers and bankers — operating in the field.

"A lot of mortgage brokers are gone. But more of the brokers and lenders who are left are real pros in their field," says Guy Cecala, the CEO of Inside Mortgage Finance Publications, which publishes industry newsletters and reports.

More stringent lending standards mean homeowners face a greater risk that their mortgage application will be denied. To reduce your risk of rejection, Cecala urges you to choose your lender carefully.

"You always want to shop around, not only for the best possible rates and fees but also for a lender who offers good service and processing speed," he says.

Use referrals to help you select the best lender.

Unlike those seeking a mortgage for a home purchase, those seeking to refinance don't have the benefit of a list of lenders handed to them by a real estate agent. But there's no reason that refinancers can't also turn to local real estate agents.

As Cecala says, agents are in a good position to know which lenders will offer the smoothest and swiftest loan processing. After all, they work with lenders year after year and need to identify those most likely to get their deals to the finish line on time.

"Contact at least three different types of lenders before making your selection. Try to include on your list one mortgage broker, one major bank and one smaller bank or credit union," Cecala says.

Don't give out your Social Security number prematurely.

Of course, no quality lender will guarantee that your mortgage rate has

been locked in without first pulling your credit scores. But that doesn't mean you should give out your Social Security number, a credit-score requirement, while you're still comparison shopping.

You shouldn't have to release your private information just for routine rate shopping. And getting your credit checked too often can hurt your scores.

"You need to be guarded about your private information," Gumbinger says.

Try to steer clear of "junk fees."

There are a number of costs and fees involved in refinancing, and only some of them are imposed by lenders. These lender-based fees include the cost for a home appraisal and a copy of your credit report. Also, other charges, often called "junk fees," are imposed by the lender.

To better protect consumers, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has set tighter rules to let borrowers compare lenders on the basis of their charges. As a result, HUD now requires lenders to give borrowers an early and accurate listing of their closing costs.

But Gumbinger says it's up to consumers to carefully compare a lender's charges before deciding whether to proceed. To do this, it's important to study a copy of the lender's estimate of closing costs. This standard form, which was recently updated by federal regulators, should list all the fees you'd pay at closing, with a very small margin for changes. The lender must give you this estimate shortly after you apply for a mortgage.

By carefully reviewing your estimated fees, you'll have a chance to ask for lower charges or to change lenders to get a better deal.

Though mortgage lenders face ever-stricter disclosure requirements in recent years, their fees have also climbed because of their heavier workloads, according to Gumbinger.

"Remember that what constitutes a junk fee — versus a legitimate business charge — is always in the eye of the beholder," he says.

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