

# Single Women Home Buyers: The Growing National Market

By ALLISON S. ZANGRILLI, ESQ.

**O**ver the past several years, single women have emerged as a significant and growing market of homebuyers. Statistics demonstrate the home buying power of this demographic, and make women an important force in the home buying market. Many factors have contributed to the trend, which is predicted to continue. Single women today are motivated to achieve independent financial security and see home ownership as a way to get it. They are specific about what they are looking for in a home, are willing to spend the time looking for it, and are not afraid of home maintenance as a responsibility of home ownership.

According to recent national studies by organizations in the housing industry, including the National Association of Realtors, Fannie Mae, and Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, single women account for the fastest growing segment of the home buying population in America. Single women are the second largest group of homebuyers, behind married couples who account for approximately 59%. A study by the National Association of Realtors revealed that in 2003, single women purchased approximately 1 in 5 homes (1.7 million homes), representing 21% of all home purchases. Single men accounted for only 10% of purchases. More women than men lived alone in 2003 (15.5 million versus 11.8 million), and women were more likely than men to own their home (56% versus 47%). It is not only single mothers or divorced women driving up the numbers of female homebuyers. Studies show that more than three quarters of female home-

buyers in 2003 did not have any children. The numbers of female home buyers in their 20's and over the age of 50 have steadily increased as well. Harvard University reported that single women accounted for 30% of overall homeowner growth between 1994 and 2002. The gap between what women and men pay for a home is also narrow (\$139,500 compared to \$142,500). Fannie Mae estimates that by the year 2010, there will be approximately 31 million female-headed households in the United States, accounting for almost 28% of all households.

Women are motivated to purchase homes by a desire for financial security and the sound investment of home ownership, as real estate has steadily appreciated in recent years. Women live longer, think about financial security in their retirement, and recognize the benefits that home ownership provides more so than ever before. Building equity and taking advantage of tax deductions appeals to women, as to most buyers. Low interest rates, low down payment and first-time buyer programs, loan programs specifically geared toward women, high divorce rates and the fact that child support payments are considered income to single parents, have helped contribute to the trend. A key factor is that women are marrying later in life or not at all - they do not see marriage as a pre-requisite to buying a home, as did most women twenty years earlier. Women today make more money, assume leadership roles in business, are

financially independent, and control their own financial decisions far more than in decades past. A 2003 Sears, Roebuck and Company study showed that 92% of the women surveyed viewed their homes as an investment, rather than a drain on their financial resources. Growing confidence about real estate among women is further demonstrated by the fact that single women account for a smaller but growing number of those buying second and vacation homes (13%), allowing them to earn rental income. Also on the rise is the number of single women buying older homes, renovating them, and selling for a profit.

Given the numbers of women in the home buying market, becoming familiar with what women look for when purchasing a home is important for those in the housing industry. Of primary concern to women is safety, followed by a desire to be a part of a social atmosphere. This may account for the apparent preference among women for condominium living, as single women made 47% of all condominium purchases in 2003. Women tend to be more detail oriented and specific about their needs in terms of square footage, amenities, and proximity to family and work. Statistically, women spend a longer period of time than men searching



for a suitable home. Women are patient, do their homework, research the market carefully, spend more time using the internet to search for potential homes, and tend to be open about networking with friends and colleagues about home buying issues. Women are more likely to seek out female mortgage brokers, attorneys and real estate professionals.

A key responsibility of home ownership is home maintenance, a responsibility that both single and married women have demonstrated an increasing willingness and ability to undertake in recent years. 53% of married women say they are responsible for basic household maintenance, either alone or with a spouse. According to the 2003 Sears study, 85% of women surveyed have been, are, or expect to be solely responsible for a home at some point in their lives. A 2004 Sears study revealed that 69% of female homeowners surveyed consider themselves at least somewhat handy, and more than 70% said they enjoyed home repair projects. Women recognize their home as their biggest asset, and are taking the steps necessary to maintain and increase their value. There are numerous home repair books on the market geared toward women, and a 2003 Forrester Research study showed that nearly half of all purchases made in Home Depot and Lowes are made by women.

Motivated by a sense of independence, desire for financial security, and increased earning power, women are playing a larger role in today's national housing market than ever before. As the trend continues, it can be expected that professionals in the housing industry will continue and expand marketing efforts geared toward this growing and powerful demographic.

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*"Men make houses, women make homes." ~ unknown*

*"Behind every great woman is herself." ~ unknown*

*"Remember, Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels." ~ Faith Whittlesey*

*"Just go out there and do what you have to do." ~ Martina Navratilova*

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