

## On the Home Front

Bi-monthly column by: Linda Skolnick

### Turn Relocation Jitters Into a Smooth Move

Relocating, whether for a job transfer or your own initiative, can be daunting when you are going to unfamiliar territory. You are faced with the challenge of finding a new home in a new community and having to accomplish it remotely. Here are some strategic steps that will help you achieve a smooth home search, and alleviate some of your relocation jitters.

Since you may need to select a Realtor sight unseen, make sure he or she is backed by a reputable and professional organization. To help you evaluate the company, ask if they have a web site and research their company on the Internet. Working with a quality network increases your chances of being referred to a quality real estate professional. As you talk with potential real estate professionals, make sure they have experience working with relocation clients, as well as specialize in the types of homes and areas that you are interested in.

Is the new city you are moving to in a buyer's or seller's market? Are the home prices comparable to Westport? The answers to these types of questions will give you a heads up on what to expect when you begin your home search. One way to familiarize yourself with the new market is to scan the real estate section of back issues of the newspapers circulated in your target area. Most major newspapers are available at local libraries, and major research libraries maintain archives of even wider selections of newspapers. You can further familiarize yourself with the market by reviewing listings online. Some major real estate networks also post listings online. For example, Prudential Real Estate Network members list properties at [www.prudential.com](http://www.prudential.com). Realtor.com is also an excellent source of information on available homes.

Working with your real estate professional, estimate the price range to which you will confine your search. Many advisors recommend that your debt ratio be no greater than 36% of your gross monthly income. In other words, when combined, a car loan, tuition loan, credit card debt, property taxes, insurance, mortgage and other debts should not exceed 36% of your gross monthly income. One way to determine your price range is to obtain pre-approval from a home mortgage lender. As an added benefit, buyers may take you more seriously with this written commitment from a lender.

Develop a list of criteria to evaluate communities and neighborhoods. Consider including such factors as commuting; school systems; parks; libraries and community facilities; property tax rates and other taxes; crime rates; cost of living; current and historical property values; age and character of neighborhoods; recreation; outdoor activities and

arts; community organizations, charities and sports clubs; shopping; health care; and other amenities, services and costs. Check your local library for “Places Rated Almanac” or research your new community on the Internet. Web sites such as [www.MSN.com](http://www.MSN.com) and Google.com allow you to compare your community with another. And don’t forget about your real estate professional. He or she can send you a relocation packet filled with information about your new area.

Undoubtedly, you will be arranging one or more house-hunting trips. Make sure your real estate professional knows exactly what you need and want so that your trips are productive. Take photographs of your current home or clip pictures from magazines to illustrate the kinds of features you’d like in a new home. Develop a home features checklist. Include rankings for the facts you consider most important—price, square footage, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, other living areas, garage space and other features. These may include laundry facilities, appliances, fireplaces, decorator features, landscaping, etc. You may also want to include other factors that may be of importance to you such as age of the home, pool, and proximity to employment, schools, shopping, hospitals, etc.

Moving can be painful or joyous, depending on whom you consult, how well you plan, and how openly you approach the task. Through a process of sound decision-making, you can banish the relocation jitters and ensure a smooth start to a new life.