

LIVING the AMERICAN DREAM

by Susan Thomas Springer,
for The Bulletin Advertising Department

With interest rates at record lows and lower home prices, first-time home buyers in Central Oregon are discovering that buying a home is not only possible, but this year, it also comes with benefits.

First-time homebuyer, Erika Gurley, checks on the construction progress of her home into which she will move next month.
Photo by **Nicole Werner**/The Bulletin

Mike and Katie Mamic have enjoyed a string of good fortune. First, they found each other and also found jobs in the city they hoped to move to despite the down economy.

Then, they found their perfect house. After that, their luck continued.

The newlyweds learned of the government's tax credit program for first-time home buyers and took advantage of it. They received a credit check for \$8,000 that allowed them to purchase new appliances and replenish their savings.

"We consider ourselves very lucky," said Mike Mamic, who married Katie this year after moving to Bend from Washington. "It's the perfect American dream—you get married and then you're looking for a house."

Mamic added that he and his wife were searching for homes priced around \$235,000. They looked at approximately 100 houses before finding the right one.

The home they chose has granite countertops, hardwood floors and is located in a fairly new subdivision, all of which are features the Mamics appreciated.

The Mamics and other home buyers are finding a silver lining in this difficult economy thanks to a tax credit of up to \$8,000 for first-time home buyers who purchase before December 1. The credit is part of the government's economic stimulus

package called the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

First-time homebuyers who are single taxpayers with incomes up to \$75,000, or married couples with incomes up to \$150,000 qualify for the full credit. The money does not need to be paid back if homeowners live in the home for three or more years. Home buyers can claim the credit on their federal income tax return.

The tax credit made all the difference for another first-time home buyer. Erika Gurley is already mentally planting her vegetable

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garden at her new home into which she'll move next month. As a special education teacher at Madras Elementary, it was hard to save for a down payment, so Gurley started looking at repossessed houses thinking they would be more affordable. She didn't expect that her path would take her to a brand new home being constructed with finishes of her choosing.

"I'm just really excited," said Gurley. "I'm putting my money into an investment instead

of throwing it away each month."

She estimates that her monthly rent and her new mortgage will cost about the same.

Gurley found a home on a cul de sac in a D.R. Horton subdivision called Summit Crest, located in Redmond. She bought early enough to choose granite countertops and hardwood floors. Gurley said it feels like a safe home where she can hang pictures on the walls and she plans for a back deck in the future. Gurley did her homework and was aware of the tax credit program when she began her home search. She praises

helped her with the practical aspects of home buying, he gave her a new garage door opener, too.

This September, Gurley will move into her new three-bedroom, two-bath home with stone siding and a large backyard priced at \$138,000. She will also turn 32 that month.

"It's a wonderful birthday gift!" said Gurley.

Another buyer was quick to take advantage of the tax credit and has been enjoying homeownership since January.

Lindsay Thompson has already received her \$8,000 check, which she is keeping in her savings account in case she needs it for repairs, even though her house in Bend's Elkhorn Estates is fairly new.

Thompson, who was not yet 26 when her sale closed, wasn't thinking of buying a house until she heard about the tax credit. When she saw both home prices and interest rates at all-time lows, she knew it was a good combination for her. She says she feels more confident, adding that buying a home is one of those passages to adulthood.

As with many first-time home buyers, Thompson found the tax credit an incentive too good to pass up.

"It was the icing on the cake," said Thompson.

the professionals she worked with from loan officer, Vickie Storjohann at Academy Mortgage, D. R. Horton construction and her Realtor for making the process a positive experience.

"It can mean the difference between ownership and renting," said Gurley's broker, Dave Feagans, with Alpine Real Estate.

Feagans said the tax credit is a great incentive that can be obtained with minimal paperwork. Gurley said Feagans not only