

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Owning a home of your own is probably the Great American Dream. Certainly the history of our country has been broadly affected by the desires of its people for the acquisition of land. Without the almost universal drive to possess a piece of property somewhere between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the nation's growth would have slowed to a standstill before the Allegheny Mountains were breached.

Even though a large proportion of the country's population is centered in cities today, there remains even in the hearts of most city-dwellers the continuing hope of finding a house they want to buy, making a down-payment, obtaining a mortgage they can manage, and becoming homeowners.

In recent years it's become more and more difficult for people to realize this particular dream. Real estate prices have soared beyond the reach of the average wage-earner, and today's interest rates give pause to even the most courageous and self-assured.

Many people rent because they are unable to put aside enough of their income to make a down payment on a home; thoughts they will ever be able to purchase a house are beginning to fade.

Most young families living in apartments, or older ones with growing children who are a constant expense to support, are leasing houses which are the property of others; they feel locked into their tenant status.

Their discouragement is understandable. If they find a house they like and might possibly be able to afford, they discover interest rates have risen sharply, mortgage money has dried up, and they don't qualify for traditional mortgage loans. Although the family income may be in the neighborhood of \$15,000 a year, perhaps even more, there seems no way to escape the rent increases that come with depressing regularity, and no way to become homeowners.

Yet they can, if they will, break this cycle. Instead of paying rent, they can, if they will, begin paying off a mortgage, start deducting from gross income on their tax returns all

interest and property taxes paid, and commence building equity in their own property instead of collecting rent receipts.

There are, of course, qualifications to be met; unlike most such situations, however, the qualifications are purposeful and specifically tailored to meet the needs of the low-income family. Any employed person earning less than \$17,000 a year and seeking to buy a house priced approximately \$40,000, is eligible.

Since there are still houses for sale priced under \$40,000, any person earning less than \$17,000 a year can qualify.

Magic? Not at all. Step one: Study the real estate sections of newspapers on Cape Cod. Step Two: Talk with real estate agents or answer ads for houses for sale. Go see what's on the market. It doesn't cost anything to look; owners wishing to sell their houses welcome prospective buyers. There's no obligation. Real estate agents will gladly show you every house listed in your price range. See everything available and don't rush. Other houses come on the market every day.

Shop around, rather than limiting yourself to one agent. Different realtors handle different properties. They're all in business to sell houses. Look at houses offered at slightly more than \$40,000, too; remember that a list price is usually an asking price. A serious ball-park offer can often persuade a seller he'd be wise to take what he can get, now, rather than hold out and not get as good an offer later.

Once you've located the property you feel best suits your family's needs, one in good condition, in the location you want, at the right price, take the next step.

Talk to the people at the Farmers Home Administration in Bourne. The telephone number is 759-2136; the address is 160 MacArthur Boulevard. Your best bet is to go to the office, pick up the literature describing the program and learn your options.

The Farmers Home Administration came into existence in 1946 as an outgrowth of the federal government's action, in 1935, to provide financial relief to farmers literally "wiped out" by the seven-year drought that turned America's Great Plains to a dust bowl. During the years 1935 to 1942, only ten inches of rain fell in the mid-west. Tens of thousands of small farms failed.

Farmers watched topsoil turn to dust, saw high winds

lift and blow it away, found once-productive land incapable of supporting crops. People lost their properties to banks, became tenant farmers, day laborers during the Great Depression, or turned into migrants.

Uncle Sam came to the rescue with programs of aid. In 1935 the Rural Resettlement Administration, through which low-income farmers could finance the re-purchase of their own farms with low-interest long-term loans from the federal government, was formed.

In 1946, the drought relieved, World War II won and over, a new name was given the agency: Farmers Home Administration. Only poor farmers were eligible for low-cost loans at that time. Then, in the 1960's, small towns were growing larger, rural development burgeoned, and Farmers Home Administration was empowered to take on new programs. Financing non-farm housing and a variety of community programs was authorized.

Although the majority of loans was made to low-income farmers or small-city governments, business and any farmer squeezed by high interest rates could be helped by the agency. Its loan business increased from around a billion dollars a decade ago to more than \$11 billion today. And, second to farmers, rural housing represents the largest part of the loans the agency makes.

The average foreclosure rate on loans made through Farmers Home Administration is about one in three hundred, an excellent record when compared to loans made by banks. People who run local offices admit to being more understanding than the friendly local banker may be. Accustomed to dealing with low- to moderate-income borrowers, people on the fringes of society, the agency is more lenient than commercial lenders when a borrower fails to make his mortgage payment on time.

If you, or someone you know, is yearning to realize the American Dream of homeownership, give Farmers Home Administration serious consideration. Available to qualified buyers are long-term mortgages which may require no down payment, with interest rates in most instances a couple of points lower than commercial institutions are charging. Cape Cod is a rural area.

All you have to be is poor. Achieving the American Dream may be easier than you think.