

PalmBeachPost.com

 PRINT THIS

Lawyers to offer foreclosure advice

By SARAH PROHASKA

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, September 04, 2007

As unprecedented numbers of St. Lucie County residents face the prospect of losing their homes through mortgage foreclosures, some local lawyers are stepping up to help these people, many of whom have never before dealt with the legal system, understand the law and navigate what can be a daunting process.



The St. Lucie County Bar Association, along with Florida Rural Legal Services Inc. and the 19th Judicial Circuit Pro-Bono Committee, have organized two foreclosure law clinics to give folks free help.

More local news

The first clinic is scheduled for 6-8 p.m. on Sept. 12 in room 109 of Building E at Indian River Community College's main campus in Fort Pierce. A second workshop

Latest breaking news, photos and all of today's *Post* stories.

Share This Story

is slated for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sept. 29 at the Port St. Lucie Community Center on Airoso Boulevard.

"The idea is to give people one-on-one time with an attorney to answer specific questions to the extent that we can about the foreclosure process in general and steps they can take to preserve their rights," said Jason Halliburton, St. Lucie County Bar president.

Representatives from Florida Rural Legal Services, a nonprofit organization that provides free legal services in a number of fields including family law and civil rights, will be on hand to screen applicants who want to apply for legal assistance and possibly have a lawyer take their case.

Sandra Rodriguez-Hickman, the managing attorney of the organization's Fort Pierce office, said it began making foreclosures a priority in January and since then has taken 144 foreclosure cases. The exploding number of local foreclosures in the past year, fallout from the bust in the housing market, prompted the decision, she said.

"It's a sad situation," Rodriguez-Hickman said. "A lot of these people, they're already in crisis mode and usually have other stuff going on as well. With foreclosures, the paperwork itself is daunting."

She said having a lawyer can help those who want to contest their foreclosure, and they've already seen

success stories. One involved a case where a man was temporarily unemployed after a car accident, and the bank agreed to work out a new repayment structure. In another case, a man who spoke little English was making his payments, but they found out the bank was crediting the payments to the wrong account, she said.

Halliburton said the St. Lucie Bar Association decided to organize the forum after St. Lucie Clerk of Court Ed Fry asked for help because court clerks are being inundated with calls about the cases, and they are not allowed to give legal advice.

Process servers drop off boxes full of cases at the clerk's civil division every weekday.

St. Lucie received 429 new foreclosure cases in July, compared with 90 in July 2006. By the end of July, the office had received 2,012 new filings for the year, compared with 1,329 from all of last year.

Find this article at:

http://www.palmbeachpost.com/search/content/tcoast/epaper/2007/09/04/m1b_slforeclose_0904.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.