
Valley of the Sun Real Estate Update

November, 2003

This Month's Topic: Getting a CLUE

What is a CLUE Report?

A number of my friends and clients have recently had questions about the CLUE Report, so I thought it might be helpful to address that subject. A CLUE Report is an insurance industry document that details the claims history of a property. It is named after the Comprehensive Loss Underwriting Exchange, which is a centralized data-collection service. It is designed to provide insurance companies with a single source when they are making a determination about the coverage they will offer.

How does it work?

The CLUE Report is a lot like a Driver's License Record for your house. When you make an insurance claim on your property, a notation about the claim gets added to your CLUE file. These claims are tracked for up to five years, after which they are supposed to drop off the report just like points off your license.

Of course, the industry didn't create the CLUE Report for your convenience; it was intended to help insurance companies control their liability by identifying high-risk properties. The last several years have been tough on insurers, as they have been hit hard by a string of expensive issues such as the recent wildfires in California. As a result, they are now looking for ways to increase their revenues, and charging above-market rates for high-risk properties is one strategy. Even home-owners with clean claims histories are seeing their rates go up.

What problems can it cause?

As a consumer, you can probably appreciate the benefits of a CLUE Report. No one wants to buy a house that has an unreasonable number of problems. However, there are some risks. For instance, some insurance companies add a claim to your CLUE Report if you just call to inquire about coverage for a loss, even if you never actually file a claim. Also, insurers can be overly concerned about a history of water-related claims. Because the issue of mold has become a hot topic recently, and because water damage is a factor in mold growth, some companies will refuse

to cover future water-related claims if a home has a history of such problems. Those that do offer coverage may charge a much higher than normal rate.

This can be a problem for a potential buyer. Even if all the prior problems have been repaired, your insurer might refuse to issue affordable coverage for the new home you have found, and this could cause the deal to collapse. Sellers, of course, have concerns as well, since they need to balance the benefit of any claims they might file against the risk of hindering their ability to sell the home later on.

What can you do about it?

Just as you should periodically follow up on your personal credit history, you might want to check out your home's CLUE report every year or so. You can access a copy at www.choicetrust.com for \$9. Be sure to print out or download the information the first time you pull it up, as you may have to pay again if you forget and go back.

Another important step is to choose your insurer carefully. Not all companies use the CLUE Report, and others use it in different ways. As with any important financial decision, it is worth calling around to find the vendor who offers the best combination of price and service to meet your specific needs.

On the Home Front

Winter is here! It seems like we dropped from the 100's down into the 40's overnight. Jill and I spent much of the last three weekends planting winter grass and hacking back the bougainvillea in the front yard. We even broke down and turned on the heat this morning.

We were happy to have a house-guest for 2 weeks in October. Jill's sister-in-law Erin was with us for some intensive training, as she is taking over as Jill's assistant. It may be a challenge learning to work together over phone, fax and email from Erin's home in Wyoming, but we're looking forward to it.



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Recipe of the Month

Spicy Turkey Stir-Fry

Turkey is one of the great holiday traditions, but a little variety can be nice, too. Here's a quick & easy variation that you can put together with Thanksgiving left-overs, or with store-bought turkey breast any time of the year.

- 1 lb boneless, skinless turkey breast, diced into 3/4 inch cubes
- 2 tsp sesame oil
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/4 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 cup green beans, fresh or frozen
- 3 tablespoons water
- 1 cup instant brown rice, uncooked
- 2 tsp canola oil
- 1/2 cup roasted unsalted peanuts
- 1/4 cup chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce

1. In a medium bowl, mix together sesame oil, garlic, and cayenne. Add turkey; coat well and set aside.
2. Place fresh green beans in a microwave-safe dish. Add water and cook on high for 45 seconds. Drain off water when done. (Skip this step if using frozen beans.)
3. Meanwhile, prepare rice according to package directions.
4. Heat oil over medium heat in a large wok or non-stick frying pan. Add turkey and stir frequently with a wooden spoon for 5 minutes. Add peanuts and continue for 1 minute. Add green beans and continue stir-frying for an additional minute. Finally, pour in chicken broth and soy sauce, and stir-fry for 5 more minutes, or until all liquid evaporates. Stir frequently to prevent sticking.
5. Divide rice into 4 bowls. Spoon the stir-fry mix over rice and serve immediately.

Recipe is designed for 4 portions. Serve with lager-style beer or ice tea. For variety, substitute cashews or almonds for peanuts, snap peas or broccoli for green beans, or experiment with different spice combinations.

Culture Corner

Quick reviews of some recent favorites

Geology: Kartchner Caverns, south-east of Tucson, has just opened the Big Room to public tours. It's a long drive, but the cave formations are very cool, and there is a very good visitor center with lots of information about how the Caverns were discovered, and the efforts to preserve their natural beauty.

Food: Despite the name, the new Keg Steakhouse by the Chandler Mall does not offer any micro-brews. But they do offer a great variety of steaks, attentive service, a bar with leather armchairs in front of the fireplace, and seating on a spacious heated patio. I should also mention that the lemon cheesecake wrapped in a cinnamon crust was one of the best deserts I've had recently.

Movies: There's no question "Open Range" is a western: it's got the high plains setting, grizzled characters, taciturn dialogue, and last-reel gunfight you know well. But it also has a unusually meditative feel, as it explores the conflict between the peace and permanence of the natural world and the sometimes violent human need for change.



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