



## **Ada County Association Makes Strides in Employer Assisted Housing – May 2014**

No one ever said it would be quick or easy. But the Ada County Association of REALTORS® (ACAR) stuck to its conviction that focusing on workforce housing is good for everyone in a community. The 3,000-member association is finally beginning to see results from its years of diligent Employer Assisted Housing efforts in and around Boise, Idaho.

"Actually, we like to call it 'Employee Housing Benefits,'" states Marc Lebowitz, ACAR's Executive Officer and an expert on the benefits and challenges of providing a region's workforce with safe, stable, and affordable housing. "That way it's clear that we're talking about a solid opportunity, offered by employers, just like health benefits."

Last summer, ACAR held its second 'Employer Assisted Housing Summit' in Boise. Several employers indicated interest on response cards, and a new task force of ACAR member volunteers was created to follow up with each of them. "In the end, four employers showed a really sincere interest, and were moving forward with our help," says Lebowitz. It's a big step for an employer -- but it doesn't have to be a scary one. In fact, the challenge for us is communicating to human resource departments how simple, easy, and painless it can be for the employer. We're learning how to get that message across."

Over the years, ACAR has also developed the right model for its team, carefully balanced, with roles for well-trained REALTORS®, lenders, and a non-profit. "The non-profit is a key element," notes Lebowitz. "When a non-profit operation makes the approach to the employer, it's less threatening, or more 'receivable,' shall we say, than an approach by a real estate professional."

The non-profit that ACAR has partnered with is the Hope Home Foundation. Based in Las Vegas, Hope Home is dedicated to providing employer-assisted housing programs to empower individuals, revitalize communities, and spur economic growth. Its growing client base includes the City of Las Vegas, Goodwill of Southern Nevada, and Zappos. Dawn Lane, a Las Vegas REALTOR® who serves as one of NAR's two instructors of Employer Assisted Housing, is its Founder and Executive Director.

"Ada County is doing great," says Lane, " This is a long process, all about trust and relationship-building. ACAR has a really good strong group, and employers in the Boise community are starting to respond." Lane has conducted on-site "lunch-and-learn workshops" for each of the employers that the ACAR team identified, and cites a progressive architectural firm with a staff of just under a hundred as looking especially promising. A number of its employees in the program are now working on their credit, and Lane expects a few to be ready to buy before long.

More often than not, however, the team has to spend time, lots of time, educating and counseling credit repair. Lane adds, "You'd be surprised how many people are unaware of their reality. One man we worked with in Boise actually owned his house, but was convinced it was upside-down. He and his wife were raising three teenage boys in 1,000 square feet, and were bursting the seams. The REALTORS® on our team took his case and were able to show him that he was actually in a position to sell, and had



options. With this training, his employer had given him the tools he needed without investing any actual funding, and had opened a door for this employee who had been seriously discouraged. That kind of empowerment is a huge, very real, employee benefit."

Beyond its ongoing 'Workforce Housing Benefits' efforts, ACAR looks forward to hosting a Residential Real Estate summit in October, inviting state government officials, consumers, members of the media, and housing authorities. "The last time we did this was in 2011, when everything was dark and gloomy," notes Lebowitz, "and now that the light's back on, so to speak, it will be good to ask, 'Where are we going?' It's a vibrant market, no doubt, yet we're seeing a dramatic downturn in first-time home buying. There's still a lot of pressure on this fragile demographic."

*To learn more about the progress Ada County REALTORS® are making on behalf of the region's employees striving toward homeownership, contact Marc Lebowitz, Executive Officer of the Ada County Association of REALTORS®, at [mlebowitz@myacaronline.com](mailto:mlebowitz@myacaronline.com) or 208.947.7228.*

