For First-Time & Every-Time Buyers

HOME BUYER GUIDE



THE Cornerstone GROUP

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“HOME IS WHERE YOU TAKE YOUR PANTS OFF.”

Nice to meet you!

I'm Ashton-

your Rockstar Realtor

Buying a home is A BIG DEAL, your first or your next. There are a LOT of moving parts. That's why I'm passionate about buyers knowing exactly what to do, who to trust, and where to start. Military families, I've got you too, VA loans and all!

Having the right agent on your side is one of the most important parts of the process. You need someone who knows Southwest Louisiana, negotiates like a pro, is cool under pressure, has great relationships with lenders, inspectors, and title companies, and will make this process as smooth as possible. With nearly 10 years of experience and over $15 million in sales, you can rest assured you are in good hands. I promise.

LET'S GET YOU HOME!

Ashton Felice

REALTOR®

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

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Your time is valuable. I respect that. Tours are tailored to fit YOUR schedule and time zone.



Hey Ashton

We're ready to buy our first home! Can you help us find the one?

read 5 minutes ago



ABSOLUTELY! Congrats! Let's get your pre-approval going, then we'll tour homes in person or on FaceTime! EASY PEASY!

Also, I'll send you new listings in your area the minute they hit the market. I GOT YOU!

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Buyer Consultation

Getting Pre-Approved

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Closing Day



Bedrooms



Bathrooms



sq. ft.

Successful Buying Process

BUYER CONSULTATION | PRE-APPROVAL

SET YOUR BUDGET WITH YOUR LENDER

TOUR HOMES AROUND SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA

FIND THE ONE | WRITE THE OFFER

NEGOTIATE

INSPECTIONS

DUE DILIGENCE PERIOD

APPRAISAL

GET YOUR KEYS CELEBRATE!



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BUYER CONSULTATİON

This is where we make a plan together. As your agent, I'm going to be asking you questions about your goals for buying a home and any questions or concerns you may have about the process.

Please take a moment to think about those things before our consultation so that we can ensure we make the best use of our time.

A few things to think about before we meet...

- When would you like to move in? Any lease or sale to time it with?
- What monthly payment feels comfortable for you?
- Are you a veteran or in the military? (You may qualify for a VA loan!)
- How would you like me to communicate with you? Text, FaceTime, emails, or perhaps a carrier pigeon? Haha!
- What are your MUST-HAVES in a home?
- DeRidder, Leesville, Moss Bluff, Sulphur, Lake Charles, or somewhere else? How long of a commute is too long?
- What would be a deal breaker? (ex: no fenced yard, too long a commute, a big project you don't want to take on...)
- Write these things down before we meet so we can talk through all the details!

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N O T E S







PRE-APPROVAL

You know what happens when you fall in love with a house before you're pre-approved?

Heartbreak.

A pre-approval is a letter from your lender that says how much they'll lend you. Sellers want to see it before they take your offer seriously, so this step comes FIRST.

Your lender will look at your income, savings, and credit, then tell you what you can buy. Send them your pay stubs, W-2s, bank statements, and photo ID as soon as you can (military: your LES too).

Until closing: no new credit cards, no new car, and no big money moves without calling your lender first. The new couch can wait!

LENDERS I TRUST
Ashley Neely, GMFS Mortgage
Chance Johnson, Capstone Mortgage
Terri Churchman, One Real Mortgage
Ask me for their contact info!

YOUR LOAN OPTIONS

CONVENTIONAL

- As little as 3% down for first-timers
- Mortgage insurance can drop off
- Best fit for stronger credit

FHA

- 3.5% down with a 580+ credit score
- Down payment can be a family gift
- A first-time buyer favorite

VA

- $0 down for eligible vets & military
- No monthly mortgage insurance
- VA sets no minimum credit score
- No VA loan limit with full entitlement
- Funding fee: 2.15% (first use, $0 down), waived with VA disability pay

USDA

- $0 down in eligible rural areas
- Towns near Fort Polk may qualify
- Income limits apply

PAPERWORK

- Pay stubs (last 30 days)
- W-2s (last 2 years)
- Bank statements (last 2 months)
- Photo ID (+ LES and COE for VA)

DON'T DO THIS

- Open new credit cards
- Buy a car or furniture on credit
- Change jobs without telling your lender
- Move big money around

SELLER HELP

- Sellers can pay toward your closing costs
- The limit depends on your loan type
- VA: closing costs + up to 4% concessions

LIVE THERE

FHA, VA, and USDA loans are for the home you live in, not a rental. On VA, plan to move in within about 60 days. Deployed? Your spouse can usually cover this.

MY HOME "WISH" LIST

MUST-HAVES

NICE-TO-HAVES

NEIGHBORHOOD

DEAL BREAKERS

BEDROOMS

YARD

BATHROOMS

MISC.

N O T E S







HOUSE HUNTING

Ever heard the old saying: "You'll know it when you see it"?

Well, it's true! In person or on FaceTime.

I'll send you new listings in your area and your budget the minute they hit the market, and we'll tour the best ones together.

At each showing, look past the paint colors and furniture. Focus on what you can't easily change: the location, the layout, the roof, and the foundation.

Pro Tips...

Save the photos and videos I send so the houses don't blur together.

Ask at every house: How old are the roof and A/C? Has it ever flooded?





SETTING YOUR BUDGET

WHOLE PAYMENT: Budget for principal, interest, taxes, and homeowner's insurance (PITI), plus flood insurance if needed.

COMFORT ZONE: Pick a monthly payment you're comfortable with, not just what you're approved for.

LEAVE ROOM: Utilities and upkeep add up.

MILITARY NOTE: BAH is tax-free, and lenders count it as income. Might you rent it out when you PCS? We'll check rents before you buy.

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YOUR NUMBERS: VA & FHA

Here's a rough picture of what it takes to buy a home. Your lender will give you your exact numbers.

VA EXAMPLE: $200,000 HOME
Down payment: $0 with full entitlement
VA funding fee (2.15%, first use): $4,300, $0 if exempt
Seller can pay closing costs + up to 4% concessions ($8,000)

FHA EXAMPLE: $180,000 HOME
Down payment (3.5%): $6,300
Mortgage insurance: about $3,040 upfront + about $80 a month
Seller can pay up to 6% toward closing costs ($10,800)

Everyone: inspection, appraisal, good-faith deposit, and moving day pizza!



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EVERY BUYER

Money Help Programs

LHC

FEE

TAX

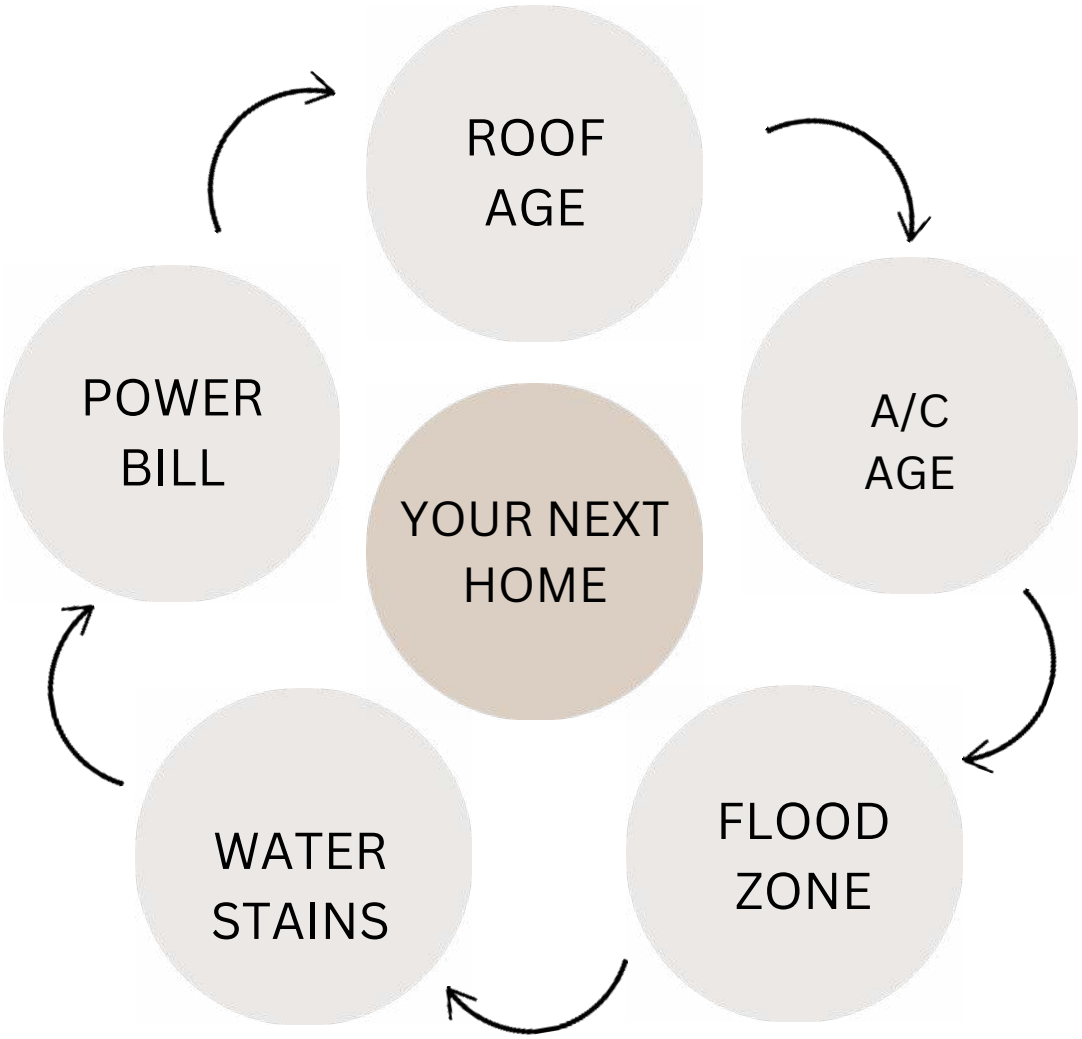
LHC: The Louisiana Housing Corporation has programs that help with your down payment and closing costs, some up to 4% of the loan. There are income limits, and you may need to take a short homebuyer class. Ask your lender if they offer LHC programs.

FEE (VA buyers): If you get VA disability pay, or you're active duty with a Purple Heart, your VA funding fee is waived. Claim still pending? Tell your lender early.

TAX (veterans): Disabled veterans may get extra property tax breaks on top of the homestead exemption. Ask the parish assessor what applies to you.

MORE HELP: Some local cities, like Lake Charles, have helped first-time buyers pay for their down payment and closing costs. The money comes and goes, so ask early!

WHAT TO CHECK



Check these five things at every showing. They're the expensive surprises buyers miss most, and they affect your insurance, your monthly bills, and your appraisal.

Snap photos at each house (on FaceTime, ask me to zoom in!) and jot your thoughts on the Notes pages so the homes don't blur together.

And remember: paint, carpet, and light fixtures are easy to change. Location and layout are not!

MAKING AN OFFER

When we find the one, I'll write your offer and negotiate for you. Together we'll decide on the price, your good-faith deposit, your closing date, and how much we'll ask the seller to pay toward your closing costs (the limit depends on your loan type).

I'll show you what similar homes nearby have sold for, so you know your offer is fair. The seller can say yes, say no, or send a counteroffer. Counteroffers are normal, so don't panic!

I negotiate hard so you get the right home at the right price, with as much help on closing costs as possible

*** FHA and VA contracts include an appraisal protection clause (on VA, it's called the escape clause). If the appraisal comes in lower than the price, you can walk away and keep your deposit.



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İNSPECTİON



Once your offer is accepted, we schedule a professional home inspection. The inspector checks the house from top to bottom: roof, foundation, plumbing, electrical, A/C, and more.

You'll also get a termite (WDIR) report. Termites love Louisiana, so this is a normal part of buying here, and most loans require one.

This is also the time to get homeowner's and flood insurance quotes, so there are no surprises later.

Try to be at the inspection if you can. Out of town? Join by FaceTime!

NEGOTIATING REPAIRS

No house is perfect, and every inspection report finds something. Don't panic! We'll go through the report together and decide what really matters.

We can ask the seller to make repairs, lower the price, or help with closing costs. Big safety issues come first. Small stuff, like a loose cabinet door, usually isn't worth fighting over.



Things to keep in mind

Major vs. Minor: Focus on big-ticket items like the roof, foundation, A/C, plumbing, electrical, and water damage. Those are expensive to fix, and FHA, VA, and USDA appraisers may flag safety issues too.

Your Deadline: Your due diligence period gives you a set number of days to inspect and negotiate. If we can't agree on repairs, you can walk away during this period. I'll give you the exact deadline in writing.

DUE DILIGENCE

In real estate, a "contingency" is a condition in your purchase agreement that has to be met for the sale to keep moving forward. Contingencies protect you as the buyer.

Your due diligence period is your window to inspect the home, get insurance quotes, and make sure everything checks out. I'll give you every deadline in writing and walk you through each one, so nothing sneaks up on you.

Common Contingencies

Inspection Contingency

This is your chance to check out the home with a professional inspection and a termite report. If something big comes up, we negotiate.

Financing Contingency

Your purchase depends on your lender getting your loan approved. Keep your credit and job steady until you hear "clear to close."

Insurance & Flood Quotes

Get homeowner's insurance quotes early, plus flood insurance if the home is in a high-risk zone. Insurance is a big part of your monthly payment here.

Appraisal Contingency

The appraiser checks the home's value (and, on FHA and VA loans, its condition). If it appraises below the price, we can renegotiate. On FHA and VA, you can also walk away and keep your deposit.

APPRAISAL FAQs:



An appraisal is a professional opinion of the home's value from a licensed, unbiased appraiser. Your lender orders it (on VA, the VA assigns the appraiser), and you usually pay for it unless we negotiate otherwise. With FHA and VA loans, the appraiser also checks the home's condition: a safe roof, working heat, water, and electrical, and no peeling paint on older homes. This protects you from overpaying and from big safety problems.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE HOME DOESN'T APPRAISE?



A home "appraises low" when the appraiser's value comes in below the price you agreed to. Your lender bases your loan on the appraised value, not the price. Good news: FHA and VA contracts protect your deposit if this happens, and on VA we get 2 business days to send the appraiser more sales to consider.

If it appraises low, we have options. The seller can lower the price, you can pay the difference, we can meet in the middle, or you can walk away and keep your deposit. If the appraiser asks for repairs, we'll work with the seller to get them done before closing.

TITLE CO.

WHAT IS A TITLE COMPANY AND WHAT EXACTLY DO THEY DO?

The title company makes sure the seller truly owns the home and that there are no surprise liens, unpaid taxes, or claims against it. They issue title insurance to protect you and your lender, hold the money, prepare the paperwork, and run the closing (called the "Act of Sale" in Louisiana). Title fees are part of your closing costs. Having a good title company is vital, and I'll make sure we use one with a great reputation.

WHO PAYS FOR TITLE AND CLOSING FEES?

Great question. Some costs are paid by the buyer and some by the seller, and the seller can often pay part of your closing costs (the limit depends on your loan type). We'll spell it all out in your offer, and I'll walk you through every line before you sign.



PREPARİNG FOR CLOSİNG

Review Your Closing Disclosure:
Your lender will send your Closing Disclosure at least 3 business days before closing. It lists every cost and your final cash to close. I'll go over it with you too, so ALWAYS ask me or your lender if anything looks off.

Protect Your Money From Wire Fraud:
Before you wire any money, call the title company at a number you already know is real. Never trust wiring instructions sent by email or text.

Do the Final Walk-Through right before closing:
We'll walk the house one last time to make sure it's in the same condition, any agreed repairs are done, and everything the seller promised to leave is still there. Can't be here? I'll walk it with you on FaceTime!

Set Up Your Utilities:
Call the electric, water, gas, internet, and trash companies to start service in your name on closing day. Book your movers early too!

Closing From Far Away?
Ask your lender and title company early about a mail-away closing or a power of attorney. Some loans, like VA, have their own rules, so don't wait. Bring photo ID either way!

If you need extra hands to help
I have all the peeps

I have all the hookups for almost anything you may need.

From movers, to plumbers, painters, electricians, handymen, landscapers, concrete guys, dog walkers...you name it and I will get you a reliable contact!

I love my community, and with almost 15 years here, I have been blessed to have made wonderful relationships with all kinds of business owners.

So when it's time to move in, or if something needs fixing at your new place, I will help get all of that set up. I am a full service agent!

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CLOSING DAY



YOU DID IT!

IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE!

yay!

This is it! The big day!!! You'll be signing a lot of paperwork, but the good news is, it's all paperwork we'll have already reviewed...probably more than once.

After you sign everything...we wait for funding.

So grab a cup of coffee, take a few deep breaths and go for a nice stroll.

The deal is done once everyone has signed and your loan has funded. The title company then records the sale with the parish Clerk of Court.

Then I get to hand YOU the keys! After you move in, file your homestead exemption with the parish assessor to save on property taxes.

And I get to say

"WELCOME HOME!!!"

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REAL ESTATE TERMS

İF YOU'RE BORED AND WANT MORE TO READ

Disclosure

A statement by a seller or broker about a property's known defects.

Good-Faith Deposit

Money you put down when your offer is accepted to show you're serious. It's credited toward your costs at closing.

Equity

The amount of the home actually "owned". It's the current market value of a home minus the outstanding mortgage balance.

Escrow

An account your lender uses to collect part of your property taxes and homeowner's insurance each month, then pays those bills for you.

VA Loan

A home loan backed by the VA for service members, veterans, and some spouses, with $0 down.

Homestead Exemption

A Louisiana tax break that exempts the first $75,000 of your home's value from property taxes. File it with the parish assessor.

Home Inspection

An examination of a real estate property's condition, usually performed by a professional home inspector.

Home Warranty

A policy that covers the cost of maintaining household systems or appliances.

Appraisal

A licensed appraiser's opinion of a home's value. Your lender uses it to make sure the home is worth what you're paying.

Contingency

A condition that must be met in order for a real estate contract to become binding.

Mortgage Insurance

Insurance that protects your lender on low-down-payment loans, like FHA. VA loans don't have it; they have a one-time funding fee instead.

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NOTES

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR AGENT

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A FEW REVIEWS FROM PAST CLIENTS



JACK SABATİNİ

Ashton was absolutely amazing to work with throughout the entire home-buying process! She was incredibly helpful, responsive, and always made sure we understood what was going on every step of the way. She made the whole experience feel easy and stress-free, and we couldn't be happier with our new home. We would absolutely recommend Ashton to anyone looking for a great realtor!



DASSELL TUPPER

Ashton was always available and had the knowledge of the areas and houses. For someone like myself who didn't know what to expect or to do, she was ready to explain and help through each step. She always had a smile on her face, easy to talk to and approach with anything. I would definitely, 100% recommend her to anyone, especially anyone who is just getting into the home buyer process.



TOMMY NILSEN

We cannot say enough great things about Ashton! For six weeks, she went above and beyond to help us find the perfect home in DeRidder, all while we were living in Germany. Buying a home from overseas could have been stressful and challenging, but she made the entire process so much easier with her patience, dedication, communication, and willingness to go the extra mile. She was always there to answer our questions, show us properties, keep us updated, and make sure we felt comfortable every step of the way. Her hard work, commitment, and genuine care made all the difference in helping us find the right home. We are incredibly grateful for everything she did for our family. If you're looking for a realtor who truly cares, is dependable, and will work hard to find you the right home, we highly recommend Ashton! Thank you for making our home-buying journey such a wonderful experience!

I can't wait to get you HOME!



You are in good hands

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