

Shopping around Refinancing with your current lender is not always easier

Searching for a competitive mortgage rate and terms can certainly be challenging in today's lending world. Mortgage rates are presently at historic lows and there is even greater opportunity to aggressively pay down your mortgage balance. So where do you go to secure the best possible interest rate on that new mortgage loan?

Banks create a perception to their customers that because they are servicing the customer's home loan already, the process of refinancing will be made easier by just working directly with them. This is nothing more than a clever sales pitch.

Refinancing with my current lender is not going to be easier?

It does not benefit them. Think about it for a second. Let's say you are paying 5.5 percent on your 30-year-fixed-rate mortgage and your balance is somewhere around \$200,000. This means your bank is making roughly \$11,000 per year off of the money they lent you. You have an opportunity to refinance to a new 30-year-fixed-rate mortgage for \$200,000 at 4.375 percent.

If you go back to your bank and complete a

refinance with them they lose money. The reason for this is because they are being paid off and they are no longer going to be collecting higher interest-rate payments from you. This means they lose and you win.



SCOTT SHELDON

If you refinance with your current lender, they will still need all forms of documentation, so it is not easier.

Make no mistake, your bank does not want to lose your business. Your bank will help you do the new refinance, but only because they want to retain you as a customer and offer you checking accounts, credit cards and other ancillary banking services. They know that you're going to refinance the loan anyway so they figure they might as well do it themselves.

Just because you are making your payment to them every month does not make refinancing with them any easier. Why is this the case? It's because all new mortgage loans being originated today must have two years of federal income tax returns, two years of W2s with a full financial package, including credit and assets. I can promise you that your loan servicer does not have all of your financial documentation readily available at their

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Best places to work in Petaluma

By **JEFF QUACKENBUSH**
NORTH BAY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Companies selected as Best Places to Work in the North Bay were analyzed by the editorial staff of the Business Journal on the basis of several criteria, including the employer application, the survey ratings by employees, the number of responses, size of the company, the breakdown of responses from management and non-management as well as written comments by employees.

In all, 130 companies were nominated, from which 67 winners emerged from Sonoma, Marin and Napa counties.

Here are the Petaluma winners.

20 to 50 employees

Cardno ERI, first-time winner

The environmental consulting company is increasing its sales team and marketing efforts as its clients change their business models in today's economy.

The merger of Cardno with Environmental Resolutions, Inc. has bolstered the firm's portfolio with expanded services, along and its ability to provide staff assistance throughout the U.S. as regional fast track projects come on line.

"This past year has provided our associates with career growth opportunities in fields related to our core business as well as the development of new marketable skill sets," said Keith Romstad, division manager.

"My coworkers are fantastic. I truly feel like I'm

a part of not only the team but a family when I step into the office every day. Management has created an environment where I feel that I can express opinions, make suggestions, and share my ideas, no matter how seemingly tiny or 'big picture' they may be," an employee said.

Heffernan Insurance

Brokers, five-time winner

"In our office, dogs, children and jeans are welcome, and if an employee has a child in a musical recital, we encourage him or her to go," said senior vice president Elizabeth Bishop. "In a nutshell, we describe our culture as work hard, strive for excellence, have fun and do good things for, and in,

our community."

"Focusing on caring for our people, our communities and our world gives us a wonderful sense of pride and purpose. This translates into meaningful relationships between the staff and our clients. Heffernan employees are treated to impromptu

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TONY PARRISH - FHA; 4.8925 in; 6 in; Process color; PD06427412

Best

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and planned staff lunches and afternoon home-baked cake and cookie breaks. Everyone celebrates birthdays, anniversaries and new babies.

The entire 400 member staff went to the Hyatt Lake Tahoe Spa Resort and Casino for a reward weekend, an opportunity to earn donations to favorite causes, and a reward dinner theme of "Come as Your Favorite Star."

"Working at Heffernan is like a dream come true for me. I like a challenging work environment where results are expected, but I also like the fact that you are given guidance, support and a reasonable amount of time to achieve goals," a staff member

said.

51 to 100 employees Golden Living Center, two-time winner

With 90 of 100 employees at the Golden Living Center are minorities and women, and the firm obtained the highest employee survey rating for all companies — a near-perfect 4.98.

"We focus on providing appropriate care for patients while striving to be the healthcare facility of choice in the community," said an employee.

The company pays for ongoing staff license renewals and offers a full suite of benefits including a modern break room, employee of the month parking, weekly staff bingo

games, monthly events and an off-site Christmas party.

Staff members enjoy playing softball and BBQs and giving back to the community by volunteering for blood pressure clinics, at senior centers, food drives, and by supporting the American Heart Association, the Alzheimer's Walk, a hospital foundation and other causes.

"Everyone likes working here. Each month our president sends me an email so I know what's going on — and get to provide feedback," another employee noted.

Petaluma People Services Center, four-time winner

Serving others in the community who are struggling, and helping to improve their social and economic health, dignity and self-sufficiency, is the mission of the Petaluma People Services Center.

According to an employee, "Every staff member is dedicated, loving and caring. We are all about helping people."

Maintaining high employee morale is vital. "We participate in I-Walk Sonoma County and organize a soup day where everyone brings an ingredient we throw into a pot to have lunch together. We also have a special dog, named Stella, for our youth therapy sessions who also visits each staff office for a treat and a pat," said Elece Hempel, executive director of PPSC.

Employees also enjoy a Spring Fling and a staff retreat with team-building games, a state-of-the-agency address, swimming and lots of good food.

Sequoia Senior Solutions, four-time winner

By fostering a level of professionalism unmatched in the home-care

industry, Sequoia Senior Solutions is raising the bar on standards of care.

"We were able to get through the worst of the economic slump by restructuring and streamlining our administrative processes," said Stan Lawson, CEO.

"The company is very supportive and looks for people with big hearts who love helping others. I'm proud to be associated with such a wonderful organization and a great group of people," an employee said.

Sonoma Technology, Inc., five-time winner

One of STI's key objectives is to improve and increase communication at every level, while also keeping an eye on the bottom line, ensuring quality and broadening the business base.

"STI is a great place to work because our president, Lyle Chinkin and all of our managers truly care about us," an employee said.

"The firm is run in an open and ethical manner where all 68 employees have an opportunity to work on projects that really make a difference in the lives of our clients and the public."

The company instituted a tuition reimbursement program and recognizes employees for jobs well done. Anniversary awards are given along with recruitment referral bonuses when staff members bring in new hires.

"This is the healthiest company I have ever worked for in my long career. It also walks its talk, always following through on its dedication to integrity and quality," another employee said.

Wells Fargo Insurance Services, three-time winner

Team members at Wells Fargo Insurance Services are encouraged to use resources available to them to enhance career paths, including job descriptions, salary range data, in

addition to team member training and other development tools.

They also have access to support services useful in their personal lives through an Employee Assistance Counseling program. This program offers discounts on a variety of financial, legal, educational, commuter assistance services — including adoption and Weight Watcher reimbursements — plus community service time off for volunteer activities.

"I'm lucky to have a group of dedicated and hardworking team members who provide excellent service to our clients on a daily basis," said regional managing director Mark Stokes.

"As big as we are, there is still a small office feel, coupled with a strong sense of stability, that tells us we can make it through good times and bad. The resources available to us are incredible and far above those found at comparable companies," one employee said.

101 to 250 employees Petaluma Health Center, two-time winner

With a culture described as "open, sharing, helpful and transparent," in the words of employees, the Petaluma Health Center has a staff completely

committed to providing the best quality of care to the whole community.

"Everyone here has a sense of purpose beyond just having a job and a paycheck. We care about helping the community, especially the underserved and disenfranchised, have the best health care possible," an employee said.

"We recognize employees' contributions every chance we get," said CEO Kathie Powell. "We decentralized administration and communicate transparently by sharing everything with our staff. People feel much more comfortable when they are kept informed."

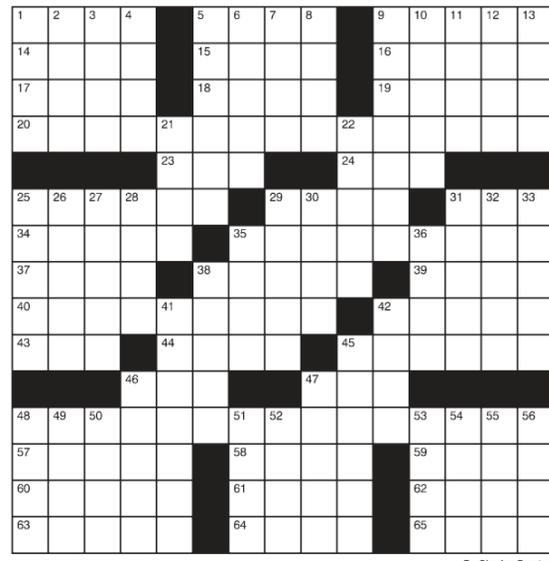
She said physicians and professionals from around the country inquire about working for us because of our holistic and patient-centered, prevention-oriented health home model of care.

"Even though we are a non-profit ourselves, our staff also serves on boards of other local agencies, including the Petaluma Health Care District, Petaluma Valley Hospital, Petaluma Bounty and various school boards," Ms. Powell said.

(Contact Jeff Quackenbush at jquackenbush@busjrn.com.)

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Turn Off



CREATORS NEWS SERVICE By Charles Preston

- ACROSS**
- 1 Lugosi
 - 5 Kind of pattern
 - 9 Hirsute ones
 - 14 Shrinking inland sea
 - 15 Chops down the cherry tree
 - 16 That's ___
 - 17 Thorn holder?
 - 18 Girl, in Madrid
 - 19 Scorch
 - 20 No turn, start to finish building
 - 23 Chameleon, sometimes
 - 24 No vote
 - 25 Hole enlarger
 - 29 Cookbook instruction
 - 31 St. Louis-to-Cincinnati dir.
 - 34 Burstyn or Barkin
 - 35 No turn, reversal
 - 37 Scarves
 - 38 Confidante
 - 39 A bad thing to put on
 - 40 No turn, pressure!!
 - 42 Treasure follower
 - 43 Wood's wood
 - 44 Face-saving measure?
 - 45 Eye parts
 - 46 Wire measure
 - 47 Bull or Celtic
 - 48 No turn, retribution
 - 57 ___ profundo: singing voice
 - 58 Drying kiln
 - 59 Hibernia
 - 60 The heavens
 - 61 ___ the dust
 - 62 Virginia's dance
 - 63 North Atlantic food fish
 - 64 Wars or Chamber
 - 65 Kind of sack
- DOWN**
- 1 Soak up the rays
 - 2 Eastern U.S. tribe
 - 3 Tramp's lover
 - 4 Sir Guinness
 - 5 *The Banjo Lesson* painter
 - 6 Be
 - 7 Transmitted
 - 8 Nicholas or Alexander
 - 9 Eyelash enhancer
 - 10 Camaraderie
 - 11 Acting Anderson
 - 12 Therefore
 - 13 Discovered
 - 21 Major golf event
 - 22 Like-mindedness
 - 25 Counter
 - 26 Run off
 - 27 Winged
 - 28 Concatenation
 - 29 Young pig
 - 30 Omar offering
 - 31 Mary Ann Evans' legal name
 - 32 Daring
 - 33 Double curves
 - 35 Baobab or acacia
 - 36 Southeast Italy port city
 - 38 Pepper or powder
 - 41 They wield blue pencils
 - 42 Heyerdahl
 - 45 31 Down, for example
 - 46 Engaged in meditation
 - 47 Pizza alternative
 - 48 Fortas and Vigoda
 - 49 English resort city
 - 50 Workers' aegis: abbr.
 - 51 Story and sister
 - 52 ___ accompli
 - 53 Fringe benefit
 - 54 Legal claim
 - 55 Code or way
 - 56 Sharp cry

Sheldon

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fingertips. So therefore, the process with them is the same as it would be if you went elsewhere.

Refinance your mortgage with a different lender for the best results.

(Scott Sheldon is a loan officer for W.J Bradley Mortgage. He can be reached at 217-4000 or visit www.sonomacounty-mortgages.com)

Here is the answer to the crossword puzzle on the left.



LENDERS RATES; 9.895 in; 3.5 in; Black; PD06588321

NEW HOME COMMUNITIES; 9.895 in; 5.25 in; Black; PD06582216