

By ELLEN YAN

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Losing a home is serious problem; but a Nassau businessman has turned the mortgage crisis into a board game - ForeclosureOpoly - that he says will help homeowners learn about financial responsibility.

D. Alexis Samuels, an executive at Commerce America, a mortgage banker, broker and loan servicer in Lake Success, said he wanted a fun way for families to learn about mortgages, credit scores and foreclosure prevention.

"The topic of foreclosure is nothing to play with," said Samuels. "We feel ironically the best way to communicate or to educate is at the kitchen table, not in a seminar at the local bank or at the diner. ... Many people that are facing foreclosure feel ashamed about not knowing."

In the roll-the-dice game, players' credit scores and cash coffers are affected by life's expenses and trivia questions. Need new shoes? Pay \$500. Don't know how long bad credit reports can affect your score? Give up 10 points on the credit score and \$1,000. Those who run out of money go to the foreclosure section and get scammed, get help or get lucky.

Answers to trivia questions, from feng shui to types of mortgage transactions, are based on research and reports from various groups, including the government, Samuels said.

But some financial experts said the answers are too black and white. For example, one answer notes that if a library fine goes to collection, the

credit score can fall by 100 points. Credit experts said it depends on the person's current score, the credit bureau's formula, the fine amount and other factors.

"Because every consumer's credit situation is unique, suggesting that a certain action will result in a specific point gain or loss could have the unintended effect of misinforming or confusing consumers whose actual impact may vary," said Steven Katz, spokesman at TransUnion, one of the three major credit bureaus.

Samuels doesn't think players will take answers too literally: "We can't ask a question and give seven different answers, but we have to provide a guideline ... to make the point. What we're trying to teach is responsible practice and on-time payments."



The nonprofit Community Development Corp. of Long Island borrows from "Jeopardy!" to teach home buyers in classes, and it helps people remember better, said Joanie LaFemina, manager of homeowner services: "When they start doing something in a way that doesn't feel like structured education, they can relax."

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