

Buyer's Guide

Columbia, South Carolina Real Estate

Mel Coker

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Introduction (Chapter 1)

Thank you for your recent registration at my [Columbia \(SC\) real estate website](#).

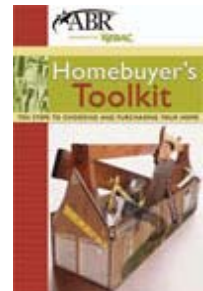
When you're ready to buy a home or property in the Greater Columbia area, I would be pleased to assist you. Also, please feel free to contact me directly by email or phone if you have questions or wish to discuss your home search criteria.

Over the next few weeks, I will send you a series of emails that will offer you very specific and beneficial information about the Greater Columbia area and buying a home or property here. At the end, I will offer you a special benefit that will offer you "money in the pocket" after you buy a home with representation from Mel Coker just for reading through my email series.

You may "unsubscribe" at any time, of course, just by sending me an email with your name and email address. **But, I promise, if you're really interested in buying a home in the Greater Columbia area, YOU WILL find the information beneficial.**

Topics of future emails will include (Mel's Homebuyer's Guide & Toolkit):

- [Searching for a Columbia area home](#)
- [Mortgage information / Pre-qualification](#)
- [Columbia \(SC\) area information and links](#)
- [First-time Homebuyer information and benefits](#)
- [Lake Murray information / Golf Course Communities](#)
- [About Mel Coker / Your Choice of a Realtor IS Important](#)
- [Retirement in the Columbia area](#)
- [Schools, Cost of Living, Average Prices, Taxes & More](#)
- [Home Buying Steps](#)
- [An Internet Special for working with Mel Coker - Receive a Lowe's Gift Card](#)



When you're ready to get started or need additional information, please contact Mel Coker:

- Call me at my office: (803) 749-5800 (ask for Mel Coker)
- Call me on my cell phone: (803) 318-2007
- Call me at my residence toll-free: (888) 528-2258
- [email Mel Coker](#)
- [Visit Mel Coker's real estate website](#)
- [Home Search Criteria Registration Form](#)

Searching for a Columbia Area Home (Chapter 2)

The Greater Columbia area includes: Downtown Columbia, Northeast Columbia (including Blythewood and Fort Jackson areas), Lexington, Irmo, Chapin and the Lake Murray area. I can assist you with all of these areas for NEW or resale homes. When you're ready to BUY, please be sure to contact Mel Coker.

Searching for a Columbia, South Carolina home or property? There are two ways to proceed.

You may initially choose to do your own searches. This may be because you're just contemplating living in beautiful and friendly Columbia, SC or you're considering a relocation move for employment or retirement or because a move may be further out in your future. You can certainly do this on my RE/MAX website with different search options (MLS #/featured search/advanced search). But, all searches do have search limitations (you do not get full MLS search capability). To get started with searching at my RE/MAX search site, click on the link below:



The BEST way to search is to allow me to do the searching on the Columbia MLS and email the listings to you. This is FREE and with no obligation. It's quicker and you will get a more up-to-date and focused grouping of listings. Click on one of the links below:

[Complete the Home Search Criteria form online.](#)

[Click here for a Home Search Criteria Guide Form in PDF format.](#)

Complete the form and use it as a guide when you call me, or click on the Internet form. It's EASY and I'm very happy to do this for you. There is no obligation or cost. I'll quickly email the best listings to you. Please be sure to provide your telephone number in case I have questions about your search criteria.



Call Mel Coker toll-free: (888) 528-2258

Mortgage Information / Pre-qualification (Chapter 3)

Getting mortgage information is easy, quick and with no-obligation when you contact one of my recommended mortgage professionals. **NOW is a great time to buy a home with historically LOW interest rates.**

Available loan programs include conventional, FHA, and VA. Also, depending on availability of granted funds and eligibility requirements, the South Carolina State Housing Authority may have special loan programs available. The mortgage professionals that I recommend can answer questions and offer beneficial recommendations.

Getting a pre-approval letter is recommended and now required in almost all instances with contracts to buy real estate. Again, it's an easy step! When you're ready to buy, be sure to contact Mel Coker as your Realtor professional and one of the following mortgage professionals.

Recommended Columbia, SC Mortgage Professionals:

Nathan Ballentine
Wachovia Mortgage
Toll-free: 877-325-9432
email: Nathan.Ballentine@wachovia.com
[Internet website](#)

Randy Brown
1st Metropolitan Mortgage
Toll-free: 866-456-5511
rbrown@1stmetro.net
[Internet website](#)

Charlie Branham
Palmetto South Mortgage Group
Toll-free: 866-912-4663
email: cbranham@palmettosouth.com
[Internet website](#)

Mike Wetzel
Homeowner's Mortgage
Toll-free: 888-653-9037
email: Mwetzel@homeownersmtg.com
[Internet website](#)

The mortgage professionals listed above are also listed on my "Mortgage" web page. You will find other resources there including a mortgage calculator. [CLICK HERE to visit Mel's Mortgage web page.](#)

[Quick Affordability Calculator](#) (BEST to call a mortgage professional above)



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Internet: www.ColumbiaSouthCarolina.com/homes email: melcoker@remax.net

Columbia (SC) Area Information & Links (Chapter 4)

Columbia is a GREAT place to call home! You will find it to be a friendly place for families, single professionals, and retirees.

Columbia, capital city of South Carolina and located in the geographic center of South Carolina, is located just a few hours from the mountains of the upstate and also only a few hours from great beach areas (Myrtle Beach 3 hours, Hilton Head Island 2 ½ hours, and Charleston 1 ½ hours). We have nice weather in Columbia and almost snow-free winters.

The population of the city of Columbia is approximately 125,000. The metro area consisting of Richland and Lexington counties has a population of approximately 540,000.

A quick overview of what you will find in Columbia...

- Friendly people
- Reasonably priced home communities & a reasonable tax base
- Areas with excellent schools
- Excellent hospitals and medical facilities
- Wonderful state, county, regional & city parks and an extensive downtown riverfront trail system
- Beautiful Downtown Columbia with shopping, dining, museums, sports, and much more
- Riverbanks Zoo – one of America's best
- Efficient highway system, including 3 interstate in and around Columbia (Interstates 20,26,77)
- A number of fine golf courses
- Three beautiful rivers through Columbia! (Saluda, Broad, Congaree)
- A National Park! - Congaree National Park (just a few miles from downtown)
- The University of South Carolina
- Fort Jackson
- Lake Murray

The BEST links for more Columbia information:

[Columbia "A to Z"](#)

[Lake Murray](#)

[Columbia weather](#)

[Columbia Blog](#)

[City of Columbia](#)

[Columbia Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau](#)

[Request a Visitors Guide and/or e-Newsletter](#)



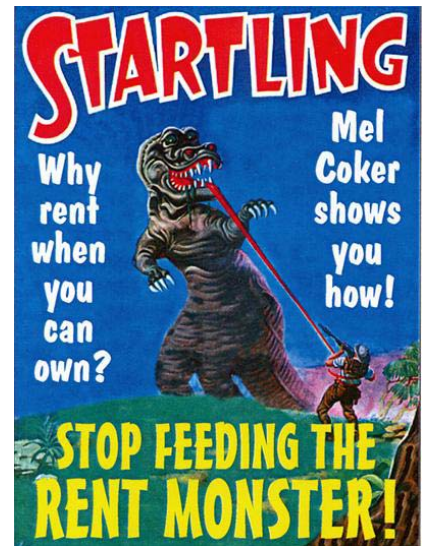
First-time Homebuyers (Chapter 5)



STOP feeding the RENT MONSTER!

BUYING your own home is EASY and SMART! Home ownership is a great investment. When you're ready to buy a home in Greater Columbia, be sure to [contact Mel Coker](#). Your choice of a Realtor Professional is important!

Owning a home IS the American Dream.
It starts with being smart about your money.



The **primary** benefits of home ownership are...

Build equity - it's really simple... over time, you pay a mortgage balance DOWN and the value of your property goes UP. The result is equity gain (a financial asset). As long as you pay rent (buying a property for someone else), you build NO equity or financial asset increase. Pay rent for three years, or five years, or 10 years or longer and you will walk away with NO equity.

A BIG tax advantage - The U.S. Tax Code lets you deduct the interest you pay on your mortgage, your property taxes, private mortgage insurance (in certain situations) as well as some of the costs involved in buying your home. These deductions, in most cases, will significantly decrease the amount of taxes you will owe on federal and South Carolina state tax returns.

First-time Homebuyer Tax Credit –

Do *Financially Successful* people pay rent or BUY a home? They BUY a home!

Home Ownership Builds Wealth - The Federal Reserve Board estimates that HOMEOWNERS have a net worth almost **36 times more** than that of renters! In 2004, the median net worth of homeowners was \$184,000 compared to \$4,000 for renters.

Research studies indicate that home ownership adds to the value of communities and has positive effects on children.

Lake Murray / Golf Course Communities (Chapter 6)

Lake Murray is one of the premier lakes in the South for living and outdoor recreation. You may choose to live near the lake or live waterfront on Lake Murray or live in a community with lake access. I can assist you with any home buying need in the Lake Murray area.

Lake Murray is a 48,000 acre lake in the heart of South Carolina and only a short drive from downtown Columbia. The lake covers an area of 78 square miles with 649 miles of shoreline. The lake is known as a clean water lake and has relatively small water fluctuation levels.

The Lake Murray adventure means boating, sailing, canoeing, fishing, water-skiing, swimming, camping and just plain fun at one of the South's most scenic playgrounds. The Timberlake community near Chapin is the one subdivision with a golf course on the shores of Lake Murray.

As of late October 2008, the current median price for a waterfront home on Lake Murray is about \$611,950 (average square feet = 3330). The average waterfront lot (min. 100 feet) is about \$285,000.



I live on Lake Murray myself (in the Chapin area). Please call me to discuss your Lake Murray area home questions. I can assist you with any home for sale on or near Lake Murray.



Golf is a very popular activity in the Greater Columbia area. There are a number of golf course communities throughout the Greater Columbia area. The Northeast Columbia and Blythewood areas have the most golf course communities.

The average price for a home fronting a golf course in the Columbia area is \$

About Mel Coker / Your Choice of a Realtor IS Important (Chapter 7)

Some "real estate sales agents" are not even Realtors. To be a Realtor, an agent must belong to the National Association of Realtors and follow their strict Professional Code of Ethics. Believe it or not, some agents practice real estate and do not even hold the Realtor designation. Mel Coker seeks to exceed agent requirements with continuing education and regular attendance at seminars and conventions. Mel Coker IS a Realtor.

Mel also holds the top designations in the Real Estate field (offered by the National Association of Realtors), including:

CRS – Certified Residential Specialist
ABR – Accredited Buyer Representative
GRI – Graduate, Realtors Institute
SRES – Seniors Real Estate Specialist



Kassie Moore, also a Realtor, assists Mel Coker with all phases of his real estate business.

Mel SELLS real estate and lots of it! Mel is continually in the top 5% of all Columbia real estate agents in sales volume and is recognized by RE/MAX as one of the top-producing agents with membership in the exclusive **RE/MAX International Hall of Fame** and Platinum Club.

Technology and great service are important to Mel Coker. Because of this commitment, Mel is the exclusive CyberStars Realtor for Columbia, South Carolina. Mel has an extensive presence on the Internet with multiple highly ranked websites. He also uses technology and services provided by RE/MAX, RealBird and Lowes Realtor Benefits. You really DO get more service with Mel Coker's representation on your behalf.

Mel is a life-long Columbia resident, having lived in the downtown/Forest Acres area, Northeast Columbia, St. Andrews/Irmo area and now at Lake Murray.

Buying a home is a very important financial decision. Get the very best in buyer representation with Mel Coker as your Realtor / Buyer's Agent. Mel is familiar with all areas of Columbia and works with the best service professionals providing home inspection, termite inspection and HVAC inspection services. Mel can also assist with the best referrals for mortgage and closing attorney services.

Learn more about Mel's experience in real estate and see more Internet technology:

[About Mel Coker](#) | [All Real Estate Agents Are Not The Same](#) | [Mel's Primary Real Estate Website](#) | [Mel's Columbia Blog](#) | [Mel's Business Card](#) | [Mel's Real Estate Newsletter](#)

Call Mel Coker toll-free: (888) 528-2258
email: melcoker@remax.net

Retirement in the Columbia area (Chapter 8)

Columbia is a great place to live in retirement! Columbia is becoming recognized as an ideal city for retirees. *Where to Retire* magazine listed Columbia as one of its 25 best choices for retirement as a "budget town" in its January/February 2007 edition. A RetireHomeSmart.com survey of retirement cities lists Columbia as America's second best retirement city.

Enjoy the friendly communities, meet new people, and enjoy new learning or leisure activities. We have a beautiful water recreation place to enjoy... Lake Murray. Play golf or join a volunteer organization to provide needed services in our city.

You may choose to join Riverbanks Zoo on a very reasonable cost basis and enjoy walking there regularly. There are plenty of county, regional and city parks to enjoy. There have been miles of trails development along Columbia's riverfront (with more miles to come soon). Join a church for worship and service opportunities.

Enjoy entertainment events at Colonial Life Arena or The Koger Center for the Arts. There are many shopping opportunities

Columbia has a significant medical community and wide offering of health care facilities. There are downtown hospitals and other smaller hospitals and emergency care facilities in outlying areas. Columbia has a VA hospital. Join a local health club to improve or maintain your health and meet new people (ask me about a free week at a local health club).

Tax reform in 2006 has made the property tax even more reasonable in the Columbia area (see Chapter 9). There are other tax breaks for residents over age 65.

Get Sold on Columbia – More Information:

[Columbia "A to Z"](#)

[Columbia Blog](#)

[Columbia Weather](#)

[Columbia area Hospitals](#)

[Retirement Living in Columbia, South Carolina](#)

[Retirement Planning – Top 5 Things to Consider for Where to Live](#)

[Top Ten Things To Do in Columbia](#)

[A Tax Guide for New Residents of South Carolina](#)



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where the future takes shape

Mel Coker

"I'm Your Seniors Real Estate Specialist"

Call toll-free (888) 528-2258

Schools, Cost of Living, Average Home Prices, Taxes & More (Chapter 9)

The Greater Columbia area has some of the **top-rated schools and school districts** in South Carolina, including Lexington District 5 (Irmo, Ballentine, Dutch Fork and Chapin areas), Lexington District 1 (Lexington area) and Richland District 2 (Northeast Columbia, Fort Jackson and Blythewood areas). Two districts were recently in the overall top four districts in the state for composite SAT scores - Lexington 5 was #2 with a 1064 composite score and Lexington District 1 was #4 with a 1055 composite score. South Carolina has an excellent 529 College Savings Plan.

[School Information Links](#) | [State of South Carolina School Report Cards](#) | [S. C. 529 Plan](#)

Columbia has a very **reasonable cost of living** compared to many other areas of the country. A recent comparison to other South Carolina and Southeast locales, revealed that Columbia's cost of living is **lower than all of the following** (percentage difference in parenthesis): Charleston (5.5), Greenville (1.0), Myrtle Beach (4.0), Hilton Head Island (12.3), Charlotte (2.7), Asheville (6.5), Atlanta (7.1) and Orlando (4.8). Electric rates in South Carolina are on average about 10% lower than the national average.

Home values in Columbia are excellent. The average home price for the entire Multiple Listing Service is approximately \$140,000. That is for a relatively large geographical area and includes all kinds of homes. Homes prices, may of course, go lower or much higher.

[Click Here for Columbia Real Estate](#)

Property taxes are reasonable in South Carolina. Tax legislation passed in 2006 and implemented in 2007 lowered homeowner taxes approximately 50% at that time. The state sales tax rate was raised to 6% from 5% and all additional revenue is designated to lower owner occupied real estate taxes. In a *typical* situation, taxes for a residential home would be about .50% to .65% of the market value of a home. As an example, a \$200,000 home would have an approximage tax bill of \$1,000 to \$1,300 (taxes vary depending on actual assessment and millage rates by area). If you are 65 or older, totally disabled or legally blind and have lived in South Carolina for at least one year, you may qualify for the homestead exemption. The homestead exemption excludes the first \$50,000 from the fair market value of you legal residence.

Home Buying Steps (Chapter 10)

[Read the Full Nine Step Report Here](#)

1. **Planning Stage** - Decide on your moving or relocation timeline. Think about your home search criteria and areas of town or neighborhoods that interest you. Do you have enough money for a down payment and for home inspection fees? If you have really good credit scores, you may be eligible for a no down payment or low down payment (3%) program. Home Search Criteria Form: [PDF](#) or [web page](#)
2. **Find and Work with a Qualified Realtor (Buyer's Agent)** - Your choice of a real estate sales agent is very important! Buyer representation is FREE. A buyer's agent is an advocate for the buyer in a real estate transaction. [Mel Coker's website](#)
3. **Get Mortgage Prequalification** - This is a very important step. This will be an assessment of your credit and finances. With a pre-qualification or pre-approval in hand, this can be submitted with an offer on a home. It will make your offer stronger. [Recommended Mortgage Contacts](#)
4. **Find a home** - Mel Coker will assist you with selecting appropriate listings from the local Multiple Listing Service. Focusing on your home search criteria will make this process easy with your Realtor's access to this computerized database of all homes available in the local market. With home search criteria defined and MLS listings pulled, an appointment is set and then the fun part starts... viewing homes. [Home Search Form](#)
5. **Negotiate Contract Terms** - Once you find the home you wish to purchase, you will write a contract offer with your real estate agent. Your agent should pull the property disclosure report(s), tax record and comparables for you. This information will help you make an offer that is appropriate.
6. **Home Inspections** - Contract terms allow you to have a home inspection completed within 10 business days of contract acceptance. I highly recommend this for a resale home and sometimes it's not a bad idea for a new home. Unanticipated issues arising from a home inspection may be negotiated with the seller for correction. You will also have termite and HVAC (heating and air) inspections completed prior to closing. Mel Coker will assist you with these inspections.
7. **Prepare for Closing** - Your buyer's agent will assist you with all closing matters. When the contract is finalized you will need to select a closing attorney, and your agent will supply the attorney with a copy of the final contract. You will also need to finalize your selection of a mortgage professional and make a formal loan application (within 5 business days of contract acceptance).
8. **Closing** - On the day prior to closing, you should be told by your closing attorney or Realtor of the amount to bring to closing. These funds will need to be in the form of a cashier's check or certified check and made payable to the closing attorney. Your Realtor will review the HUD-Form 1 settlement statement prior to closing for accuracy and the closing attorney will review this most important document with you at the closing table.
9. **Move and Celebrate!** - The negotiated contract states when you get possession of the home and can start moving in (usually the day of closing). The moving part can be mildly stressful, but you now OWN your home! You have achieved the American Dream! You've made a smart move financially! Congratulations!

HOME BUYING = WEALTH BUILDING



An Internet Special Bonus for You (Chapter 11)

Ready to Buy (or Sell) a home in Columbia, South Carolina? Please be sure to contact Mel Coker for the best in Columbia real estate service. Mel says “service is everything”!



Thank you for taking the time to read through my online course – Buyer’s Guide for Columbia Real Estate. I really do want to help you buy your next or first home in Columbia. I’ve had over \$60 million in home sales volume during the past 10 years. Each transaction is very important to me.

If you contact Mel Coker to buy your home, I will provide a very nice gift to you at or after closing. **This is a very special offer and you must tell me (telephone or through email) that you completed the online course (through email or the PDF version online).** When you do this, I note this on my client record for you.

At closing, I will provide you with a Lowe’s shopping card worth the following:
.00125 x home closing sales price (rounded to the next highest \$25 increment)
Example: \$175,000 purchase price x .00125 = \$218.75 or Gift card from Mel Coker = \$225
(This program starts for closings on and after November 1, 2008)

Additionally, I will sign you up for available special offers from Lowe’s including a discount coupon and Lowe’s e-newsletter. I am a partner in the Lowe’s Realtor Benefits program so that I can offer these benefits to my real estate clients.



Thank you!

Mel Coker
www.MelCoker.com
(803) 749-5800

