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Increasing public awareness about the appraisal profession

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One of the more frustrating aspects in the day to day life of a real property appraiser is the frequent question or comment by clients or property owners when accompanying an appraiser on an inspection: "Is this all there is to an appraisal, taking notes and photos? You must be able to do a ton of these every day!" In my case, biting my tongue and holding back a flood of follow-up one-liners, I proceed to try and educate the individual as to what the process entails, assuring the property owner that the physical inspection, while an integral part of the process, is but the tip of the iceberg in terms of what goes into developing a credible opinion of value and cohesive, concise appraisal report, requiring several hours of research, analysis and reporting. It only takes a few extra minutes to engage in this dialogue and the points generally land in the minds of the consumer. The public's general lack of knowledge of what appraisers do is not shocking, but does point to a flaw that the appraisal profession needs to address in order to gain a greater degree of appreciation and respect for our profession.

Buyers going through the mortgage application process or home-owners seeking to refinance their mortgage or gain approval for a secured line of credit also frequently have the misconception that appraisers work for them and that we are being evasive by not discussing value at the time of the property inspection. After all, they are the party typically paying for the appraisal. Purchasing a home or refinancing a mortgage are likely to be among the biggest financial decisions an individual will make in their lifetime. The process can be stressful and it's human nature to seek assurance that their application process will go smoothly and the value of their property will be sufficient to secure the loan they desire. How we as professionals respond to these concerns at that moment is critical to how the end result of our work is perceived by the borrower, as well as how our client (i.e. the lender) is perceived by the borrower. After all, appraisers probably have more face to face contact with the applicant than anyone, and by association, we represent our lender in the public's eye at that moment.

In appraising for lending situations, explaining why we cannot discuss value with them and assuring them that our report will be provided to them later in their loan process through appropriate channels can put them at ease and allow the whole process to become more transparent. Similarly, in situations where a lender or financing is not involved, whether it be for an individual to ascertain value prior to listing a property for resale, a probate matter of familial dispute, divorce, bankruptcy, etc., laying the groundwork for the assignment by determining not only the scope of the assignment but who is involved directly and indirectly, can avoid confrontation down the road when the report is delivered.

As in all walks of life, an unscrupulous few appraisers who choose to cut corners or put profit ahead of common sense and the common good, can wreak havoc upon an industry of otherwise well educated, diligent and ethical business practitioners. A "perfect storm" of economic events have

contributed to where our local, statewide and regional real estate markets are at present. Evidence of declining property values, depressed real estate markets, talk of foreclosures, REOs, strategic defaults, etc., in recent years continue to put people on edge and place the appraisal profession and the process of evaluating real property in the forefront of public scrutiny. We need to embrace the scrutiny as a profession and increase the public's awareness of why our services are vital to individuals and to a healthy economy.

Much like a baseball umpire's work, we rarely read about an appraisal well done. The public needs to know an appraisal is not just a completed form, and needs to know how it is that appraisers go about becoming qualified to evaluate real property, how we become certified, how we stay on top of our profession by embracing technology and continuing education, and about how we go about honing our craft. The Appraisal Institute, a leader in promoting integrity within the profession, provides educational resources for its 25,000 members worldwide and the appraisal professional at large and is a frequent voice to be heard on national real property valuation issues. Educational offerings through the Appraisal Institute are available to members and non-members, alike, ranging from core courses necessary to pursue a career in real property valuation to courses and seminars targeted to topics pertinent to specific real property interests. AI courses are also available to the general public as well.

In addition to technical education, there are other effective ways to educate the public through networking channels with our business contacts, our primary clientele such as lenders, attorneys, corporate and government entities and our friends in real estate sales. By making ourselves available to their professional association meetings or being more available on a one-on-one basis to answer a question, we project our professionalism and elevate our presence in the community as trusted professionals.

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