

Price Cuts Arrive in Title Insurance

By JAMES R. HAGERTY

A big real-estate broker in suburban New York, Houlihan Lawrence, is trying to attract more home buyers by offering savings on title insurance, a business that generally avoids price competition.

Houlihan said an affiliated company, Thoroughbred Title Services, will offer title insurance and related services at costs well below those of competitors under an arrangement with EnTitle Insurance Co., a unit of Entitle Direct Group Inc., Stamford, Conn.

Houlihan operates in Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties. Thoroughbred plans to offer its title insurance services throughout New York State.

EnTitle last week won approval from the New York State Insurance Department for premiums on title insurance sold through agents that EnTitle says are 10% below those charged by its competitors in the state. Nineteen other title insurers operating in New York state set uniform premiums through an industry group, the Title Insurance Rate Services Association, and don't compete on pricing. An official of that group declined to comment.

Home buyers often pay scant attention to title insurance and related fees when they buy homes because they are focused on bigger items, such as negotiating a price for the home and getting a loan. That generally has freed title insurers and agents from worrying much about price competition.

For a person buying an \$800,000 home with a \$600,000 mortgage, Thoroughbred would charge a total of \$4,291 for title insurance and related research services, according to Christopher Meyers, chief operating officer of Houlihan. That is about \$1,000 below the typical cost from competitors, Mr. Meyers said.

EnTitle operates in 35 states and the District of Columbia and sells insurance directly as well as through agents.