2014 home building activity best in 6 years

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Oconee home builders in 2014 posted their best numbers in six years, according to a report tracking residential building permits sinc 2009.

The 235 permits pulled in 2014 by Oconee home builders eclipsed the previous year's total by six, according to a year-end report released by Dale Akins, president of the Market Edge LLC in Knoxville, Tenn.

Although the yearly gain was modest, Russ Price, a spokesman for the Oconee Home Builders Association, said activity remained steady throughout 2014 and there was no drop-off in the last quarter as had been the case in previous years.

"People are looking to build again, and the building industry is back," Price said ahead of the Home and Remodel Show put on by the OHBA over the weekend.

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Terri and Bill Graham chat with S-Tek Solar owner Jason Smith during the Oconee Home Builders Association's Home and Remodel Show at Shaver Recreation Complex on Friday. New home construction is up locally and across the state, according to officials.

Residential Building Permits

Area	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Oconee	235	229	173	195	181	227
Pickens	300	253	172	249	161	251
Upstate	4,615	4,178	3,491	2,643	2,472	2,623

Mark Nix, executive director of the Home Builders Association of South Carolina, recently told The Journal that the industry recaptured some of its swagger that had been lost after the recession hit the country toward the end of 2007. He said the number of permits for new housing and remodeling in South Carolina topped the 21,000 range that used to be the average when the industry was strong.

Nationally, Nix said the industry topped 1 million homes in 2014, surpassing a benchmark that had been eluding the industry since the recession.

"We weren't coming close," Nix said. "So to be able to hit the million mark is wonderful."

During the past six years, Oconee construction activity hit bottom, with 173 permits pulled, or 26 percent less than in 2014.

Commercial building activity in 2014 dropped off from the previous year in both Oconee and Pickens, according to Akins' report. Oconee builders pulled 122 permits in 2014, or almost 20 percent less than the 152 permits in 2013, while Pickens County builders slumped to 198 permits in 2014 after posting 386 in 2013.

Pickens County home builders in 2014 also enjoyed their best numbers in six years, with 300 permits pulled, or 18.5 percent more than the previous year.

During the same six-year stretch, Pickens County home builders also went through some hard times, including 2010, when just 161 permits were pulled, or 46 percent less than in 2014.

Overall, Price is confident the building industry is on the right track and will surpass 2014 numbers this year. He said as the economy continues to improve and more jobs come to the area, demand for homes in the $150,000 to $225,000 price range will grow in Oconee and nearby areas.

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