Home sales spike 11.7 percent in Oconee, Pickens counties

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SENECA — In the best news to come out since the bottom fell out of the housing market two years ago, home sales in the tri-county area of Anderson, Oconee and Pickens went up by almost 12 percent in October compared to a year ago.

A total of 229 homes sold in the area last month, or 11.7 percent more than in October 2008, the latest housing market report released Friday by the South Carolina Association of Realtors (SCR) shows.

At the same time, the median price of homes sold in October was $130,000, an increase of $10,000 or 8.3 percent over last year's numbers.

SCR officials credited the healthy showing, in part, to the first-time homebuyer tax credit.

"October was a good month for the housing market in South Carolina," said SCR President-elect Jay Rinehart.

Statewide, the number of homes sold last month increased by 18.1 percent over a year ago.

Spartanburg was the only market that saw a drop in the number of homes sold (-21.2 percent) from October 2008.

The Hilton Head area was the hottest market with a 38.1 percent increase in sales. Experts attribute the spike in the coastal areas to high double-digit drops in median home prices.

Nick Kremydas, the SCR's chief executive officer, said the local housing market is not out of the woods yet.

Although economists say the recession is likely over, and while South Carolina's housing industry is doing better compared to the rest of the nation, Kremydas said pitfalls remain.

Kremydas said high unemployment still persists, and he expects additional foreclosures and increased housing vacancy rates to continue.

Also, Kremydas said the banking industry is just beginning to absorb the losses from defaulting commercial real estate loans, which he thinks will make future loans of all kinds more difficult to acquire.

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