


OUR VIEW

# Housing numbers good news for Oconee County

Your glasses don't have to be rose-colored to get the impression that Oconee County's building slump may be ending.

Since 2008, at the heart of the recession, the number of people building homes – and commercial buildings – in Oconee County has slumped.

It got so bad that no one was building spec homes in hopes of selling them to anxious buyers. It got so bad, some Realtors were likely looking at secondary incomes or leaving the business altogether.

That's all changing.

In the first four months of 2013, there were 88 permits issued for new homes and a total of 506 building permits in all. That is a lot of construction.

Last year, in 2012, the numbers were up to 72 homes and 400 total permits through April.

To put that in perspective, in 2011 there were only 45 homes and 306 total permits issued through April.

And, to give it even more meaning, Pickens County has issued a total of 248 permits through April this year and 341 through April in 2012.

So, are we back? Maybe not all the way, but the signs are good that people are beginning to once again look at our lakes, cost of living and mountains and feeling good about locating in Oconee County.

In a Tuesday story in The Journal, Oconee County Zoning Administrator Josh Stephens expressed cautious optimism about the numbers he is seeing.

"If you talk to Realtors, we're all seeing the same thing – more movement in the market," Stephens said. "We're beginning to see some spec houses being built, and some of the subdivisions are open to it."

We're not ready to break out the champagne yet, but more good numbers as summer rolls in will surely signal a turnaround in the county's economy.

If we can return to the kind of numbers we saw in 2006-2008, it will be good news for the county coffers and for anyone living here. More people means more investment in Oconee County – both by industries that bring jobs and those who make decisions on the location of restaurants and big box stores.