CONSTRUCTION:

Biggest strength of Oconee County'

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ooking like this year s going to be a better ear than last year — hat's the way that we're ooking at it right now,")conee Home Builders ıssociation executive irector Russ Price said. There's a few things ut there that give us oncerns, but other than hat, it should be a better 'ear than last year."

Oconee County onstruction numbers eleased recently show hat permits were issued or 217 new homes in 013 — 38 more than 2012 nd the highest number of new home permits since 2009, when 235 new nomes were permitted.

Total building permits n the county reached ,400, well ahead of the ,213 building permits in 2012 and the most since 2008, when the county approved 1,739 building permits.

The total amount of fees paid for permits and other county building fees was $645,922, the second-highest amount in fees collected in the seven-year period from 2007-2013. County zoning administrator Josh Stephens said the money collected does include large fees collected for commercial buildings at BASF and Duke Energy's Oconee Nuclear Station.

Even without the commercial buildings, Stephens said the number of fees collected are higher than those in 2012 and show positive signs for the future of construction growth in Oconee County.

"In a general sense, the economy is improving," Stephens said. "We're moving out of the recession and we're having some improvements economically. These numbers are climbing, and I hope to see it continue into 2014."

Although no formal plans were approved in 2013, Stephens said there has been more interest by developers in building subdivisions. The last subdivision approved by the county was in 2008, but Stephens said he is hopeful one or two will complete the process in 2014.

"We haven't had any subdivisions go from beginning to end yet, but I can tell you there's a lot of activity of people coming in and talking about the process and looking at properties," he said. "To me that's an encouraging sign. If people are out there willing to consider putting serious money on the line to develop properties or build a spec home, to me that's a positive sign that they have enough confidence in the economy and the real estate market to take on that risk."

Price said improvements in construction help the overall economy of the county.

"I'd say (construction) is the biggest strength of Oconee County," Price said. "It just helps all the way around. People will start going to restaurants and things like that again where they've been not going. A lot of the guys out here used to buy a new car every year. Now, nobody buys a new car. But I am starting to see them do that again. It will help the total economy."

ncannada@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6684
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JESSICA NELMS |

Construction numbers highest in 5 years

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

New home construction and total building permits issued in Oconee County rose in 2013 for the third consecutive year, reaching their highest points in five years and making officials more optimistic for 2014.

"I'm optimistic; it's

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Year	New Homes	Total Permits	Construction Fees
2007	677	2,178	$545,982
2008	396	1,739	$669,980
2009	235	1,126	$423,902
2010	186	1,173	$368,786
2011	145	1,075	$313,834
2012	179	1,213	$386,989
2013	217	1,400	$645,922

FOR MORE

The local housing market also finished 2013 on a high note.
To read more, turn to page A3.