Spike in permits bodes well for local housing starts

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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SENECA — New home construction in Oconee is off to one of its fastest starts in years, according to a market report that tracks residential permits.

Contractors pulled 148 permits through the first three months of 2016, eclipsing the 60 permits recorded in the first quarter a year ago by 147 percent.

To put the first-quarter numbers in perspective, they represents more than half of the 256 residential permits Oconee issued through all of last year.

Pickens County did not fare as well — issuing 83 permits through March 31, a drop of 31 percent over the first quarter of 2015 — according to the report recently released by The Market Edge, an online industry resource based in Knoxville, Tenn.

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Mark Nix, the executive director of the Home Builders Association of South Carolina, said he's seeing hot spots in other areas — particularly Charleston.

"We are having good growth across the state, but we are not back to normal levels," Nix told The Journal in Monday. "It may be the increase is due to the market suppression over the last couple of years."

Aside from Pickens and Greenwood County, which posted less building permits than a year ago at this time, other Upstate counties joined Oconee in recording brisk activity.

Anderson County issued 227 building permits in the first quarter to eclipse last year's Q1 total of 143 permits by 59 percent.

Spartanburg posted 393 Q1 permits, 90 more than in 2015 — an increase of 30 percent. Greenville issued 642 permits — an increase of 18 percent over the 544 recorded last year.

The 147 permits issued through March 31 positions Oconee to enjoy one of its best years since the Great Recession. From 2011-2015, the county averaged about 218 permits a year.

Nix is scheduled to talk about Oconee's housing market and make his predictions for what lies ahead when he speaks at a lunch event scheduled by the Home Builders Association of Oconee in the summer.

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