Tri-county housing market looks to rebound

Some see flattening drop in home sales as sign worst is over

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SENECA — Tri-county home sales in Anderson, Oconee and Pickens slumped by 9 percent in 2009 from the previous year, according to a year-end report released this week by the South Carolina Association of Realtors (SCR).

Some look at the single-digit-drop in home sales as a hopeful sign that the precipitous drop in the housing market, which ushered in a deep national economic recession, has bottomed out.

In her most recent newsletter to members of the Western Upstate Association of Realtors that includes Oconee and Pickens, President and CEO Peggy Hill encouraged real estate professionals to have their business plans in place so they can take full advantage of what she hopes will be a rebound in 2010.

Real estate professionals have no other choice than to look at the glass as half full after three straight rocky years.

The once red-hot local housing market peaked in 2005 when 4,209 sales were registered and the median price of homes rose to $127,000.

At the end of 2009, 2,584 tri-county home sales were posted, a vertical drop of more than 41 percent since 2005. Last year ended with the median price of homes also down to $120,000.

The median sales price is the point where half of homes sold for more and the other half for less.

There were encouraging signs in the second half of 2009 that might indicate the worst is behind.

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>
> **Peggy Hill**
> Western Upstate Association of Realtors

SCR year-end report shows third-quarter 2009 sales of 732, or 8.6 percent less than the 801 sold in Q3 2008. In Q4 2009, 557 sales were posted, or the same number as in 2008.

SCR CEO Nick Kremydas is quick to caution that there probably will be bumps along the road in 2010, even though the recession is most likely over.

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

Also, Kremydas sees additional foreclosures increasing housing vacancy rates because of high unemployment throughout South Carolina.

Hill, as the head of the Western Upstate realtors group, said the savvy professionals should be looking beyond the present challenges and preparing for future opportunities.

"Sit down and think entrepreneurially, as well as creatively, about how you can position yourself to be ahead of the game for the coming market," Hill said in her newsletter.

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