

Realtors: Housing market stabilizing

Realty execs rap media coverage for fueling consumer anxiety

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Tucson real estate executives and a national industry analyst said Wednesday that they expect the local market will start to improve either this year or in 2009.

"I think we've stabilized," said Judy Lowe, executive vice president of Realty Executives Southern Arizona, at the Tucson Association of Realtors annual forecast Wednesday. "Our inventory is shrinking. The phones are ringing more. The pent-up demand is there."

Lowe was part of a panel discussion at the event, held at the Sheraton Tucson Hotel & Suites, 5151 E. Grant Road. Lawrence Yun, chief economist for the National Association of Realtors, also spoke in a separate presentation.

Although Yun and the local industry panel provided some thoughts on the coming year, most of the event was not focused on the future. Rather, speakers spent considerable time criticizing media coverage of the slowdown and urging attendees to keep up their spirits.

"Lethargy is your enemy right now. You have to pick yourself up and start doing things," said Laura Mance, regional vice president of Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage.

Yun said media-fueled consumer anxiety has caused the real estate market to be slower than it should be given the job market, household wealth, relatively low mortgage rates and falling home prices.

U.S. homes sales fell by about 2 million from 2005 to 2007, Yun said. Meanwhile, the economy has added 4 million jobs, \$700 billion in total wages and \$8 trillion in household wealth since 2005, he said.

"This is the battle we're fighting, the consumer confidence battle," Yun said. "(The information) is implying that clearly there is excessive pessimism in the marketplace."

Yun said he expects Tucson to rebound from the slump with help from retiring baby boomers and the region's growing reputation as a recreation destination.

"Ten years from now, people will say, '2007, 2008, there was a great opportunity to enter the market then,' " Yun said.