

Real estate board president encouraged by numbers

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On the positive side, the Medicine Hat Real Estate Board recorded its third consecutive increase in April in the value of residential units sold and in the number of units sold since January of this year.

Compared to last April, however, this year's total value for residential units sold totaled \$27.3 million, a \$19 million drop from last year's \$46.3 million. The number of residential units sold this April totaled 109, compared to April 2009's 179 units.

Year-to-date to the end of April, this year's first quarter volume of sales totaled \$85.7 million with 348 units sold, compared to the first quarter of 2008 with 543 residential units sold totaling \$140.9 million.

The average sale price this April was \$250,824, compared to \$258,922 last April.

Although the volume of sales and the number of housing units sold is a far cry from the boom times over the past few years, real estate board president Ellen Baba is encouraged by the steady increase over the past few months.

"From all the bad news we've been getting, it's a positive thing," she told the News Thursday. "You never know what the fall is going to bring, but then of course this is generally our more active time of the year and that's good."

According to Baba, a significant number of recent buyers have been first-time homebuyers.

That's due to a number of reasons, she explained, including government incentives such as the federal homebuyer's plan and the first-time buyer tax credit.

In addition, she points to lower house prices and low-interest rates as also being responsible for drawing buyers back to the housing market.

David Van Leeuwen and his fiancé Alexis Mayer are two first-time homebuyers who'll be taking possession of their new home later this month, and they're happy with the present market.

"The first thing is in terms of how prices are really good and it's really a buyer's market," Van Leeuwen said. "The other thing is that we're quite tired of apartment living and are eager to move on to a house and get to that stage of our lives."

Last year, he added, was not the right time financially and house prices were not as good as they are now.

Baba said more and more people are also showing interest in the tax credits from the city and the province for energy efficient renovations.

With the incentives and low mortgage rates as well as the increased number of active listings, it's definitely a buyers market.

For those homeowners who are having difficulties with their mortgages, because of layoffs or whatever, Baba suggests seeing your bank, or other financial institution that you're borrowing from, as soon as possible.

"At this point, they don't want foreclosures and they're going to work with you," she added.



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The local real estate industry is seeing some positive and negative numbers.

