

REAL ESTATE LEADER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Spring 2008

Make lemonade
Get your creative juices flowing

**REALTORS® tackle
smart growth challenge**

**Got talent?
Join our
Raise the Roof Revue**

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



There's an old saying, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." And well, life has handed REALTORS® a few lemons these past few months what with the media bombarding consumers with negative reports about the tanking national real estate market.

But guess what? There is no such thing as a national real estate market. All real estate, as we know, is local. And the good news is that Mississippi real estate markets remain a stable and responsible marketplace for home buyers and sellers.

In this issue, we asked the presidents of our 21 local boards of REALTORS® to give us a market snapshot of business in their neck of the woods. And we profiled Jackson Association of REALTORS® President John Praytor whose fresh-squeezed perspectives about his own real estate market are setting the record straight with reporters and consumers alike.

We also get insights into the subprime mortgage market in a guest article by Jeff Farnham, President of the Mississippi Association of Mortgage Brokers.

And my favorite features in this issue focus on economic development and smart growth as important aspects of our jobs as REALTORS®. Two guest articles by Gray Swoope, Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority, and Hugh Morris, Community Outreach Representative for the National Association of REALTORS®, highlight what the focus of my presidency has been all about. See page 12-13 to learn more about the smart growth/economic development challenge I've issued to our local boards and to read about their progress.

Finally, I continue to be impressed with the quantity and quality of member benefits our association provides. Look for information inside this issue about the free webinar series, upcoming MAR Convention & EXPO in Hattiesburg and the Raise the Roof Revue we're planning in June, a talent show fundraiser for MARPAC.

I look forward to seeing you on my visits around the state this year.

Gwen James
President

Word on the Street

REAL ESTATE NEWS BRIEFS

NAR Midyear Legislative Meetings & EXPO, May 12-17

Register now at www.realtor.org to attend NAR's Midyear Meetings & Trade EXPO in Washington, D.C., May 12-17, and be part of a strong voice for NAR's legislative agenda. During a special day of Hill Visits Mississippi's Congressional delegation will meet with Mississippi REALTORS® to discuss issues of importance to the real estate businesses. MAR encourages REALTORS® to plan to attend the following events during the meeting:

Tuesday, May 13

4:00 p.m. – 4:59 p.m.: 59 1/2 minutes: A Member & Director Update

Wednesday, May 14

TBD: State Hill Visit Briefing

1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.: State Hill Visits (detailed schedule TBD)

4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.: Mississippi Congressional Reception

Friday, May 16

4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.: Region 5 Caucus & Reception

Surround Sound Campaign combating negative media

Surround Sound, NAR's recently launched communications strategy, is working with state and local REALTOR® associations to get the word out to consumers about the positive aspects in today's housing markets. With Surround Sound consumers receive this message from all sides. The multi-sided approach includes NAR's 2008 Public Awareness Campaign, new media toolkits for state associations and local boards to help get the word out, and re-tooled media relations to make sure that the national media is hearing the facts about ALL the real estate markets, not just a select few. To learn more about Surround Sound visit www.realtor.org.

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LEGAL EASE



BY RON FARRIS, ROBINSON, BIGGS, INGRAM, SOLOP & FARRIS, PLLC

Getting paid: Procuring cause

A recurring question to the MAR Legal Hotline is whether the caller is entitled to a commission. The facts are always different, but the question remains the same: Is the REALTOR® the procuring cause of the sale?

Put another way, would the sale have occurred without the REALTOR®'s efforts? A REALTOR® who is the procuring cause initiates an unbroken chain of events, resulting in a deal between the buyer and the seller. Disputes over procuring cause arise in two contexts: REALTOR® vs. REALTOR® and between a REALTOR® and a seller or buyer.

Disputes between REALTORS®

Article 17 of the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the National Association of REALTORS® (2005) requires REALTORS® who have a contractual dispute or specific non-contractual dispute with other REALTORS®, including claims for compensation, to submit that dispute to arbitration in accordance with the regulations of their local board. The decision of the arbitration panel as to procuring cause will be conclusive with respect to all claims for compensation.

There is no "one size fits all" test to determine procuring cause; instead, each scenario must be determined on a case-by-case basis. The National Association of REALTORS® Arbitration Guidelines provide a number of factors for an arbitration panel to consider in determining procuring cause. No one factor is determinative and not all are weighted equally. The factors are not conclusions and each factor should be considered in conjunction with the other factors relevant to the case. An agency relationship is not determinative. Factors for consideration include:

1. The nature and status of the transaction (residential or commercial?);
2. The nature, status and terms of the listing agreement (exclusive, open, in writing, in effect at time of sale?);
3. The nature, status and terms of any buyer representation agreements (exclusive, in writing, when established?);
4. The nature, status and terms of the offer to compensate (offer of cooperation in writing?);
5. The roles and relationships of the parties;
6. The initial contact with the purchaser (who first introduced the purchaser to the property, when and how was the introduction made, and was the introduction instrumental in creating the desire to purchase?);
7. The conduct of the REALTORS® (required disclosures made, faithful exercise of duties, initiation of a separate series of events resulting in the transaction, efforts of one REALTOR® compared to another?);
8. Continuity and breaks in continuity (uninterrupted series of events?

If there was an interruption, who caused it?);

9. Conduct of the buyer (decision to buy independent of REALTOR®'s actions, negotiation without aid of REALTOR®, seek to freeze out REALTOR®?);

10. Conduct of the seller (act in bad faith to deprive REALTOR® of commission?); and

11. Other information which may be relevant.

Disputes between REALTORS® and sellers or buyers

Disputes between REALTORS® and sellers or buyers over entitlement to commission and procuring cause are most often litigated in court. Whether a REALTOR® is the procuring cause of the sales depends on the facts and circumstances specific to the case. Under Mississippi law, the REALTOR®'s efforts do not have to be the sole cause of the sale, but must be the predominant cause. While Mississippi courts have not yet set forth a list of factors for determining procuring cause, the above list proves useful in the litigation context as well to show the totality of the circumstances.

Additionally, Mississippi courts have recognized that a seller is entitled to place any lawful condition on a REALTOR®'s right to commission if the parties so agree on that condition, notwithstanding the general rule that the REALTOR® is entitled to a commission if he or she is the procuring cause of the sale. One such condition that has been allowed is that the commission does not become due until the time of closing and shall be paid from the proceeds of the transaction.

In summary

Again, there is no magic formula to determine procuring cause and no conclusion can be drawn from the presence or absence of any one factor. Each case is as different as the facts that compose it. Thus, procuring cause will continue to be a hot topic so long as REALTORS®' commissions are based upon a successful sale. ■

Ron Farris is MAR's Legal Hotline attorney and general counsel. Missye Martin, Esq., Associate Attorney with Robinson, Biggs, Ingram, Solop & Farris contributed to this article.

Call MAR's Legal Hotline

MAR's Legal Hotline (800-747-1103, ext. 25) offers free and confidential legal information relevant to broad-based real estate practices and applications, including MAR Standard Forms and Contracts, to MAR members, and is available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Calls received after 3:00 p.m. will be returned the following business day.



Legislative update

Here is a brief update on legislation MAR has been monitoring during the 2008 legislative session:

Licensees to sit for exam without a sponsoring broker

MAR supported SB 2935, which allows an individual to take the state licensing exam prior to securing a sponsoring broker. The bill was passed by the Senate and House and signed by the Governor. The change becomes effective upon bill signing.

Lawyers required for residential closings

MAR opposed HB 384, requiring the use of an attorney in all residential real estate closings. Thanks to a strong REALTOR® presence during REALTOR® Day at the Capitol and our lobbying efforts, supporters did not bring the bill before the House for a vote and the issue died.

Impact Fees

MAR continues to oppose impact fees in any form and encourages government at all levels to refuse to enact impact fees where they do not currently exist and to discontinue their use in areas where they are currently assessed. This year's attempt to institute impact fees, SB 2711, died in committee.

Contractors Lien

HB 715 died in committee. The bill would have allowed a contractor to place a lien on improvements to real property if the subcontractor failed to pay the contractor.

Meth Labs

Several pieces of legislation were introduced that would have affected seller disclosure and remediation of properties that may have been used in the production of methamphetamines. No bills related to this issue passed.

Health Insurance Exchange Program

MAR supported Governor Haley Barbour's plan to create a Health Insurance Exchange Program allowing small business owners and independent contractors to use pre-tax dollars to purchase health insurance. The bill unanimously passed the Senate but died after House Chairman of Insurance, Walter Robinson

(D-Bolton) failed to bring the bill out of committee.

First-time homebuyers' tax credit

MAR supported efforts to provide a state income tax credit for first time homebuyers. Thanks to REALTOR® and Senator Walter Michel, an effort to provide a state income tax credit for first time homebuyers passed the Senate Housing Committee. The bill later died in the Senate Finance Committee given an impending Tax Study Commission created by the Governor. The legislation looks favorable for 2009.

The following bills were in conference at press time:

Eminent Domain

The Senate and House passed Eminent Domain legislation which is headed to conference. MAR opposes the House bill, as it goes too far and could negatively affect future economic development. The Senate legislation more closely aligns with the association's position.

Employer down payment/closing cost assistance

MAR supports legislation designed to allow employers and employees a tax incentive for down payment assistance and/or closing cost assistance in the purchase of a home. The bill has passed the Senate 52-0 and the House 121-0. Because of some minor changes made in the House, the bill will now go back to the senate for concurrence or for the Senate to invite Conference.

"Sunshine Legislation" weakened but still alive:

MAR supports Senate Bill 2188, legislation that would bring oversight and accountability to contracts the attorney general's office enters into with private attorneys. The bill has passed the Senate and was amended significantly in the House Judiciary A Committee. The bill will now be voted on by the full house.



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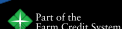
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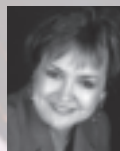
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Local Board MARPAC participation levels

As of March 14, 2008

MARPAC has reached 73.7 percent of its 2008 goal with \$147,383 of \$200,000 and 47.7 percent of its 50 percent fair share participation goal.

Biloxi-Ocean Springs	61.4
Clarksdale	0
Cleveland	34.9
Four County	40.6
Golden Triangle	49.6
Greenville	58.5
Greenwood	62.5
Grenada	75
Gulf Coast	46.4
Hattiesburg	51.4
Jackson	28.1
Laurel	75.6
Meridian	65.6
MCAR	57.9
Natchez	32.3
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Northeast	62.4
Northwest	69.3
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Vicksburg	63.4

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CAPITOL WATCH

UPDATE ON LEGISLATIVE ISSUES IMPORTANT TO YOUR BUSINESS



MAR supports health insurance bill

REALTORS® showed support for Governor Haley Barbour's health insurance exchange legislation during the governor's press conference at the State Capitol, Thurs., March 13. Pictured left to right, front row are REALTOR® Johnny Brown, ERA Real Estate Professionals, Ridgeland; Jackson Association of REALTORS® Association Executive Jo Usry; REALTOR® Larry Edwards, Edwards Homes, Inc., Ridgeland; MAR CEO Angela Cain; Governor Haley Barbour, and REALTOR® Rita McIntosh, McIntosh & Associates, Flowood. Back row: Mississippi Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney; REALTOR® Glen Smith, Promised Land Properties, Jackson; Lt. Governor Phil Bryant; and MAR Governmental Affairs Director Derek Easley

REALTOR® Day at the Capitol draws record crowd

Hundreds of Mississippi REALTORS® gathered at the state capitol Feb. 20 for the annual REALTOR® Day event where members heard from Lieutenant Governor Phil Bryant and legislators on issues that matter to their businesses.



Senator Tom King of Petal receives the MAR's 2007 Legislator of the Year Award for his long-standing support of REALTOR® and property rights issues.



MAR President Gwen James presents Representative Mark Formby, Picayune, with the 2007 Legislator of the Year Award during REALTOR® Day at the Capitol.



Four candidates for the Third Congressional District race including Gregg Harper, David Landrum, Charlie Ross and John Rounseville participated in a candidate forum during the MARPAC Political Action luncheon following REALTOR® Day at the Capitol. Pictured here: Gregg Harper addresses a packed house.



Attendance at the 2008 REALTOR® Day at the Capitol set new records. With over 40 members from their local board attending, the Hattiesburg Area Association of REALTORS® arrived in style on a chartered bus. Pictured left to right are Debbie Sinopoli, Lavon Smith, Delois Smith, Sandy Wright, Shelia Staten, Carol Downing, Linda Seifert, Barbara Wilson, Judy Corts, Jessica Harless and Misty Corts.



FOR THE COURSE OF YOUR CAREER



BY JOHN PHILLIPS

Why standard forms?

Throughout history people have found it necessary to use a common language in order to transact business with each other. During the Crusades, knights from all over Europe found they needed to be able to converse with each other and, upon reaching the Holy Land, discovered that they also had to do business with the citizens of several of the nations of the Middle East. From this conglomeration of European, Asian and African languages, there developed a lingua franca that they could all understand and use to make war, to make peace or just to buy oats for their horses.

Centuries later a couple of guys who ran a bicycle shop in Ohio built a machine that could not only fly, but also carry a human passenger. This novelty quickly developed into an accepted form of transportation. Airplanes today fly to just about every country on earth and, as they do, all conversations with airports and traffic controllers are carried out in English, the common language of commercial air traffic worldwide. Can you imagine the chaos if there was not a common form of communication for airplanes full of people? You wouldn't want to miss the 6 o'clock news!

The Bible in the book of Genesis speaks of a time when all people on earth spoke the same language and were able to build great civilizations. In fact, they became so powerful and so confident that they decided to build a soaring tower, the Tower of Babel, so they could be close to heaven. When God intervened and caused them to speak different languages, not only did the great civilizations fall, they were not even able to finish building the tower because they could no longer understand what each other were saying. There's got to be a lesson there somewhere.

We believe that Standard Forms are a kind of language that will allow our members to converse with each other in a recognizable way and facilitate business between them. If something is easy and profitable, people are apt to do it more often.

Don't you find it somewhat disconcerting to have an offer or another document that you are not familiar with brought to you to present to your client? Even after reading the pages line by line, you may still be uneasy about overlooking something that could cause you to appear less than professional and might cause big problems for you and your client later. There are some definite advantages to our clients and customers when Standard Forms are used.

Some of the best real estate minds in Mississippi and many of the most experienced REALTORS® in the state have worked for years to bring us the Standard Forms we have today. As you probably know, these forms recently were reviewed and rewritten to produce the January 2008 version which we think are the best forms available. With these revisions in place, the Standard Forms Working Group has no plan to make any other changes in the foreseeable future.



Since we don't know who will be using the forms, or for what purpose, you will see that each form has a disclaimer at the top that our legal counsel recommends to give the Mississippi Association of REALTORS® and our members some protection if the forms are misused in some way.

If an agent in Pontotoc can write an offer that is clearly understood by an agent in Pascagoula, or an agent in Bay St. Louis can fill out a disclosure or an addendum that an agent in Batesville can easily read and understand, they can feel better about doing real estate business with each other.

The Louisiana legislature has decreed that beginning January 2008 all real estate contracts will be on state approved standard forms, much as Mississippi's Working with a Real Estate Broker Disclosure and Property Condition Disclosure are required by Mississippi state law today. It will be interesting to see what happens across the river as companies give up their proprietary forms and start using the same ones as everybody else.

Any REALTOR® member can obtain the new Standard Forms at no cost by going to www.msrealtors.org clicking on Standard Forms and printing out any or all of the 32 forms available there. Some companies download a master set, use them to make copies on their copy machine, and keep a supply of forms on hand for their agents to use. You can also click on ZipForms to have Standard Forms available on your desktop computer or on your laptop for ease of use and availability. The first year's use of ZipForms is free to all members on the Mississippi Association of REALTORS®. After your first year, the fee for this great business tool is nominal. ■

John Phillips, a Hall of Fame inductee and Past President of MAR, is the Vice President of Professional Development for the Mississippi REALTOR® Institute. E-mail him at jphillips@realtorinstitute.org.

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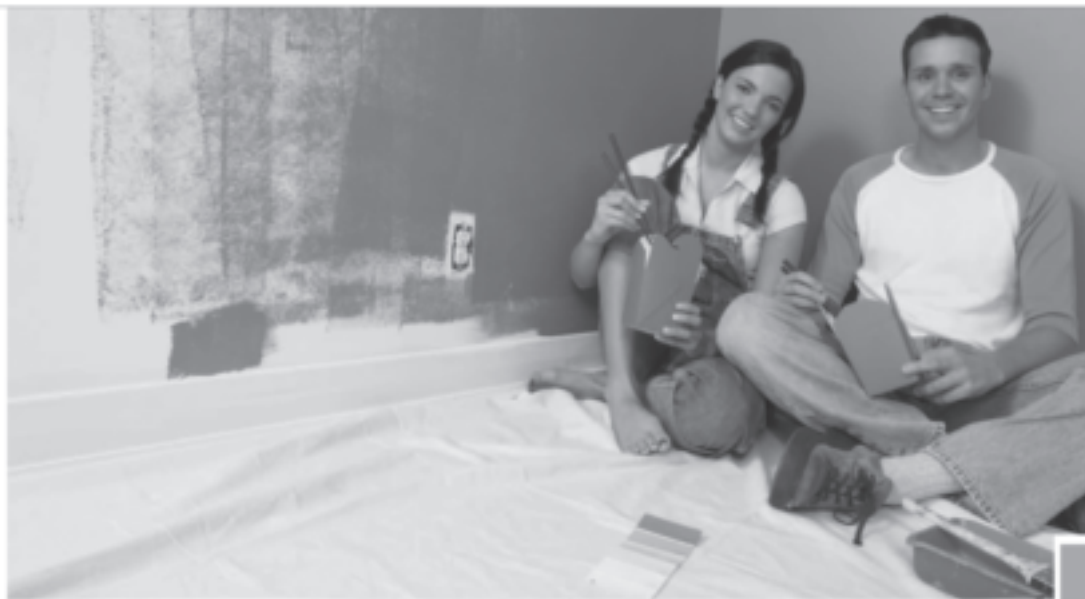
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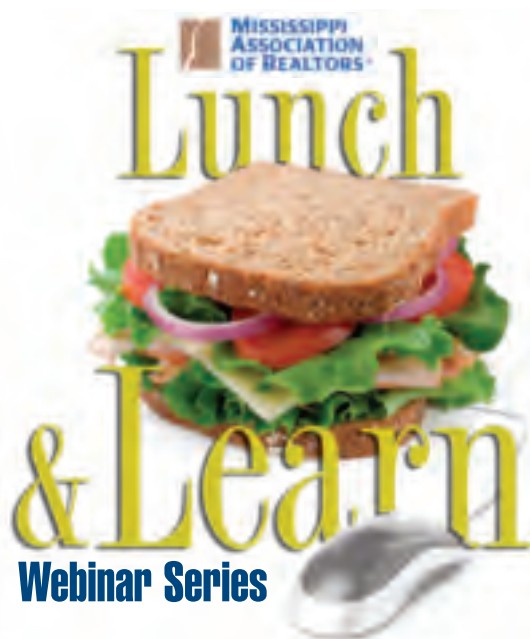
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May 21 • Noon - 1:00 p.m.
**Mississippi Real Estate
Commission Update**
Robert Praytor, Administrator



June 18 • Noon - 1:00 p.m.
**Procuring Cause:
Show Who the Money?**
*John Phillips, Vice President of
Professional Development, Mississippi
REALTOR® Institute*



July 16 • Noon - 1:00 p.m.
**Risk Reduction:
A Legal Hotline Lowdown**
MAR General Counsel Ron Farris



August 20 • Noon - 1:00 p.m.
**Go Where the Consumers Are:
Cyberspace**
*Keith Garner, Managing Director,
NAR Center for REALTOR® Technology*

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Smart Growth – How (and why) REALTORS® should take the initiative

By Hugh Morris

By 2030, this country will need to house 70 million more Americans than in 2005. How will we live? Differently! Households will be smaller. More people will remain active into their 80s; they will want shopping, entertainment, and medical services within walking distance. “Empty nesters” may gravitate towards revitalized city neighborhoods.

Struggling with traffic congestion and watching precious open space disappear, many homeowners are saying “enough” to sprawl development. Smart growth, which emphasizes compact, high-density, mixed-use development, is gaining in popularity as residents and local governments struggle to mitigate the negative impacts of the growth patterns of the last fifty years.

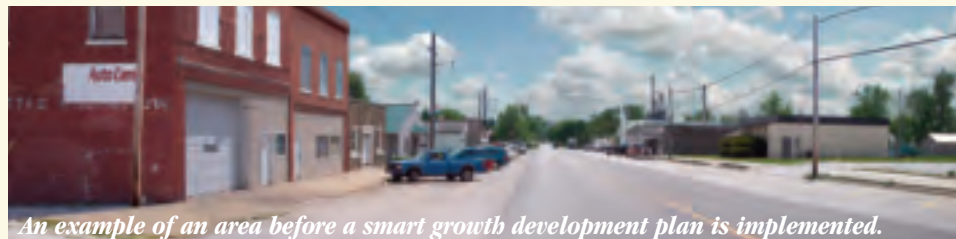
Smart Growth focuses on the existing assets of the community, the long-run implications of various development patterns, and the fiscal impacts of these patterns. The bottom line: some ways of growing are more likely to succeed in the long term and those sustainable ways of growing are dovetailing nicely with a shift in consumer taste for the type of development people are looking for.

Each community defines Smart Growth differently because the needs and challenges each community faces are different. Many areas of Mississippi are still struggling with the recovery from Hurricane Katrina, and economic development eludes many localities looking for growth.

Attracting economic enterprises is one task (see NAR Smart Growth Resources, right), but the way in which that growth is accommodated is what smart growth seeks to address.

The National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) has developed five principles of Smart Growth and has produced a wealth of resources to assist REALTOR® associations in their effort to help shape their communities as they grow and change. Those principles include:

1. Make a commitment to housing opportunity and choice, a wide range of urban, suburban, and rural homes at all price levels for a diverse population.
2. Build better communities with good schools, low crime, quality public services, efficient transportation systems, ample recreation areas, open space, a strong employment base, and a viable commercial sector.



An example of an area before a smart growth development plan is implemented.

3. Protect the environment by controlling pollution and encouraging preservation of natural resources and properties of historic significance.

4. At the same time, respect our Constitutional rights to freely own, use, and transfer real property.

5. Implement fair and reasonable public sector fiscal measures to ensure that the cost of new infrastructure is shared proportionally among those served.

Why REALTORS® care about Smart Growth

REALTORS® have everything to gain by joining with other community leaders to assure ample homeownership opportunities in communities with efficient transportation, good schools and plenty of parks and open space.

REALTORS® sell more than just homes, they sell neighborhoods, and because of that, REALTORS® around the country are getting involved in Smart Growth projects to ensure that the communities where they live and work are the best they can be.

How local boards can get active

Many local REALTOR® associations know what ails their community and the first step they take is to make a decision to fix it. The second step is to round up partners, including local government officials and area business leaders.

Next, a collective education is needed about the possible remedies for the ailment. Often, this is where a Smart Growth Action Grant from NAR helps because the funds can be used to bring in an expert on the issue at hand who can provide a deeper understanding and some cutting-edge ways of addressing it. Once that education takes place, the group can develop an action plan for addressing the ailment in a way that fits with local culture.

Such action plans often require a public-private partnership, an alteration to local land use planning regulations, and a public education process to ensure that the citizens have a voice in the direction that their community is headed. ■

NAR Smart Growth Resources

NAR provides a variety of resources to state and local associations to assist them with their Smart Growth programs. Below are three of the most popular items. Visit www.REALTOR.org/smart-growth for the complete list of resources.

• Smart Growth Action Grants

These grants are designed to assist your efforts to implement programs and activities that position REALTORS® as leaders in improving their communities by advancing Smart Growth policies. The maximum amount available for any one association is \$5,000 per grant cycle.

• On Common Ground magazine

NAR's twice yearly magazine devoted to Smart Growth issues and the various ways that REALTORS® are involved in shaping their communities. NAR can arrange to have multiple copies delivered to you or a mailing list of your choice of public officials and community leaders.

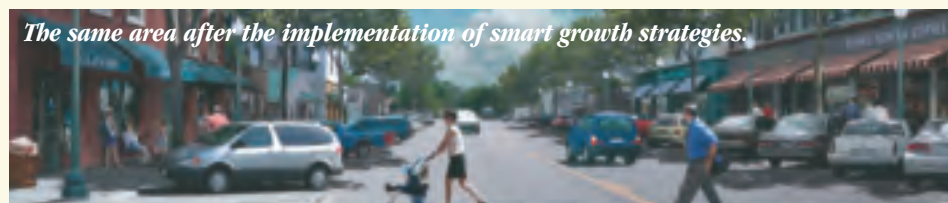
• Smart Growth Toolkit

This 150-page resource provides descriptions of all aspects of Smart Growth, from transportation to open space preservation, including cutting-edge examples from around the country and case studies of REALTORS® and REALTOR® associations that have made an effort to improve their community by applying Smart Growth techniques.

• Other Resources

• Visit: www.brookings.edu and search for “Turning around Downtown” which provides a case-based review of 12 common steps found in successful revitalization efforts.

• Visit: www.smartgrowth.org to read about the 10 principles of Smart Growth.



The same area after the implementation of smart growth strategies.



Hugh Morris is the Smart Growth/Community Outreach Representative for the National Association of REALTORS® and can be reached at bmorris@realtors.org or (202) 383-1278.

In January, MAR President Gwen James challenged each of the 21 local boards of REALTORS® in Mississippi to develop and implement a smart growth or economic development project in 2008. James encouraged boards to apply for NAR's Smart Growth Action Grants which could provide up to \$5,000 in funding for each board's program.

With grant application deadlines in April and October, many boards are already brainstorming ideas, looking for connections with existing economic development efforts and initiating their plans. Here's what's already in the works:

The Gulf Coast Association of REALTORS® has applied for an NAR Smart Growth grant to hold a training seminar for REALTORS®, appraisers, developers, community leaders and interested citizens to familiarize them with the specific provisions and use of Smart Code Zoning plans that have been recently adopted or are in the process of being adopted in at least five Gulf Coast Municipalities.

The Northwest Mississippi Board of REALTORS® passed a resolution providing \$5,000 per year for five years to fund the A.W. Bouchillon Institute for Community Planning. The institute provides training for planning commissioners, elected officials, historic preservation commissioners and members of the development community. Approval of the funding is contingent upon the institute's training becoming mandatory for all Desoto County Planning Commissioners. Since announcing the initiative, groups including the North Mississippi Homebuilders Association, the Desoto County Economic Development Council and the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi have also pledged financial support.

Local boards get smart about growth

by Tracee Walker

Meridian is another city in Mississippi that has embraced and adopted many of the smart growth principles already. Members of the Meridian Board met with the mayor to discuss project ideas and are awaiting his feedback.

The Hattiesburg Area Association of REALTORS® is planning an Economic Development Boot Camp and is fleshing out a second project with the City of Petal.

The Vicksburg-Warren County Board of REALTORS®'s project will plug into recycling efforts while the Northeast Mississippi Board plans a project addressing Mississippi's high school dropout rates.

At press time, other boards in the organizing and brainstorming stages include Biloxi-Ocean Springs, North Central, Clarksdale, Greenwood, Jackson, Laurel, Natchez and Pearl River.

If your board is not sure where to start or is still in the planning stages, consider ideas like putting on a smart growth conference or speaker series to educate members on niche topics such as transportation, open space preservation, wetlands, school development, or attainable housing. Programs could also feature instruction in how the local planning process works, including issues such as zoning, master plans, and comprehensive plans. NAR support also can be used to further activities to develop a community vision through a community planning workshop or joining a coalition that is working toward a similar community vision.

Awards for the most creative and innovative projects will be presented to local boards at the MAR Convention & EXPO in Hattiesburg in December. Questions? Contact NAR's Hugh Morris at hmorris@realtors.org to get started. ■

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Mississippi real estate: The sweet & sour of it

Real Estate Leader magazine asked officers of our 21 boards of REALTORS® across Mississippi to give us the flavor of their local real estate markets. Some share sweet stories of success. Others say souring media reports about real estate aren't exactly tempting consumers' taste buds.

Kay Jefferies, President

Northwest Mississippi Association of REALTORS®



"NWMAR records indicate a 32 percent reduction in sales from a year ago. There's a stronger inventory of homes with similar pricing and a slight increase in days on market. However, listings are selling for an average of 96.5 percent of the list price and sales are running very close to 2005 numbers which was our third highest year on record. Overall numbers are still stable in our area."

Sherry Fischer, President

North Central Mississippi Board of REALTORS®



"Over the past year, the market in North Central Mississippi has seen an overall increase in sales of five percent. Last year our average "sold per square foot" was \$100. This year it stands at \$103. In comparison, four years ago we had an average of \$85 per square foot. We believe our local market will continue to climb in the next few years, and the overall market will be fine despite some media misinterpretation of the facts."

Ken Austin, President

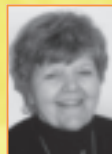
Gulf Coast Association of REALTORS®



"Business volume at the start of 2008 appears to be off by about 30 percent on the Gulf Coast as compared to similar dates in 2007 and reflects the same trend when compared to volume of four years ago. At the same time, the average sales price reflects a decrease of 14 percent from one year ago which puts it just above 2005 (pre-Katrina) levels. This is the first time in recent history that we have seen a significant drop in both volume and pricing year to year. A record large inventory of existing homes coupled with the high cost of insurance post-Katrina have created the downward pressure on selling prices throughout this market."

Joyce Asken, President

Southwest Board of REALTORS®



"After Katrina, home and land -- especially land -- prices escalated to a point that it was almost unbelievable. Now we are having the task of getting those 'Katrina Prices' out of the sellers' minds. I think we are having to work more diligently now than a year ago to make every potential buyer count."

Betty DuBard, President

Greenwood Board of REALTORS®



"According to MLS records, the year ending 2007 reflected the average residential sold price to be \$111,237 while at the end of 2006 the average residential sold price was \$108,759. In other words: good, steady appreciation."

Rebecca Palmer, President

Golden Triangle Association of REALTORS®



"The Golden Triangle market seems to be doing well, mostly due to growth of industry in the area. Our area has a slightly higher inventory of homes on the market versus the past couple of years. The market is being affected to some extent by the constant negative reports from the national media."

Beverly McMillin, President

Vicksburg Warren County Board of REALTORS®



"The real estate market in our area has changed since the problems with subprime mortgages became evident. We are seeing fewer first-time buyers purchasing homes. We are seeing potential buyers turned down for credit issues and debt-to-income ratios that were approved a year ago."

Ray Branscome, President

Grenada Board of REALTORS®



"Our market is about half the volume of a year ago. Our market was good through the first half of 2007 and started trailing off in September with January 2008 being our worst month in many years. The encouraging news is that we are starting to see more buyer activity. Cold calls are picking up, showings have increased, and pending sales have also increased in the last few weeks. Hopefully, we have turned the corner!"

Jerome Kittrell, President

Meridian Board of REALTORS®



"In Meridian, 2007 was a near record year and, so far, 2008 is tracking similar to 2007. Meridian is not a boom or bust market. It has always been stable or balanced, never tilted toward the buyers or sellers. 2006 was the record year to-date with 2007 just barely below that."

Adam Watkins, President

Hattiesburg Area Association of REALTORS®



"The standing inventory is higher than one year ago, but we are having the same amount of closings. Buyers are still engaging and are active in the market. We are seeing increased activity in the spring market and look forward to the next six months. The Hattiesburg economy has been able to remain stable because industry employment is stable."

Elaine Sones, President

Pearl River Board of REALTORS®



"Our business has been pretty much the same as one year ago and last year's was equal to 2004. Price ranges customers are looking in are lower and people aren't looking at recreational. Commercial is hot and affordable. Housing up to \$150,000 is hot now."

Leland Speakes, III, President

Cleveland Board of REALTORS®



"Our market is the same as one year ago. Cleveland is a stable market. Even in the last four years, things haven't varied. Cleveland holds it own. The only problem we are having is getting things financed. The time it takes to get a loan closed has increased from last year."

Lisa Hollister, President

Biloxi-Ocean Springs Association of REALTORS®



"There are more houses on the market than one year ago. The average sales price has dropped and the list-to-sales ratio has decreased while the "average days on the market" has increased. Between 2004 and mid-2006, the value of the market increased. List-to-sale ratio was up and days-on-the-market was down. Reasonable insurance is hard to find and sales have dropped because of it."

Truman Dawson, President

Four County Board of REALTORS®



"Our market has been doing well this year. We have not seen a steep downturn. Granted, we do have foreclosures, but that market has not been the front-runner that dictates our market. Four years ago appears to be the beginning of what some would call the "yes" market – "yes, you can get the loan." That was then. This is 2008, and we are moving forward."

Glenn Green, President

Natchez Board of REALTORS®



"The Natchez real estate market is strong and growing stronger. Natchez is in a much better position today than it was four years ago. REALTORS® are doing an increasing amount of business with out of town residential and commercial prospects looking to move to Natchez. The oil and gas business, agricultural products, tourism, metal fabrication, casino expansion, and alternative fuel production are all fueling growth."

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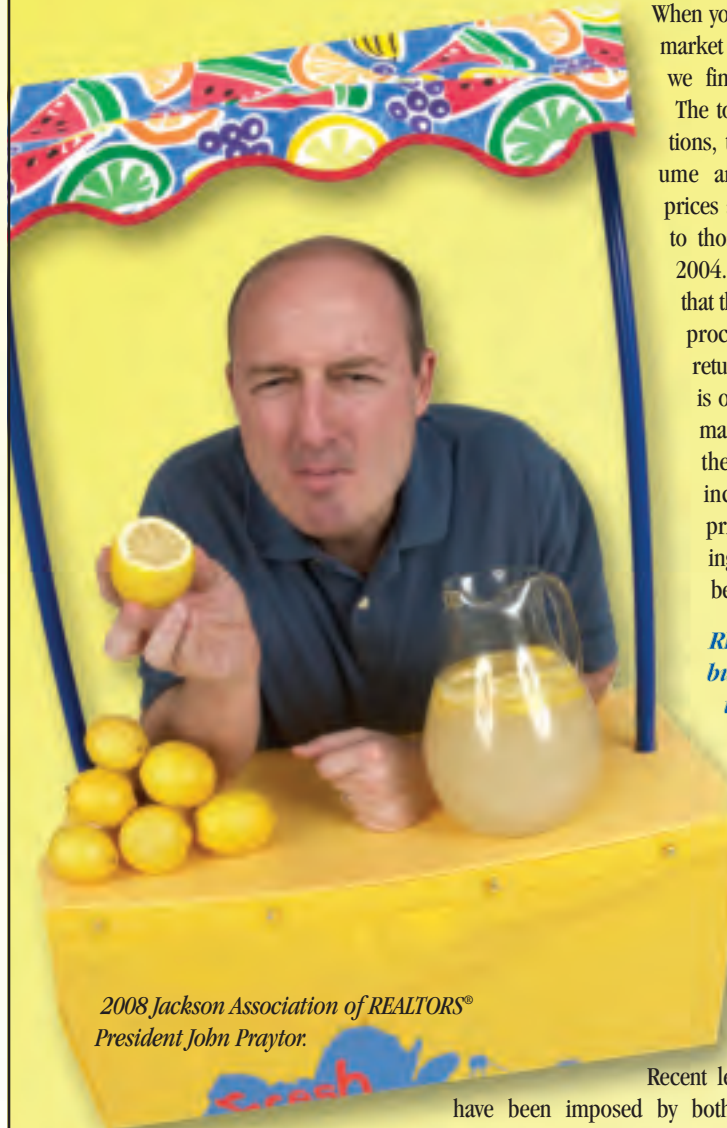
Making lemonade

A fresh-squeezed perspective

Becoming President of the 2100-member Jackson Association of REALTORS® got John Praytor's creative juices flowing. Praytor's zest for his chosen profession coupled with his fresh-squeezed perspective on the Jackson-area real estate markets has proved invaluable in what he describes as a challenging and rewarding leadership role. *Real Estate Leader* magazine sat down with Praytor, The Professional Appraisal Firm, to get his take on what's happening in his real estate market.

RL: How is the real estate market in your area compared to a year ago? Four years ago?

JP: According to the latest statistics from the Jackson MLS, REALTORS® are finalizing the same number of transactions now as they did in 2007. The primary difference between last year and 2008 is that a larger number of less expensive homes (under \$300,000) are being sold now. Only four percent of the homes selling through the Jackson MLS are in excess of \$300,000. However, during 2007, approximately eight percent of the homes that sold commanded \$300,000 or more. The total number of transactions is remaining fairly constant but the dollar value of the transactions, both in median price and total sales volume has decreased.



When you compare our current market to that of four years ago we find striking similarities.

The total number of transactions, total sales (dollar) volume and the average sales prices are practically identical to those of 2002, 2003 and 2004. I believe this is a sign that the local market is in the process of stabilizing and returning to equilibrium. It is obvious that the housing market could not sustain the unusually large increases in housing prices that occurred during 2005, 2006 and the beginning of 2007.

RL: Are you doing business differently than you did a year ago? Four years ago?

JP: The business being conducted this year is nearly the exact opposite of that which we were accustomed to doing during the past four years.

Recent lending restrictions that have been imposed by both Secondary Mortgage Market purchasers and by lending institutions dealing with conforming loans have forced REALTORS® to face challenges they have not seen since the 1990's and early 2000's. A prospective purchaser with a credit score (rating) between 600 and 680 is no longer viewed as one

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BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

REALTOR® GUEST COLUMNISTS SHARE THEIR STORIES

Gadgets, gizmos and a pencil

The difference technology makes for the progressive real estate professional

By Tommy Boykin

Visualize this: a 17 year old, clutching an Apple iPod nano in one hand, listening to her favorite tunes, and a Blackberry World edition phone in the other, surfing her favorite web site, multi-tasking at her personal PC, e-mailing six friends at one time, incessantly updating her personal web page, all with seemingly effortless control. That really seems over the top but, to the modern, technology craving generation of teens, that is the normal way to stay in touch with all your friends. Not to mention the fact that in five or six years, they'll be looking for a house to buy. Who's gonna effectively represent these technosensitive, wireless-savvy professionals who cut their teeth on a computer keyboard? The answer to that question directly correlates with our commitment to adapt to this ever changing professional environment.

The fact is that there is already a sea of buyers and sellers, right now, who don't want to fax any docs or talk on the phone at all. They would rather e-mail info and text message conversations just because its...well quicker, easier and takes much less time. Advances in technology, when used, make a huge difference in the efficiency and volume of productivity. The best news yet is that, with

all the gadgets and gizmos, simplicity of use is becoming more prevalent in the design process. To make it simple...things are getting as simple as using a pencil.

Here's a few ways that easy technology has made a difference in our firms productivity. For example: The Jackson Association of REALTORS® MLS system allows you to scan sellers disclosures into the system so they can be reviewed by your clients with just a click of the mouse. Also, our brokerage uses the MAR link to Zip Forms for creating totally digital files, so that a complete transaction can be done online. No copier, no mail, no ink and no gas. We are now starting to maintain digital files, for listings and sales, on the office hard drive in hopes that we'll soon be allowed to go completely digital.

It's coming whether we're ready or not. So lets all muster the courage to take the time to implement a few simple techno steps in our daily routine. You won't regret it ...not for a nano second. ■



Tommy Boykin is the managing broker of Realty Consultants in Pearl and can be reached at rcbroker@realtyconsultants.org



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continued from page 16

Marian Miller, President

Clarksdale Board of REALTORS®



"In the Clarksdale area, we are experiencing an increase in foreclosed properties. With a great number of foreclosures, low interest rates, and room for negotiation, investors and well-prepared buyers are thriving. A year ago, we began to feel the effect of a declining economy in our market. Now, we are actually seeing the effects."

Ronald Windham, Vice President

Laurel Board of REALTORS®



"Our market experienced a surge in demand following Hurricane Katrina, for both temporary housing as well as permanent homes for people migrating northward away from the coast. While the Katrina demand has subsided, we are continuing to experience higher demand for new homes than we did prior to Katrina."

Phield Parish, President

Greenville Area Board of REALTORS®



"Compared to a year ago, the real estate market in Greenville is somewhat slow, but there is a steady trickle of sales for some and more for others. Foreclosures are above average but not alarming. Today, I am working smarter rather than harder. I am working with prospects and not suspects and I keep up with the changing market."

Ed Neelly, President

Northeast Mississippi Board of REALTORS®



"Our agents are informing sellers that it is a 'buyers' market now, and they need to list like it. We have more foreclosures and people are making money on them, including sales to flippers and people looking for a bargain. Four years ago repo's weren't plentiful. Our sales haven't dropped any year, but the number of listings and new construction is rampant."

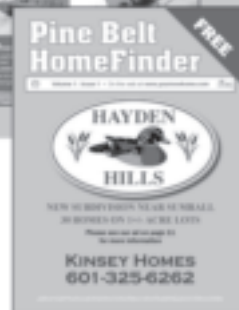
Ernie Clark, President

*Mississippi Commercial Association
of REALTORS®*



"The commercial market in Mississippi is healthy, though changes in lending practices, capitalization rates and risk factors are making the market, in the words of one broker, 'interesting and challenging.' New lifestyle centers and increased development in downtown areas in communities of all sizes are the most common projects mentioned by statewide brokers. Many brokers mention utilizing some of their time to expand their education and look for opportunities with "new eyes." Networking events are increasingly important, keeping commercial brokers in touch on a regular basis. Inquiries from the internet continue to rise, so many brokers are increasing their online presence." ■

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Raise the Roof Revue



The Mississippi Association of REALTORS® will host a talent competition where one talented act from each local board is invited to compete and help raise funds for MARPAC. Be a part of this fun night where *The Gong Show* meets *American Idol*, *Dances with the Stars*, *America's Got Talent*, *Last Comic Standing* and the *\$1.98 Beauty Show!* Performances will be limited to three minutes. A panel of MARPAC judges will rate performances based on overall talent, showmanship and creativity. But the audience will vote to pick the winners!

Each vote will be a \$25 contribution to MARPAC – and entitles you to one entry into a prize drawing for an iPhone (\$400 value).

Vote early and vote often!

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A REALTOR® Talent Competition

Show Off & Show MARPAC the Money!

Thursday, June 5, 2008

Mississippi REALTOR® Center - Jackson

5:30 p.m. Doors open (Grab some popcorn, a drink & a seat!)

5:45 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. Raise the Roof Revue: A REALTOR® Talent Competition

7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. BBQ & Live Entertainment (Outdoor event – weather permitting)

Registration fee:

\$15 per person (includes popcorn, dinner & one drink ticket); Cash bar available (Beer, wine & soft drinks only)

SPACE WILL BE LIMITED. YOU MUST REGISTER IN ADVANCE.

Registration Deadline: Noon - Monday, June 2

Register online at www.msrealtors.org. Questions? Call MAR at 601-932-5241

1st Place:

Contestant wins \$500; Local Board wins 4 FREE 2008 MAR Convention & EXPO registrations

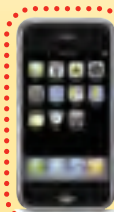
2nd Place:

Contestant wins \$250; Local Board wins 2 FREE 2008 MAR Convention & EXPO registrations

3rd Place:

Contestant wins \$100; Local Board wins 1 FREE 2008 MAR Convention & EXPO registration

PLUS...one lucky attendee will win an Apple iPhone valued at \$400. Each \$25 MARPAC contribution entitles you to one entry.



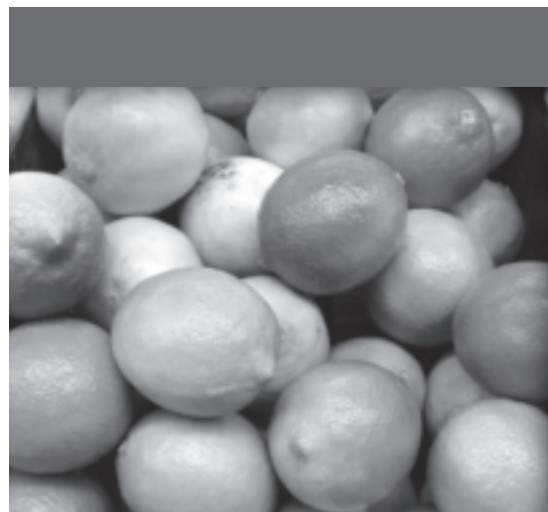
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Mississippi REALTORS® play a key role in economic development

By Gray Swoope

REALTORS® play a vital role in a community's growth and development – essentially being stewards for the communities they represent. Selling real estate is important, not only for the buyer and the REALTOR® marketing a property, but also for a community's future. The more involved REALTORS® become in the growth of their communities, the more likely they are to succeed and provide valuable insight into ways to better the areas they represent.

At the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA), the two main focuses of the agency's economic development efforts are jobs and communities; the two are inseparable. It is our job to sell the state to prospective business and industry. As a REALTOR®, you have developed your own marketing strategies to assist in your sales efforts, and you can also appreciate the importance of selling all that your community has to offer.

While MDA focuses on promoting the entire state of Mississippi, REALTORS® can be key players in promoting at a local level. One constant – no matter if in Mississippi or Hawaii – is the direct link between vibrant communities with a strong quality of life and job creation. If a community's quality of life is viewed as poor, the REALTOR's job is difficult. Few people or businesses are willing to purchase real estate in a depressed or poorly maintained area of town. If communities can't take pride in their hometowns, don't expect others to.

In the business of economic development, the term site selection is not really accurate. In fact, many site selection consultants will tell you it's actually a process of site elimination. In order for Mississippi to be competitive, the communities in the state must be able to find ways to enhance their competitive positions. This is a prime reason the involvement of REALTORS® is so important. Businesses will choose to locate in an area that offers a higher quality of life, or resources for living, for its operation, its employees and their families.

Curb appeal is imperative to the real estate market. If a downtown area of a community is dilapidated and unkempt, the people of the community will likely be perceived as having no pride, a poor work ethic and a "don't care" attitude. This impacts the opinions of company prospects. REALTORS® should take advantage of the opportunities to plan for growth and development and help MDA change minds and change lives regarding Mississippi's communities.

MAR President Gwen James is encouraging each of the 21 boards of REALTORS® around the state to participate in some type of smart growth/economic development project in 2008, and the National Association of REALTORS® is providing Smart Growth grants of up to \$5,000 to do just that.

Gwen is someone I have long admired. Her dedication to her profession as well as her commitment to getting REALTORS® involved with growth in their communities is unmatched throughout the state. She knows that in order to succeed in real estate, you must have a personal interest and take pride in your communities. That is why she was one of the founding members of the Hattiesburg Area Development Partnership – and what a great record they have had in economic growth!

I stand behind Gwen in urging the 21 Boards of REALTORS® in Mississippi to take full advantage of these grants and encourage REALTORS® to attend their board meetings and get involved to better their communities.

At MDA, we have the opportunity to change the perception people have of Mississippi. The work we do at MDA each day impacts people and communities all over the state, as our staff works diligently to help bring businesses and tourists to the state and revamp communities in need of assistance.

We often create reports for presentations that may contain bullet points of all

the projects MDA produced over the course of a year. These projects may represent a new business announcement to the state, such as Toyota, PACCAR, GE or Automatic Data Processing, or they may represent industry expansions, such as the recent expansion of the Chevron refinery in Pascagoula or the Raytheon Aerospace expansion in Forest.



Sometimes the bullets represent funding MDA provided to revitalize a community by installing a new water system or roadways or helping beautify a forlorn downtown area. What many people don't realize is that behind each one of those bullet points are people. Each new job created, each improvement made to our communities changes lives. Each business that chooses Mississippi as its home changes minds by changing the way that people view the state. When you view economic development in that way, it gives purpose and meaning in every aspect of your work.

As Mississippi's REALTORS®, you have an excellent opportunity to voice your concerns and offer ideas for development in your local areas. As Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has." Please join us in our mission to change minds and change lives. Continue to support your local economic development organization. Continue to develop vibrant communities, and continue your partnership between your association and local government agencies. Every step towards bettering our communities is a step in the right direction.

Learn more about the Mississippi Development Authority at www.mississippi.org.



Gray Swoope is the Executive Director of the Mississippi Development Authority. With over 20 years of economic development experience, including work on the local, regional and state level, Swoope leads the top agency for economic development in the state.

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5

Home buyers and sellers are hearing a lot of distracting information about the real estate market today. Reports that prices are still too high, there are too many houses on the market, loans are difficult to get and housing just isn't the investment it used to be all discourage consumers from entering the market. The good news is that Mississippi real estate markets remain a stable and responsible marketplace for home buyers and sellers.

IMPORTANT

TRUTHS ABOUT MISSISSIPPI'S REAL



1

All real estate is local. There is no such thing as a national real estate market.

If you pay attention to the news media, you might think that real estate markets are troubled everywhere. Not true! If you're considering buying or selling a home, pay attention to sales price trends, volume and inventory in your target market. Get the facts straight by talking to a local REALTOR®.



ESTATE MARKETS

A house is not a place to make a quick buck. It's a place to call home.

Despite the recent popularity of television shows like "Flip this House", real estate was never meant to be a quick-in, quick-out proposition.

Homeownership provides shelter, a place to raise a family, a greater sense of community and a better quality of life – not to mention savings accumulated through equity and tax benefits. No paper investment can claim all of these benefits.

Now is a good time to buy.

Housing inventory levels in many markets are high and interest rates are at historic lows. Contrary to perceptions, conventional mortgages are widely available at favorable interest rates for the bulk of homebuyers. Buyers with good credit and a realistic view of what they can afford should have no difficulty obtaining mortgage approvals.

REALTORS® add value to the real estate transaction – and your bottom line.

Studies show that sellers who use a REALTOR® get up to 26 percent more for their home. REALTORS® handle hundreds of real estate transactions over the course of their careers and can counsel and guide buyers and sellers through the process. They have the expertise and experience to help sellers protect their investments and help buyers build theirs.



2

Purchasing a home in Mississippi is a great long-term investment. Homeownership is still the number one way that Mississippi families build wealth.

Did you know that 60 percent of the average homeowner's wealth comes from their home's equity? The average renter's net worth is \$4,800, while the average homeowner's net worth is \$171,000. And the average return on a five percent down payment over 10 years is usually three to five times greater than stock market returns. Real estate has delivered the most consistent positive return over any investment over the past 40 years.



4





Feeling the subprime crunch: Loans for the less-than-perfect borrower

FOR ALL DEBTS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

35221465

WASHINGTON, D.C.

By Jeff Farnham

In the wake of the subprime crunch, REALTORS® wonder if options remain for potential buyers with less-than-perfect credit records or those who have been defined as subprime, potential borrowers with credit scores below 620. Is there still hope of financing that leads to a sale? The short answer is yes. However, it may take some work and time to accomplish the goal. REALTORS® are in a position to foster that accomplishment.

Over the past 14 months we have seen over 239 subprime lenders go out of business nationwide, thus, reducing the availability of credit to the subprime borrower. Yet, there are still options available such as FHA, USDA and to a certain degree your typical conventional loan programs. And yes, there are some subprime programs that are still available.

One of the smartest moves you can make in taking your client down the path to homeownership is to work with a knowledgeable, qualified mortgage professional. When choosing a mortgage professional, look for those who have earned national certifications such as the CRMS or the CMC. Both designations are earned through years of experience and education. Further, look for the Lending Integrity Seal of Approval.

Prepare for loan approval

1. Help clients assess the situation. - Find out exactly what is in their credit report. Are there late payments, open collections or judgments? Have they been late on their previous mortgage or rent payments? If late payments exist, have the buyer bring them current. If there are open collections or judgments, your client should contact the creditor and see if a settlement can be reached. Time is the best remedy for a poor credit file. Have potential buyers commit to maintain a current status on all bills and

put as much distance between the situations as they can.

2. Potential buyers should save as much money as possible. - This savings would not be for a down payment or closing costs, as there are still several 100 percent options available, but to show stability in financial management. One of the most important factors in underwriting is the amount of cash or reserves the borrower has. Reserves can be defined as the amount of liquid assets as a multiple of the PITI (principal, interest, taxes and insurance) the borrower has on hand after the loan closes. For example if the new PITI is going to be \$500 per month. Does the borrower have \$0, \$500, \$1,500, or \$10,000? At a minimum the borrower should have at least three months reserves on hand. Ideally, six months or more is desired. At times, reserves can be the difference between loan approval and denial for the subprime borrower.

3. Get them pre-qualified. - Make sure that your potential homeowner is not trying to buy too much house. Get them pre-qualified before you ever start showing them houses. In today's market it is imperative that you stay within the guidelines of the housing ratio and the debt-to-income ratio as prescribed by the loan program they are seeking approval. Generically speaking, you want to keep the PITI to around 29-30 percent of the total gross income and the total debt-to-income ratio around 43 percent. Exceptions exist; so it is imperative to pre-approve potential buyers rather than just pre-qualify them prior to writing a contract. The difference between pre-approval and pre-qualification is verification of the information given. Be patient.

With a sub-prime borrower it may take some time to work through all the kinks to get them to approval.

Best advice: Act now

If a past client is facing an ARM about to adjust or a foreclosure, the best advice you can give them is to contact their mortgage professional now to see what options are available to them. Seek help immediately. Be careful not to crucify the product that made them a homeowner in the first place. ARMs served a purpose in the previous market and will continue to serve certain segments of the market in the future. Many options exist to refinance the ARM into a fixed rate product or possibly convert the existing note to a fixed rate. The key in an adjusting ARM or foreclosure is to seek advice quickly. Typically, people put off the task until it is too late.

Take the first step

As a REALTOR®, you are aware of which past clients financed with a subprime loan. As a courtesy, contact them and encourage them to make their payments on time. Talk with them and see how they are doing with mortgage payments. If they are having trouble, advise them to start taking the necessary steps now before it is too late.

If we are preemptive, we will save many families from foreclosure and move them from a subprime borrower to a prime borrower with a credit score above 620. ■



Jeff Farnham is the 2008 President of the Mississippi Association of Mortgage Brokers and can be reached at jfarnham@jts-co.com.

What are REALTORS® doing to address mortgage-related challenges?

The National Association of REALTORS® is working hard at the federal level to address credit challenges through loan/mortgage-related reform. NAR's advocacy agenda for 2008 includes:

- **Freddie Mac/Fannie Mae Reform** - The Association will work closely with the United States Senate when the Senate considers H.R. 1427, a measure to strengthen the regulatory oversight of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.
- **GSE Reform** - NAR will also advocate an

increase in the GSE conforming loan limit to better serve homebuyers in all regions of the country.

- **FHA Reform** - NAR will work closely with the House-Senate conference committee on FHA reform to ensure that FHA loans are once again a viable product in all mortgage markets nationwide. NAR issued a recent REALTOR® call for action urging Congress to pass an FHA Reform Bill that includes realistic and permanent increases in the loan limits. The increased loan limits for FHA that were included in the Economic Stimulus package are set to expire at the end of the year. Early evidence shows that the increased FHA loan

limits are providing a much needed infusion of stability, liquidity and security into the market. If Congress lets the new limits expire, the fragile housing market will once again be thrust into a period of turmoil.

- **Appraisal/Mortgage Reform** - NAR will participate in the Senate's upcoming debate of legislation to reform appraisal, mortgage and anti-predatory lending practices and work to ensure that persons engaged in real estate brokerage and sales activities only are exempt from any proposed mortgage professional registration requirements.

continued from page 17

who can receive an "automatic" loan approval. Many of those persons are now resorting to financing from loans insured by the FHA and/or receiving Rural Housing Loans.

More than one-third of the active REALTORS® have been licensed during the past four years, and they are not as familiar with the new financing guidelines associated with loan programs such as FHA and Rural Housing because non-conforming loans have dominated the market for purchasers with credit scores under 680. The current climate is such that conforming loan programs (such as FHA and Rural Housing) are beginning to dominate the lending environment. Those programs require significantly more documentation for verifications of employment and income, in-depth analysis of credit history, higher loan to value ratios, verifiable down payment amounts and real estate appraisals that support the sales prices.

RL: What changes, if any, do you see in the real estate business in the next few years?

JP: I believe that in the next few years we will not recognize the real estate industry as it exists today. We are currently in the midst of major changes impacting real estate mortgage lenders. We are experiencing nationwide consolidations in the real estate brokerage business, and the internet is presenting challenges that we never expected.

RL: Are negative national media reports affecting consumer perceptions in your real estate market?

JP: I personally believe that the perception of the local real estate market has been negatively impacted by both national and local media reports that tend to emphasize bad news about the housing market and the economy. This has helped create a mindset with the prospective purchaser that our market is depressed when, in fact, that is not the true picture.

Many of our members are approached on a daily basis by private individuals seeking to purchase a home at prices much lower than the asking price and state that their offer is low because they have heard from the media that the "housing bubble" has burst and home prices are plummeting. Builders with new construction in our market area have reported receiving offers which are as much as \$50,000 less than the asking price based on the would-be purchaser's assumption that the local real estate market is terrible.

While the local market is certainly being impacted by the problems with the national economy, the majority of homes in our area have not experienced a decline in their market values as homes have in other parts of the country. The typical seller in our housing market is not ready to sell their home for a "fire sale" value. Their approach has been to either continue with the marketing of the property or suspend the marketing until a time in the future when the public perception changes.

RL: What have you done as JAR President to address market concerns and boost consumer confidence?

During 2007, the JAR Board of Directors implemented a media campaign to combat the impact of negative reports in the media and to present a more meaningful snapshot of the Jackson market. The specifics of this year-long campaign were finalized at the beginning of 2008 and the television and radio advertisements began March 1. Following the initial two months, new television and radio advertisements will be developed and will be supplemented with newspaper advertising, flyers and mail-outs for the remainder of 2008. The board office has received numerous calls from both REALTOR® members and lending institutions expressing their appreciation of our efforts to expose the general public to the truths concerning our local housing market. The focus of our campaign is to educate the buying public on what is really happening in the Jackson market.

As a result of our advertising campaign, the officers and directors have received calls from newspapers, magazines, civic groups, banks and mortgage companies to answer questions about the Jackson market or schedule speaking engagements. As one of the primary spokespersons for JAR, my charge is to present the message of our Association and our REALTOR® members in all public forums and attempt to inform the buying public about our market. The different groups I have spoken to have been very appreciative and excited about the market data available from the Jackson MLS. In fact, most are happy to hear a positive slant on our market instead of the usual negative information.

RL: What advice would you give to REALTORS® who may not have experienced the full effects of a cyclical real estate market?

JP: When I moved to Jackson and opened my business in December of 1993, rates were 10.5 percent and sales were slow. However, I still was able to build my business over years and form a working relationship with clients. I believe that REALTORS® are strong, intuitive, and can face adversity. The recent changes in our market are good ones that will insure supply/demand and housing prices are stable and that REALTORS® will have a business to work in for the future.

RL: Why did you step up to become a Golden R \$5,000 contributor to MARPAC? Is there a connection between PAC giving and business success?

JP: I decided to become a Golden R \$5,000 contributor to MARPAC to give something back to our association, no matter how small, for the wonderful opportunities this organization and the real estate business have afforded me. Any contribution that one of our members makes to MARPAC helps to insure the future of the real estate business. It assists our state and national leadership in presenting their property initiatives, and a contribution provides a mechanism by which we REALTORS® can truly become a part of a business fabric which believes in the sanctity of the rights of property owners.

RL: Are you enjoying your term as JAR President? What advice would you give to other REALTORS® considering association leadership roles?

JP: I am honored to serve as JAR President for 2008. In the beginning, I was unsure how I would handle the leadership role and speak for our membership but, with few exceptions, I have no regrets. The position as President and all of the other leadership roles in JAR require a considerable amount of time, but it provides an individual with business opportunities that might never have been possible. I would encourage anyone that is contemplating a leadership role to "step up to the plate." The benefits realized in the day-to-day business world will far outweigh your time commitments, and you will establish many life-long friendships.

RL: Is it hard working in a business regulated by your father? (Editor's Note: Praytor's father, Robert Praytor, is Administrator of the Mississippi Real Estate Commission).

JP: The real estate profession is all that I have ever known, and I really would not be satisfied in any other business venture. While both of my parents were instrumental in my choosing the real estate industry as a profession, neither would have been disappointed had I pursued another endeavor in my adult life. My father's position as Administrator of the Mississippi Real Estate Commission is not an envious one. During his tenure at the MREC, he has expected more from me than from anyone else, but I know that it is for the good of my career. He has always taught me to be fair and honest and everything else will take care of itself. By being in the public eye as President of JAR, I am "under the microscope" a lot more because of his administrative position. However, in the long run, I think it has made me a better person, REALTOR and appraiser because my goal is to produce the very best work product possible and make him proud.

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ASSOCIATION NEWS

Sterling R reception honors top PAC contributors



JAR President John Praytor, Jackson; MAR Central District Vice President Dee Denton, Jackson; MAR President Gwen James, Hattiesburg; and MAR First Vice President Tony Jones mingle during the reception at Elixir.

Senator Merle Flowers (left), Southaven, and Senator Gary Jackson (right), Kilmichael, join Ernie Clark, Brookhaven and MAR Governmental Affairs Director Derek Easley for the festivities.



Bob and Naomi Ridgway, Jackson; Mary Clark, Brookhaven, Senator Terry Burton, Newton; MAR President-Elect Lynette Magee-Praytor, Ridgeland; and Ernie Clark (back row), Brookhaven, enjoy the reception.

REALTORS® attend Governor's Health Insurance Summit



MAR First Vice President Tony Jones with Governor Haley Barbour at the Health Insurance Summit.

REALTORS® From across Mississippi met with other stakeholders at Gov. Haley Barbour's Health Insurance Summit on Feb. 5 in Jackson.

REALTORS® "Get on the Bus" to cut drop-out rates

REALTORS® joined the Mississippi Economic Council and the Department of Education in a program to decrease Mississippi's high school dropout rate by attending the "Destination Graduation Adult Summit," Feb. 28. At the summit REALTORS®, took a seat at the table alongside other state and community leaders to work together to improve Mississippi schools. Fewer dropouts and better schools equal better business for Mississippi REALTORS®.

NWMAR launches local leadership program

The Northwest Mississippi Association of REALTORS® launched its first leadership development program with 10 REALTORS® participating in the Challenge Ropes Course. The year-long program designed to cultivate association leaders will become an annual event for the board. Members of the 2008 class include Patricia Barnes, Stephanie Crosslin, Kimberly Hollis, Audrey Jacobi, Alan McClurg, Cheryl McCormick, James McIngvale, Vicky Reel, Kimberly Starnes and Marsha Taylor. ■

HEADLINERS

NAR Directors named



Kammer



Lane



Short

Picayune REALTOR® Bruce Kammer, Coldwell Banker Country Properties, has been named as an NAR Director representing Mississippi. Kammer's three-year term began in late 2007. Jackson REALTOR® Nancy Lane, Nancy Lane Commercial Realty, and Tupelo REALTOR® Ellen Short, TRI, will be serving three-year terms as NAR Directors beginning in 2009. Short is currently serving as an NAR Director and was re-elected to another term.

Miller earns RCE designation



Miller

Meridian Board of REALTORS® Association Executive Laura Miller has earned the REALTOR® association Certified Executive (RCE) designation from NAR. The RCE designation exemplifies goal-oriented AEs with drive, experience and commitment to professional growth. Candidates earn the designation by accumulating points through an experience and education based application form and a comprehensive written exam.

REALTORS® among Top 40 Under 40



Shoemaker



Williams

Ridgeland REALTOR® Scott Shoemaker, Shoemaker Homes, and Meridian REALTOR® Boyd Williams, Boyd Williams Real Estate Company, were named to the *Mississippi Business Journal* Top 40 Under 40 for 2008. The Top 40 Under 40 program seeks to identify and recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to Mississippi's overall economic progress, often working at their own local levels. ■

MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

YOUR NECK OF THE WOODS

Local Board & AE Forum

In Mississippi, there are 21 local boards serving REALTORS® in every corner of the state. Here's what's going on in their communities:

Biloxi-Ocean Springs

With Lisa Hollister, Coldwell Banker Alfonso, Ocean Springs, as our 2008 President leading the way, our year is sure to be full of success. We launched into 2008 with a great start. We held our annual REALTOR® awards banquet at the Imperial Palace Casino in Biloxi. Congressman Gene Taylor was the guest speaker, and over 100 successful and deserving agents received awards for 2007.

Clarksdale

No information provided.

Cleveland

No information provided.

Four County

No information provided.

Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle Association of REALTORS® recently hosted the MAR Course "Standard Forms for Dummies" to allow members to learn about the 2008 MAR Standard Forms. Our REALTOR® Community Service Committee has chosen "REALTORS® for Kids" as our major project this year. We will provide uniforms, clothing and other needed items for underprivileged children in grades K-8 for the 2008-09 school year. We provided maps to the area Red Cross to aid emergency workers following recent tornadoes and also at our February luncheon collected funds for the American Red Cross that will benefit recent tornado and fire victims.

Greenville

No information provided.

Greenwood

No information provided.

Grenada

The Grenada Board of REALTORS® will partner with the Grenada School District, the Grenada County Chamber of Commerce and others presenting "Destination Graduation" a platform to decrease the drop out rate and keep our children in school. We believe to accomplish healthy community development, smart growth, and quality of life our children are the most important source of future growth. We held our first organization meeting on April 7.

Gulf Coast

Twelve outstanding future leaders of our association have been selected as participants in our 2008 Coast REALTORS® Leadership Program. The first session was held in March followed by a retreat in April at Longleaf Plantation. Our 2007 "Top Producers" were recognized at our annual banquet held at the IP Casino Resort. We anxiously anticipate our Affiliate Committee's annual "Fun in Our Backyard" BBQ on April 17. We are conducting a strategic local media blitz to enlighten homeowners and homebuyers why now is a great time to buy or sell. Our Community Development Committee is in full

swing planning our 6th Annual Charity Golf Tournament to be held October 10 at Sunkist Golf Course. We're very busy and we're having a great time!

Hattiesburg

The Hattiesburg Area Association of REALTORS® has been busy, thanks to the energy of our President Adam Watkins. The year began with a Leadership Team Luncheon for chairs and vice chairs of committees of our board. We are meeting quarterly with the local Home Builders' Association Board of Directors. We rented a charter bus for REALTOR® Day at the Capitol where Hattiesburg had its largest turnout ever. We sponsored a booth at the Home and Products Show and held a Parade of Homes for two weekends featuring over 300 homes.

Jackson

Our RPAC Committee is busily planning a fundraising event scheduled for May 9, "Denim and Diamonds," with ticket holders entered into a drawing for a diamond valued at \$1,500. In an effort to arm members with tools they need to communicate to buyers that now is a great time to buy, national real estate trainer, Karel Murray from Waterloo, Iowa, will present a CE course in June "Get Em Off the Fence: Strategic Perspectives in Persuasive Selling." To counter the negative media and build consumer confidence, JAR is working with two local ad agencies to create radio, print and TV advertising to promote the Jackson area's stable market. JAR has also formed a strategic partnership with the Home Builders Association of Jackson to promote a better understanding among members of how each group can benefit the other.

Laurel

Laurel Board of REALTORS® would like to welcome McKenzie Wood with Woodland Realty and Carolyn Wood with Exit Realty Extreme Team. Allyson Knotts, EDA director, gave a very positive report to the board about great things happening in Laurel-Jones County. Our REALTORS® are very active in community projects and were inspired to help Laurel-Jones County grow. So far, 2008 sales and listings are up from 2007.

Meridian

CE sessions for 2008 have been confirmed. Thanks for attending the HUD session and Terminator's free session in April. Our Broker Breakfast is scheduled for April 15th, and our MLS vendor training on April 18th. We are keeping our new "conference room" occupied on a regular basis.

Natchez

No information provided.

North Central

The North Central Mississippi Board is enjoying a good start to 2008 led by our new president, Sherry Fischer, Fischer Properties in Water Valley. The board continues to grow, and our real estate market

is sound. Spring not only brings out the new growth, but also the new prospective buyers and sellers. We look forward to a strong remainder of 2008.

Northeast

Tupelo's planning department held a public forum on Tupelo's comprehensive plan, which provides a "blueprint" for the city's future at the BancorpSouth Arena and invited REALTORS® to participate. The plan outlined the goals and strategies for the community on new development, transportation, economic development, public facilities, historic preservation and other key community issues. The plan will serve as a guide for future decisions of Tupelo and is being built by many people.

Northwest

The Northwest Mississippi Association of REALTORS® completed a conversion to the new SUPRA ActiveKey in early February. This lockbox key provides better security for homeowners by updating user access via cell phone networks, rather than having to cradle the keys at night. The association is also excited about its first local Leadership Class that attended REALTOR® Day at the Capitol in Jackson. The class meets monthly to develop their leadership skills and knowledge.

Pearl River

Congratulations to one of our local brokers, Mark Formby, Formby Realty, Picayune. Mark was one of the legislators recently honored as MAR's 2007 Legislator of the Year for his work in support of REALTOR® and property rights issues during the past year's legislative session.

Southwest

No information provided.

Vicksburg-Warren County

The Vicksburg-Warren County Board of REALTORS®' Public Relations Committee is working on a long term recycling plan that includes community education and a home and business curbside recycling service. We are planning on applying for the NAR smart growth grant to help with our efforts.

Mississippi Commercial Association of REALTORS®

The Mississippi Commercial Association of REALTORS® will be hosting national commercial educator Duke Kuehn on June 10th at the MS REALTOR® Center in Jackson. Dr. Kuehn, a strategic thinking consultant, will discuss building effective client relationships, positioning yourself as a trusted advisor in your market, and the benefits of forming strategic alliances with fellow brokers. Additional details and registration information is available at www.mcar.ms.