Thermopolis Hot Springs Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW VOLUME 112, No. 6, February 10, 2011 THERMOPOLIS, WY 82443 USPS 627-300

Interest rates down, home sales up in Thermop area

Numbers in 2010 up 13 percent from 2009

by Joe Sova

Many people believe winter is not a good time to purchase a home, but that might not be the case in many areas that experience cold weather this time of year.

With interest rates dipping to well under 5 percent nationwide, it appears we're in a "buyer's market" that could also benefit home sellers.

The Thermopolis, Wyo., Real Estate Year End Review indicates units sold in 2010 outperformed 2009 by 13 percent and are expected to continue growing in 2011. Low mortgage rates and aggressive and creative marketing is expected to boost the sales in the spring selling season.

The year-end review indicated the average price of homes sold stayed basically the same with the average price in 2009 being \$133,500 and the average in 2010 at \$131,385. There have been very few bank-owned homes in Hot Springs County.

As of late last week, there were 64 homes on the market in the county – ranging in price from \$25,000 to \$595,000. The 22 commercial properties listed ranged in asking price of \$63,500 to \$292,000.

"Units are definitely up. There is more happening as far as commercial property is concerned," said RE/MAX All-Star Realtors broker/co-owner Jody Coleman. "It's an aggressive and creative market. We're working with what people have."

Other realtors in the county include Properties

West, Roundtop Real Estate, Matt Brown Real Estate and Silver Spur Realty.

RE/MAX All-Star Realtors had 57 units listed from Jan. 1, 2010 to Dec. 31, 2010 in Hot Springs County, according to MLS (Multiple Listing Service). Properties West was next with 52 and Roundtop Real Estate had 20, followed by Silver Spur Realty, Hake Realty and Home Source Realty. The volume was just more than \$17.6 million for 135 listings, an average of about \$130,000.

In many areas, especially outside Hot Springs County, agents are "behind the 8-ball competing with bank-owned properties," Coleman said of repossessions.

For decades, Lander had been known as a community with higher priced properties than sur $rounding\,areas, but\,Coleman\,said\,the\,agents\,there$ are getting "hungry enough" and aggressive in finding buyers. "What is the property worth and what does the seller have to do" is a lot of the mindset there during the economic downturn.

'Sellers are in a price war and beauty war and marketing war, and the seller has to win on all three accounts," Coleman said.

Good time to buy

It's an attractive time to buy with interest rates as much as 2 percentage points lower than just a couple of years ago. Wyoming Community Development Association has offered first-time buyers and people who have not owned a home for at least three years – an interest rate of as low as

See Housing on page 11

RWE celebrates 100th day



Seth Weyer, a kindergartner at Ralph Witters Elementary, happily celebrates the 100th day of school on Feb. 3. Each of the schools had different activities to celebrate the milestone. --Cindy Glasson photo

Commissioners discuss survey issues, fire numbering system

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners held a conference call regarding land survey issues near the fairgrounds, discussed the county fire-numbering system and talked about some budgeting issues during their Feb. 1 meeting.

At the request of the Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources Division, a review was conducted on the land survey done in 2001 to ensure the leases for the armory building and the fairgrounds were marked appropriately.

According to surveyor Rick Hudson, the state has apparently een using boundary descriptions which date back to 1957, rather than a revised version, creating some question as to which land is actually being leased by whom, the joint powers board or the fair board.

The newest survey by Hudson, including a site visit in early

January, shows 25.7 acres that include everything in the general area with the exception of the county's weed and pest, the original armory tract, the former WYDOT building and county road and bridge.

Katherine Palmer with Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources concessionaires division said her office was not prepared for the conference call and requested all the information from Hudson be sent to her office for further review.

Palmer said right now the state wants to make sure money is not being "double dipped" from the leases.

All the information the state needs along with Hudson's latest surveys will be hand delivered next week by commissioner Mike

Road and bridge supervisor Ray Shaffer told the commissioners they are still trying to work out all the details with WYDOT regarding a new fire numbering system in the county. Shaffer said there are other counties having issues with the

new system and each of those counties does it differently, creating confusion. WYDOT has suggested numbering based on a mileage system.

In driving around the county, Shaffer said he has found several discrepancies in the current numbering system.

Changing the numbers as WYDOT suggests could change a lot of addresses in the county, something the commissioners are sure the public would resist.

"If we don't make it right at some point," Shaffer said, "it could be a bad thing for fire or emergency services."

The commissioners suggested Shaffer continue to work with WYDOT to come to some kind of agreement, but also said a public

hearing on the issue might be needed down the road.

Canyon crash claims life of Colorado man

by J.D. Stetson

Wyoming Highway Patrol troopers have identified Frank M. King, 39, of Rifle, Colo., as the man who died in a fatal crash Friday morning in Wind River Canvon near Bovsen Reservoir Dam.

Hot Springs County firefighters, Highway Patrol troopers, EMTs and Fremont County authorities responded to the crash at 9 a.m. Friday after receiving a call from local fishermen of a vehicle on fire about 300 yards from the dam.

When authorities arrived, they saw the vehicle, a 2008 Ford pickup, fully engulfed in flame at the bottom of the canyon near the BNSF Railway.

The ambulance and fire trucks were able to get to the wreck by using a Boysen State Park road and crossing the railroad tracks.

According to a Highway Patrol release, King was driving his vehicle south on U.S. Highway 20 and drove straight as he entered a curve near the dam and went off the right side of the road. The vehicle went off a 74-foot embankment and traveled 220 feet, then hit a large boulder

Troopers do not know why King went off the highway and there were no marks to indicate he had attempted to brake before leaving the roadway.

Fremont County Coroner Edward R. McAuslan said identifying people who perish in similar incidents is difficult.

"In this case, we were able to determine the vehicle was a company truck and there was only one employee in this area for that company," McAuslan said.

Authorities also found a receipt from a

store in Basin dated Friday morning. Authorities confirmed King was the person who made the purchase when the store employee identified him.

King also had rented a room in Thermopolis, which put him in the area. Before



Hot Springs County Firefighters inspect the wreckage of a 2008 Ford pickup after it went off a 70-foot embankment and caught fire Friday near the Boysen Reservoir Dam in the Wind River Canyon. Authorities do not know why the driver, Frank M. King, went off the road. — J.D. Stetson photo

the crash, King had talked on the phone to a business in Riverton and had said he was going there to pick up material for a job site, McAuslan said.

McAuslan discussed the information from the investigation with King's wife, who acknowledged the information was correct.

She added her husband called her on a regular basis and she had not heard from him since the crash.

McAuslan added King previously lived in Evanston before moving to Colorado where his family lives.

Legislature update

Education bills abound in House

by Joe Sova

Bills pertaining to education have been taking considerable time in State House and Senate committees during the 61st Wyoming Legislature in Cheyenne, and some of the legislation is not making it to the respective house floor.

Monday was the last day for bills to be heard by the Committee of the Whole in the house of origin. Tuesday was the final day for second reading on bills where they originated, and Wednesday was the last day for third reading.

Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-HD28) said Senate File 110, reorganization of the School Facilities Commission, would definitely be moving forward. It was on General File in the House this week.

"The original (law) had a lot of autonomy, it answered to nobody," Quarberg said Tuesday. "The commission will answer to the governor.

"They've (the commission) had a tough go in terms of their ability to be accountable and prioritize projects."

She said the Senate was finishing up the teacher tenure bill on third reading and it was expected to move to the House for debate. The Senate Education Committee has begun work on the recalibration bill, which

See Quarberg on page 11

Tenure bill scrutinized by Senate

by Karla Pomeroy As of Monday morning the Wyoming Senate had lain back second reading of Senate File 52 twice. The bill would remove tenure or continuing contract status for teachers.

Sen. Gerald Geis (R-SD20, Worland) said, "I think (the leadership) is waiting to see what happens with SF146. If it passes Committee of the Whole then I doubt if SF52 will pass. But, it's never over 'til it's over,"

Senate File 146 – Teacher Accountability Act would require school district teacher performance evaluations to be based in part upon student achievement; direct the state board of education to establish performance criteria

based upon educational accountability measures to be established by law; establishes performance as a basis for contract determinations; modifies grounds for teacher suspension dismissal and termination.

Big Horn County School Dist. No. 4 Supt. Mary Fisher said they are developing an evaluation plan based on the McRel model of evaluation, which incorporates student achievement based on chosen assessments. Work on the evaluations began last March and includes parental and staff involvement.

SF146, which Geis strongly favors, was up on General File

See Geis on page 11

Quarberg

from page 1

Quarberg said had substantial changes and much of the content has been stripped from it.

"I hope they're not too extensive" she said of

"I hope they're not too extensive," she said of the changes. "It's our funding model."

 $HB166,\ pertaining$ to teacher evaluations, did not come out of committee.

"There are so many bills on teacher evaluation and things like that. They just took one of them and worked in many ideas," Quarberg said.

Quarberg co-sponsored HB212, teacher tenure.

Quarberg co-sponsored HB212, teacher tenure, which failed to come out of committee and she's not seen the similar bill that originated in the Senate. She expressed her confidence in school administrators and board trustees and believes they truly care about students in their district. Quarberg said they would not allow their personal feelings to enter into terminating a teacher.

"Teachers should work on their own merits," he said.

Quarberg speculated the teacher tenure bill will not make it out of the Senate on third reading Wednesday.

Debate on abortion bill

HB251 was passed by the House Committee of the Whole on Monday by standing vote. The bill pertains to a physician or qualified person informing a pregnant woman that she has a right to view an active ultrasound of the unborn child.

Quarberg calls it a "woman's right to know." She said there was no debate on the bill until

second reading Tuesday.

HB244, titled unemployment insurance amendments, failed the Committee of the Whole; there were 25 aye votes and 34 representatives voted nay. It would have modified the state's unemployment provisions to make the Wyoming unemployment system eligible for additional funds and unemployed Wyoming workers eligible for additional benefits.

Quarberg voted against the legislation.

"There are so many strings attached to ARRA funding," she said. "It wouldn't allow us to go in and tailor that statute."

She said once federal funding ended, the state would have to foot the bill on the additional benefits. It's a similar situation with some other federal funding.

"It had red flags all over it. We, as a state, end up picking up the tab to continue the program," Quarberg said. "It's in our state's best interests that we limit our involvement with federal programs. We can't maintain the level of funding. We want to do what we can to keep our economy healthy. We want to keep Wyoming people working year round."

Two House bills co-sponsored by Quarberg, no duty to retreat and castle doctrine, were assigned to the Judiciary Committee and she believes both will get a hearing. Concealed carry, another Quarberg bill, was up for a hearing Wednesday morning.

BUYERS

REAL

P

NUMBER

Geis

Monday, the final day for Senate File bills to pass Committee of the Whole this session.

The Senate did approve the tenure bill on second reading Monday and SF146 was approved on Committee of the Whole Monday.

Also on tap Monday under deadline was SF70 – Education Accountability, which would establish a statewide education accountability system and establish system components and student performance measures for the system.

The bill was approved by Committee of the Whole Monday and includes an allocation of \$265,000.

Bills fail

One bill failed initial third reading, but after reconsideration and an amendment, was approved on third reading Monday. The bill, Senate File 132 – Strangulation of a Household Member, states that a person is guilty of "strangulation of a household member if he intentionally and knowingly or recklessly causes or attempts to cause bodily injury to a household member by impeding the normal breathing or circulation of blood ..." If found guilty of the felony, a defendant can face up to not more than five years. The bill originally had the penalty at not more than 10 years until an amendment was approved Monday.

The Senate defeated a file that would have established a pilot program for teacher evalu-

ation that would include videotaping of one unannounced class. Geis said teachers and administrators expressed concerns about the videotaping breaking the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only way to not violate FERPA would be to videotape the classrooms every day, he said.

– from page 1

The bill failed on Committee of the Whole 6-23-1 with Geis voting in favor.

Geis said the Senate was focused on getting Senate bills passed with Wednesday the final day for third readings in the house of origin. The focus will turn to House bills.

The Ag Committee he chairs has passed a number of House bills out already including HB74 – Validity of Marriage and HB15 –Weed and Pest Council. The Weed and Pest bill allows Weed and Pest boards to buy and sell property as needed to carry out district programs.

It also increases the penalty for those violating the Weed and Pest Act to a \$750 fine and/or six months in jail for a first offense and a fine of \$1,500 or one year in jail for subsequent offenses.

Geis said while there has not been many, if any, prosecutions for violating the Weed and Pest Act, the penalty does give boards more leverage in seeking compliance with the act and thus more tools to control noxious weeds.

The Senate and House are slated to begin work on the supplemental budget Monday, Feb. 14.

NUMBER OF BUYERS

Housing

4 1/2 percent. Low down payment loans are more common than in the recent past as well.

Interest rates will go back up, according to Coleman.

Home affordability revolves a large part on the interest rate. For example, on a home with a sale price of \$150,000, with 5 percent (\$7,500) down, the monthly payments (principal and interest) would be \$680.32 on a loan with a 4 percent interest rate. The payment would be about \$84 higher, or \$764.97, with a 5 percent rate.

Going hand-in-hand with the interest rate as well is the ability to qualify for a home loan. As an example, if you qualify for a \$100,000 on a 4 percent loan, you would only qualify for an \$88,000 home with a rate of 5 percent (\$76,000 with a 6 percent rate).

With every 1 percent increase in the interest rate, you lose 10 percent in your purchase power.

Buyer numbers rebounding

There were 66 "real buyers" of homes in Thermopolis and the surrounding area in 2008, but that plummeted to 48 in 2009—a drop of 27 percent. The number rebounded to 54 for 2010, a 13 percent increase.

———— from page 1

Earl Knighten, broker for Silver Spur Realty, said Monday he's turned down a number of listings because many sellers want their property listed too high. "They can't get financing for them," he said of buyers.

Knighten believes the economic downturn is having an effect on home sales in the county.

"In the overall picture, before we see much of a turnaround it's going to be two to five years," he said.

Real buyer numbers increased from 70 to 75 in Worland and the surrounding area, but dropped by 6 percent in the Riverton, Shoshoni, Pavillion, Kinnear and surrounding areas. Real buyers rose by 23 percent in the Lander, Hudson and surrounding areas.

In what price range are most homes in Hot Springs County selling? Of 54 sales in 2010, there were 17 homes in the \$150,000-\$199,999 range. There were 12 in the \$100,000-\$149,999 category, and 11 in the \$50,000-\$99,999 range. Only one home sold in the \$300,000 range (\$379,000 selling price) and none at \$500,000 or higher.

In comparison, there were 48 sales in 2009 – six of them going for \$200,000 or more, the same number as in 2010.

THERMOPOLIS & SURROUNDING AREAS # of 8 12 11 4 0 14.8% | 20.4% | 22.2% | 31.5% 1.9% 7.4% 1.9% AVG. 375 120 206 223 341 150 379 27 Average Price of Homes 24 \$131,385 21 18 15 12 9 6 3 OVER Less than \$50,000 to \$100,000 to \$150,000 to \$200,000 to \$250,000 to \$300,000 to

REAL BUYERS IN 2010

PRICE RANGES

\$199,999

\$149,999

\$99,999

\$49,999

\$249,999 \$299,999 \$499,999 \$500,000

*Data is derived from Multiple Listing Services statistics but agent assumes responsibility for the information correctness.