

FORT MYERS FLORIDA WEEKLY™

YOUR NEWS AND ENTERTAINMENT SOURCE

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 21-27, 2008

www.Florida-Weekly.com

Vol. I, No. 47 • FREE

Down housing market not scaring off realtors

PETE SKIBA

Florida Weekly correspondent

When the real estate market tanked in 2005, so too did the number of licenses issued to sell real estate.

More than 1,300 fewer licenses were issued to real estate professionals in Lee and Collier counties during 2005 than the year before.

Although figures for Collier and Lee counties show a drop in real estate licenses issued during 2005, the number sprang back by more than 2,000 in 2006. By all reports the field continues to attract renewals and new applicants.

"I've been through these market cycles several times," said Robert Hardwick, a broker and the owner of Ameriflora Real Estate School, Inc. in Fort Myers. "But I believe that the market is starting back up because the last couple months we have been getting more calls about getting new licenses. I'd say 50 to 75 percent of calls are now about new licenses. I think people see this as an opportunity to learn the business while it is slow. The market's future is good."

The only numbers from the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation available for the individual counties reflected the years from 2004-2006.

"Our school has been doing well for 50 years," said Lori Rodgers, the president of Sarasota's Bert Rodgers Schools. "Applications to take our online courses for new licenses have dropped about 40 percent,

SEE REALTORS, A11 ►

"I've been through these market cycles several times. But I believe that the market is starting back up because the last couple months we have been getting more calls about getting new licenses ... The market's future is good."

—Robert Hardwick, a broker and the owner of Ameriflora Real Estate School, Inc.

FOUR AMBITIOUS FORT MYERS
ENTREPRENEURS TACKLE NEW BUSINESS IN
STRUGGLING ECONOMIC TIMES ... THEY'RE

RISKING IT ALL



BY ROGER WILLIAMS

rwilliams@florida-weekly.com

Courage and necessity are often the parents of commercial adventure (or any other kind of adventure), which must explain why some people in Lee County continue to ignore the experts.

The experts, after all, prefer action based on good numbers and promising statistics, rather than on mere courage and necessity. They caution that now would not be a real good time to open a new business.

Since the beginning of 2006, the market has plunged like a downhill skier who can't turn — straight into unexpected changes, struggling lifestyles and new careers for many, all of which can seem perilously close to the rocks.

So why now stake savings, credit and reputation on a new business, especially one that offers products

people might not buy in these pinched economic times?

Here, we visit four individuals who can answer that question, at least for themselves. (*Florida Weekly* has carried a particular affection for this spirit of commercial adventure since printing its first issue, on April 5, last year.)

Meanwhile, the stats aren't pretty. The number of practicing Realtors in Lee County has dropped by almost a third in two years, to less than 5,000; sales-tax receipts have dropped almost 10 percent in a year, suggesting that people are spending significantly less; and unemployment in the county has leaped from a one-time low of about 2.8 percent to well over 5 percent, almost a full percentage point higher than the state or national averages. (Those end-of-year

FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTOS

These four individuals are not disheartened by a weak real-estate market or reams of ugly economic statistics. They've started new businesses here in Lee County. From top left to right, Gail Day, Randy Dusharm, Patti Price and Sherry Simes.

SEE NEW BUSINESS, A8 ►

INSIDE



Reiko celebrates 25

SWFL Symphony's Concertmaster Reiko Niya talks about her 25 years with the orchestra. C1 ►



Edison Coronation Ball

And other events in Fort Myers society. C26-29 ►



Up on the roof

Lee Crowther and Co. have been in the roofing business locally for 33 years. B1 ►



Tarpon Point Marina

Voted "Best Overall" in CCCIA Builders' Showcase. D1 ►

POSTAL CUSTOMER

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FORT MYERS, FL
PERMIT NO. 715

ROGER WILLIAMS	A2
OPINION	A4
15 MINUTES	A6
HEALTHY LIVING	A22

BUSINESS	B1
NETWORKING	B10&11
ARTS	C1
EVENTS	C6&7

SOCIETY	C26-29
CUISINE	C31
REAL ESTATE	D1
CLASSIFIEDS	D20-23

DATED MATERIAL - PLEASE RUSH
POSTMASTER - REQUESTED IN-HOME DELIVERY DATE: FEBRUARY 21, 2008

2 NEWS TODAY Count On Us! • Your Local Forecast Every 10 Minutes • Traffic Alerts nbc-2.com

