









Collier home price nears \$500,000

Naples-area market continues boom

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REALTOR SALES	JAN. 2004	JAN. 2005	PERCENT CHANGE
Statewide	14,204	15,567	 10%
Lee County	645	829	 29%
Collier County	321	384	 20%
Charlotte County	287	236	 -18%

MEDIAN SALES PRICE	JAN. 2004	JAN. 2005	PERCENT CHANGE
Statewide	\$164,900	\$204,900	 24%
Lee County	\$170,200	\$219,800	 29%
Collier County	\$392,400	\$497,900	 27%
Charlotte County	\$144,800	\$196,000	 35%

SOURCE: FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS

The median price of a home in Collier County edged close to the half-million-dollar mark in January.

To be precise, it reached \$497,900, about \$130,000 more than any other market in the state.

In Lee County, sales and prices of existing single-family homes were down slightly last month from the month before but still up 29 percent above January 2004, the Florida Association of Realtors reported Friday.

U.S. sales, including condominiums and co-ops for the first time, declined 0.1 percent in January, the National Association of Realtors reported.

The Naples area is becoming so popular so fast because "it's a newer market. It's not mature," said Denny Grimes of VIP Realty. "People want to live there."

Naples, he said, "is really the thermostat market for the west coast," pulling up prices in lesser venues as it soars into the stratosphere.

Property records show Naples houses with values far above what the owners paid even a few years ago. A house at 370 Rudder Road in Naples, for example, sold for \$316,500 in 1997 but is now assessed at \$565,167.

Lee County's median price was \$219,800, compared to \$221,200 in December and \$167,100 in January 2004.

In Lee County, Grimes said, "I have seen no slowdown."

Although the market cannot sustain continued increases such as those in the past year, he said the boom may go on for a while, although eventually the escalation in prices will have to at least

slow down.

Nationally, sales of existing homes edged down. Strength in condominium sales was offset by a dip in demand for single-family homes.

The National Association of Realtors said existing single-family homes and condominiums were sold at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 6.80 million units in January, down from a revised 6.81 million units in December.

Demand for single-family homes dropped by 0.5 percent to an annual rate of 5.94 million units. Sales of condominiums, however, rose by 2.3 percent to an annual rate of 858,000 units.

Sales of existing homes set a record for a fourth straight year in 2004 and analysts said the January performance showed housing started on a strong note

in 2005.

"Still no problems in the housing market, though by now that should be no surprise to anyone," said Joel Naroff, head of Naroff Economic Advisors.

"Without any major rise in mortgage rates, there is little reason to believe that home sales will fall apart anytime soon."

The median price for a home sold was \$189,000 in January, an increase of 10.5 percent from January 2004.

Across the country, the sales strength came from the South, where sales rose by 3.5 percent, and the West, where sales were up 0.6 percent. Sales dipped 3.5 percent in the Northeast and 5.2 percent in the Midwest.

Realtors chief economist David Lereah said even with the small overall decline in sales, demand for homes remained strong.

- The Associated Press contributed to this report.