

Home market getting pricey

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Fort Benning growth, cost of building materials impacting housing industry

BY TONY ADAMS
Staff Writer

Home prices in the Columbus-area housing market continue to escalate as builders and real estate agents position themselves for growth associated with Fort Benning over the next five years.

Derrick Shields, president of the Columbus Board of Realtors, doesn't see existing housing sales and new home construction cooling off much, if any, over the next couple of years.

"It's a strong market. The appreciation rate is continuing to be strong," said Shields, an agent with Coldwell Banker Kennon, Parker, Duncan & Key in Columbus.

"Fort Benning, I think, is the most immediate impact that we have into the market," he said. "New construction is creating a flurry of activity with people changing homes. We're also seeing multiple offer situations because demand is heavy. It's not uncommon now to see homes with two to three offers on them."

New and existing home sales rose in Columbus, Phenix City/Smiths Station and Harris County in 2005, according to Multiple Listing Service data supplied by local Boards of Realtors.

Columbus jumped from 2,322 homes sold in 2004 to 2,426 last year, with a total valuation topping \$377 million. The Phenix City and Smiths Station areas generated 1,305 sales a year ago, up from 1,105. Harris County, with its predominantly upscale offerings, increased from 425 in 2004 to 533. Valuations were \$167 million and \$126.7 million, respectively.

Square footage getting pricey

As the number of homes sold



TONY ADAMS *Ledger-Enquirer*

Eric King, 19, of Columbus lays a brick foundation for a home in the Boulder Creek subdivision off Summerville Road in Smiths Station, Ala. King, an Alabama State University student, is on break and working for his father's company, Willie King Masonry Company.

start in the \$70 to \$80 per square foot range, while the mid-point now stands between \$120 to \$140 per square foot, industry veterans say. Anything above \$160 would be considered upper end.

A high-end example is River Crest subdivision off River Road, where

development in southern Harris County, where 2,000-square-foot residences start at \$250,000. That's \$120 per foot.

The hot sales have whittled away at existing home inventories, with estimates at 90 days or less.

"I've got somebody right now that

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