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## In tough market, Realtors pull out the stops

By Buddy Moorehouse  
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

These are tough times to be a Realtor in Livingston County.

There are more homes on the market than ever before in the county, and fewer of them are selling.

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Look at the numbers: In 2005, there were 7,337 homes listed, and 2,698 sales. In 2006, the number of listings ballooned to 8,461, but the number of sales fell to 1,938.

It's no secret that the housing market is tight around the country, and that's certainly the case in Livingston County.

While this still ranks as the fastest-growing county in the state, the housing market has cooled considerably in the past couple of years, which has provided a host of challenges to the folks who sell and market homes in this area.

"It's a challenging time, no doubt," said Todd Buckley, the co-owner of Buckley Jolley Real Estate in Brighton, and the current Realtor of the Year in the county, as chosen by the Livingston Association of Realtors. "The number of sales are down, and the number of listings are up."

Some Realtors in the county say the tight market has spurred them to try a host of new marketing techniques — some of which have worked, some of which haven't.

"I think that what we're seeing is that we've gotten back to basics," Buckley said. "We've tried the gimmicks — things like giving away a free plasma TV or a car with every sale — and they haven't worked. We've realized that it all comes down to positive thinking. You have to provide the best value in a given price range. It's that simple."

At Keller Williams Realty in Brighton, associates Linda Barnwell and John MacLeod say that increasing the exposure of their listings is key.

"The condition of the home and the price have to be right, and you really have to maximize the exposure of the home to other agents," Barnwell said. "The Internet, of course, is huge. We offer virtual tours of every single one of the homes we list. That's a must."

Barnwell and MacLeod have also taken the unique approach of sponsoring a series of seminars for the community. They hold a senior symposium every April and October, offering information for senior citizens on topics ranging from legal matters to buying a condo.

"I think we've been able to provide a great service to the seniors, and that network has also been great for business," Barnwell said. "We're really reaching a niche that nobody else is serving."

Barnwell and MacLeod are also sponsoring a seminar series in April, covering topics ranging from selling a home in a slow market to advice for condo buyers. The seminars are set for Thursday and April 12 and 17, and



Photo by GILLIS BENEDICT/DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Associate broker Dan Davenport of the Michigan Group discusses new listings with fellow Realtors in their weekly planning meeting.

### At a glance

Linda Barnwell and John MacLeod of Keller Williams Realty in Brighton are offering a series of seminars in April, aimed at home buyers and sellers. The seminars take place at the Keller Williams office, 1005 E. Grand River Ave., and are free and open to the public. All seminars start at 6:30 p.m. Topics and dates:

- Thursday — "Selling Your Home in a Slow Market."
- April 12 — "First-time Home Buyer."
- April 19 — "What To Know Before Buying a Condo."

### File downloads:

- [Average sales prices, 1999-2006 \(28K, PDF file\)](#)
- [Listings and sales by community, 1999-2006 \(16K, PDF file\)](#)
- [Residential permits, 1999-2006 \(24K, PDF file\)](#)

are free and open to the general public.

At the Michigan Group in Genoa Township, sales manager Stephen Scholes said that home sellers are realizing that now, more than ever, they need professional assistance in selling their home.

"We're able to offer first-rate service, and there's really no substitute for that," Scholes said. "The gimmicks don't work. The home has to be priced right, it has to be marketed aggressively, and you have to be able to take advantage of professional service."

Scholes said the Michigan Group is also excited about its revamped Web site, [www.michiangroup.com](http://www.michiangroup.com). Among other features, prospective buyers can go to a home listing, and they have the option of clicking on a "Call Me Now" button that will result in an immediate phone call from a Michigan Group Realtor.

Buckley agreed that it's vital to have the best possible Internet presence.

"So many people are searching for homes online now," he said. "It allows them to look at the homes without feeling pressured. We've purchased three new Web sites that have already produced great results for us."

Donna Pachey, a Realtor with the Michigan Group, has taken an additional step toward maximizing her clients' curb appeal. She received a certification in "home staging," a relatively new concept that involves making a house look the best it possibly can.

"The idea is to redesign the house to make it look just right," she said. "Sometimes it involves moving furniture or removing furniture. Sometimes you'll have a room that's being used for something it wasn't designed for, so you change the room to reflect its original purpose."

Pachey said she's already seen results with home staging.

"It's definitely helped with some of my listings," she said. "The buyer has so many choices within a given price range now. You have to make your home look the best of all the homes in that range. Home staging helps with that."

Realty professionals are also relying on innovative mortgage products to help them sell homes.

The Michigan Group's mortgage division has started offering a new product that gives homeowners additional money to fix up their new places. That way, buyers can get a lower-priced home and immediately increase its value by making needed repairs and improvements.

If you're still stuck with a home that hasn't been able to sell, MacLeod from Keller Williams has another piece of advice.

"In some cases, if they've already moved and they haven't been able to sell their old house, we're advising people to look at leasing the home," MacLeod said. "That way, they can stop the bleeding for a couple (of) years until the market picks back up. Rather than lose it to the bank, they'll at least have some money coming in."

The bottom line, say the experts, is that homes are still selling in Livingston County. There just a lot more choices for buyers.

"Homes are selling in the county every day," Pachey said. "The ones that are priced right are the ones that are selling. You just have to remember that yesterday's market was yesterday's market. Today's market is different."

Contact Buddy Moorehouse, metro editor-features, at (517) 548-7081 or at [bmoorehouse@gannett.com](mailto:bmoorehouse@gannett.com).

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socialledauthor - impressive post - RIGHT ON!!!!

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Comments by: clobber Posted: Sun Apr 01, 2007 1:49 pm

Actually, the reason home prices were up for so many years is because the homes were selling! The value of a home is what someone is willing to pay for it. Certainly, greed plays a part to some degree; homeowners want to make as big a profit as possible. And certainly, lenders were making it easy by offering risky ARMs to less-qualified buyers. But the housing market, like any

other market, operates on supply and demand, and what's happening now is that the market is correcting itself: When supply outstrips demand, prices go down. And just as certain, when supply and demand even out, prices will rise again. The bottom line is this: Livingston County remains a very desirable place to live; homes in this area, especially with land attached, remain sought after by those yearning for relief from crowded cities and high taxes, as well as wanting a good investment. For buyers, now is the best time to buy a home in this area; for sellers, hold on to your home for a year or two, if you can. It's still the best - and safest - investment you can have.

Comments by: notyomama Posted: Sun Apr 01, 2007 12:19 pm  
I'm tired of people saying 800/sf in so and so state is worth X and the houses in Livingston would be 4 times somewhere else. People, you/we don't live somewhere else you live in Michigan. I agree I was incorrect about the realtors being the main reason for the prices. Appraisals should all be very close if not the same. If they are very far apart then some one needs to look into the appraiser.

Comments by: socalledauthor Posted: Sun Apr 01, 2007 11:52 am  
Actually, the problems lies more with appraisers. Everyone wants their house to appraise at a price higher than what they bought it for, and some will even shop around until they get that high appraisal. And they'll even shop for a Real Estate agent that tells them what they want to hear "Oh, absolutely, we can get \$xxx dollars for YOUR house!" If the Realtor says, instead, "I don't think we're going to be able to get that for reasons x,y, and z," then the homeowner will just find a different agent.

Homeowners, appraisers, and realtors get all lumped up together in this fast growth speculation stuff. Watch House Hounters-- especially in California where a two bedroom house with less the 800 square feet goes for over two or even three hundred THOUSAND. People want to see that kind of growth here, especially after they've paid only a hundred thousand.

I'm starting to think that there's not a profession that IS well liked. . . . no one likes Realtors. No one likes Cops. Or politicians. Or teachers. Or lawyers and doctors.

Maybe people like the garbage collectors?

Or maybe people are just so disgruntled with their own lives they only know how to cope by trashing everyone around them, regardless of facts and relying on distortions, myths, and outright falsehoods.

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Originally published April 1, 2007

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