HOUSING: Prices are probably at lowest point

Continued from page 1A

While many market experts believe 2007 will be an improvement, an official from the University of Florida's (UF) Bergstrom Center for Real Estate Studies doesn't expect sales to be astronomical. The center's director, Wayne Archer, said the numbers will be better but won't come close to peak levels from 2005.

"If you're thinking of buying a house, there's probably not much to be gained by holding out at this point," Archer, said. "It doesn't look like prices are going to fall anymore."

According to records kept by the Florida Association of Realtors, the state's median sales price for existing single-family homes in January was $239,300. A year ago, it was $243,200, which represents a 2 percent price decrease. The median is the midpoint; half the homes sold for more, half for less. In January 2002, the statewide median sales price for single-family homes was $128,900, which represents an increase of about 85.6 percent over the five-year-period.

Optimism about Florida real estate seems to be particularly strong among foreign investors. Many respondents to a study conducted by UF commented that foreign investors and lenders are aggressively trying to invest more capital in the state's rental markets.

"They apparently have no fears about the future of these markets, despite what we perceive as our problems with hurricanes, taxes and other concerns," Archer said.

FERRY: Park service hopes to add water access

Continued from page 1A

Franklin Hayes/Gulf Breeze News

Fort Pickens is currently accessible by boat or a four-mile hike.

Rosa Island. The ferry service, which would cost consumers $15 to $20 per round trip, would be a temporary extension of a similar service in Gulfport, Miss. Eubanks added that he would like to see one boat making trips by the end of the summer and would eventually send the ferry contract out for competitive bid.

"I wanted to get a ferry service before the road went out," Eubanks said.

Fort Pickens Road wasn't the only corridor damaged on federal property that is yet to be repaired. J. Earle Bowden Way, the highway that connects Pensacola Beach to Navarre Beach has also been out of commission since 2004. Eubanks said the two projects would cost a total of approximately $40 to $55 million to repair and blames the delay on environmental rehabilitation and restrictive government entities.

"I just don't have a crystal ball," Eubanks said when asked when the roads might be repaired. "The faster the island recovers, the faster we'll see those roads. We have to have a design that won't impede the natural movement of the island. We have to contain the road and hold it in place while the gulf and the island do their thing."

Eubanks added that the Federal Highway Administration would not release the necessary road funding until certain hardening structures, like articulated concrete block or sheet piling, are installed. Eubanks estimated that J. Earle Bowden Way would be the first to be repaired due to its designation as an evacuation route and the existence of fewer environmental complications.

Despite its current remote disposition, Fort Pickens is an important historical relic that serves as a beacon of hope against all odds. Hope against surrounding enemy encampments during the Civil War and hope against the destructive forces of nature during modern times.

"Fort Pickens represents a continuum of our nation's history," said Gail Bishop, Chief of Interpretation and Education for Gulf Islands National Seashore. Bishop added that when the state of Florida seceded from the union in 1861, larger garrisons at near by Forts Barrancas and McRee also became confederate units.

"This area was very active in the early part of the war," she said. "The war could have very easily begun at Fort Pickens instead of Fort Sumter."

TODDLER: Navarre child returned to mother unscathed after abduction scare

Continued from page 1A

Unit, as well as the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office K-9 unit. The search yielded negative results.

The female victim was transported to a local hospital to be checked out. The mother stated that she has never seen the suspect prior to this occasion. Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office Crime Scene Technicians arrived to process the scene in an attempt to locate evidence.

No suspects are known at this time. No further information is known at this time and the investigation is ongoing.

Anyone with any information is encouraged to call crime stoppers at 850-437-7867.

MIDWAY: Fire District, AMR will partner in bid to supply countywide ambulance services

Continued from page 1A

Midway Fire Commissioners voted at a special meeting Friday night to enter into a partnership agreement with American Medical Response (AMR) ambulance service in submitting a bid at the end of the month to provide ambulance service to all of Santa Rosa County. AMR is the largest ambulance service in the nation, with both ground and air ambulances.

But Midway Commissioners have also decided to submit their own separate bid for Midway Fire District to operate a countywide ambulance service, with no partner.

Fire Chief Stephen Demeter told his commissioners Friday that their legal counsel said this week that under the bid proposal advertised by the county Midway can enter as many bids in as many forms as they wish. So they decided Friday to submit two bids, with one being MFD providing countywide ambulance service with no partner, placing ambulances around the county and coordinating with other fire departments. Included with that bid will be their approved line of credit for just over $3-million for start up costs, purchase of ambulances, and added payroll costs of new paramedics.

But they will also submit a partnership bid with AMR, with Midway only servicing its own area under that bid. "We are trying to cover all our bases," Commissioner/Treasurer Clyde Broome said.

The bids to provide ambulance service to Santa Rosa County for the next five years are due into the county emergency officials by 5 p.m. April 3.

That gives Midway Fire and AMR two weeks to hammer out a contract between themselves, and also put together a joint proposal to submit to the county. Chief Demeter told commissioners, "If this partnership bid would be approved by the county, it would be almost like having our very own COPN (operating certificate), carving out our area for ourselves to handle our own ambulance transports. We could do what we have been wanting to do – service our own residents the way we want to with our own ambulances."

AMR agreed to pay Midway Fire $300 per emergency transport it handles within the Midway area, under this proposed partnership agreement, if AMR wins the countywide contract.

Under the partnership agreement, MFD would still purchase two ambulances of their own. AMR had offered to place two of their ambulances in Midway, but at least one of those would not be equipped with the rescue apparatus MFD wants, so the Chief wants to purchase ambulances with the equipment needed that would belong to Midway. Commissioners approved that plan. Treasurer Broome presented commissioners with a five-year financial study on the partnership agreement with AMR, based on figures of what ambulance transports the Midway area has generated in the last couple years, showing that even with the purchase of the two ambulances the five-year projection shows Midway would break even financially by the end of five years.

Commissioners scheduled a special meeting for Wednesday, March 28 to review the contract AMR will work out with the Fire Chief and if they approve that contract, they will move forward with the joint bid for the county ambulance service.

Midway Fire Commissioners like Chief Demeter's skills

Midway Fire Commissioners released the results of their annual performance appraisal of their Fire Chief Stephen Demeter at last week's regular meeting, and the chief received high marks from all commissioners in all areas.

In the area of Management and Leadership, each commissioner was asked to rate the fire chief from 1 to 5 — a 1 meaning "significant improvement needed", and a 5 meaning "significantly exceeds expectations (role model behavior). In all areas reviewed, from communication to professional relationships to employee relationships and personal conduct, the commissioners gave their chief a '5'. The only areas with less than a perfect 5 were Innovation (bringing new concepts to the district) and Management Team Effectiveness, where they rated him a 4.75.

Included on the review were objectives and goals for the next year, with three listed — have an ISO review by July 2007, complete the self assessment process for accreditation by December and prepare district to provide ambulance transport by Oct. 1.

Calendar of Events

Thursday, March 22

Santa Rosa County Commission Regular Meeting, 9 a.m., Commissioner's Board Room, 6495 Caroline Street, Milton

School Board Meeting, 6:30 p.m., School District Administrative Offices, 5086 Canal Street, Milton

Friday, March 23

Saturday, March 24

Santa Rosa County Waste Amnesty Day. 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., South Santa Rosa Service Center, 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy., next to the Zoo. Details: 981-7135

Sunday, March 25

No meetings scheduled as of press time

Monday, March 26

Town Hall Meeting on Property Taxes, 7 p.m. South Santa Rosa Rec Center, Shoreline Drive,Gulf Breeze. Santa Rosa County Property Appraiser will conduct an open forum to explain property valuations and proposed changes to tax law. Details: 983-1880.

Tuesday, March 27

Board of Adjustments, 6:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze

Free AARP Tax Preparation: 9:15 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. at Gulf Breeze Library

Wednesday, March 28

Executive Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze

Santa Rosa Island Authority Committee Meeting, 5 p.m., SRIA Administrative Office, 1 Via De Luna, Pensacola Beach

Free AARP Tax Preparation: 9:15 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. at Gulf Breeze Library

Gulf Breeze Library Book Club, 5:30 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. at Gulf Breeze Library will be discussing Sanctuary by Faulkner

Thursday, March 29

Preschool Story Time, 10:30 a.m. at Gulf Breeze Library

Free AARP Tax Preparation: 9:15 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. at Gulf Breeze Library

To submit an event for publication in the calendar, email news@gulfbreezenews.com with the subject "Calendar." Items must be received one week prior to date of publication.

Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office Report

Information provided by the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office.

FELONIES

3/13/07

Bentler, Christina Mary, 38, W/F, 6400 block of Garden Drive, Gulf Breeze, fraud

3/15/07

Jones, Trenton Winter, 21, W/M, 6800 block of Flintwood Street, Navarre, aggravated assault

Maddox, William Devan, 22, W/M, 8700 block of Rio Vista Drive, Navarre, aggravated assault

Atkinson, Destin Jon, 18, W/M, 8100 block of Gulf Boulevard, Navarre Beach, burglary, larceny, less than $5,000

3/18/07

Birge, Jimmy Lamar, 57, W/M, 1600 block of Via de Luna, Pensacola Beach, larceny, less than $5,000, possession of a controlled substance without a prescription

Bryant, Christopher Delaine, 19, W/M, 8100 block of Calle Mio, Navarre, violation of probation

Diaz, Adolfo Cortez, 25, H/M, 1800 block of Iris Lane, Navarre, possession of cocaine

Hernandez, Jonathan Maldonado, 20, H/M, 6400 block of Flagler Drive, Gulf Breeze, possession of cocaine

Jackson, Sarah Elizabeth, 37, W/F, 1200 block of Marble Court, Gulf Breeze, violation of probation

Maldonado, Pedro Martinez, 25, H/M, 6400 Flagler Drive, Gulf Breeze, possession of cocaine

DUI

3/12/07

Vanvalkenburgh, Kevin Michael, 36, W/M, 6900 block of Sea Crab Circle, Navarre, DUI

3/14/07

Logan, Robert Andrew, 18, W/M, 100 block of Camelia street, Gulf Breeze, DUI

3/16/07

Longmire, Fredrick Bernard, 35, B/M, 2000 block of America Avenue, Gulf Breeze, DUI

3/17/07

Lopez, Salvadore Ramos, 35, H/M, 5600 block of Charter Circle, Gulf breeze, DUI

White, David Lawrence, 51, W/M, 7900 block of Williams Creek Court, Navarre, DUI

Elected Officials CONTACT

GULF BREEZE ELECTED OFFICIALS
Write to your City Council Member at:
1070 Shoreline Dr., Gulf Breeze, FL 32561;
or contact the Council by phone at (850) 934-5100

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mayor@ci.gulf-breeze.fl.us

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bzimmern@ ci.gulf-breeze.fl.us

Councilmember CARL HOFFMAN
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choffman@ci.gulf-breeze.fl.us

Councilmember J.B. SCHLUTER
(850) 437-0263
jschluter@ci.gulf-breeze.fl.us

Council Seat D
Open

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