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Tri-City housing market 'healthy'

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With all of the speculation over Hanford layoffs, one might have expected a flood of homes for sale and spooked sellers ready to make a deal.

Not so fast.

Home sales figures for August cast a rosy glow on the Tri-Cities housing market, as the number of homes listed for sale dipped below 1,000 while the average sales price was \$101,400 — the lowest monthly average since January 1993.

For home sellers that meant their homes sold faster and there was less competition with other houses on the market. Buyers benefited with better prices than in previous months.

Last month, 975 homes were on the market, the lowest since January, the Tri-City Association of Realtors reported Wednesday. Of those, 149 homes sold, half less than 60 days after the "for sale" sign went up on the lawn.

Housing officials say a few more houses were sold at the end of August, but have not yet been recorded.

"This is a healthy situation," said Larry Miller, executive vice president of the association. "Our cycles are flattening out. It's become a more rolling, stable pattern."

August 1994 presented a much different set of numbers. Fewer homes on the market — 817 — boosted the average sales price to \$125,900.

Prospective home buyers paid considerably less this year than in 1994, the association said.

The average sales price in the Tri-Cities year-to-date is \$111,000 — or \$9,000 lower than in the same

period last year.

Tri-City real estate brokers say the figures are positive but not surprising.

Just as record employment at Hanford fueled unchecked growth in the housing market, work force reductions brought it back in line.

"Everybody wanted to know if the market was going to go into the Dumpster," said Donna Powers, president of the association. "We're finding it's just returning to normal more than anything else."

Helping the trend are fixed, 30-year interest rates that continue to

hover around 7.9 percent, Powers said.

"In part because of the rates and because of the market, we're seeing a lot of people out looking," she said.

Sellers with homes in the \$80,000- to \$89,000-range and between \$100,000 and \$119,000 fared best last month. Twenty-two homes in each of those price ranges sold in August. The third hottest category were homes in the \$70,000- to \$79,000-range, where 19 homes sold.

Real estate agents have seen prices for some expensive homes drop — a possible knee-jerk reac-

tion as the threat of more pink slips for Hanford workers looms. But Miller says they may be reacting too soon.

"There are some people who are running scared about Hanford, and they shouldn't," Miller said, noting sales close on an average of four homes each day.

"They read the story in the paper about the layoffs, and they think they have to drop their price and get rid of their house," he said. "They forget to read the other story right next to it about the new shopping center or new business coming to town."

