



Thank Goodness It's Fort Worth!

*By Kenneth Jones, President
Greater Fort Worth Association REALTORS®*

When compared to the rest of the nation, Fort Worth has had quite a reputation for superior economic performance. Nevertheless, the R-word (recession) is still with us, and some are beginning to question whether we're actually stronger or just slower.

In an effort to help clarify differences between the real estate market locally and the national real estate climate, the Greater Fort Worth Association of Realtors distributed a public opinion survey last month. Our belief was that it's actually more positive here than in other areas of the country, but we wanted to verify that assumption. How are the comparative economic climates nationally and locally, and how do they affect the daily lives and decisions of our citizens?

We surveyed the marketplace about their perceptions using an electronic tool that posed questions about a number of topics. The questions allowed for scaled and open answer opportunities. While not a scientific market research vehicle, our survey's questions and requests for input provided an opportunity for us to glean insights into what is important to consumers in the local area. The survey used carefully-crafted questions to minimize bias and to seek candid answers and opinions. Over 350 people responded.

We found that things are different in Fort Worth. Our survey respondents indicated that we're pretty lucky to live here rather than in areas harder hit by the strong winds of economic turmoil. In fact, we enjoy relative stability.

With this in mind, last week we launched a public awareness program called Thank Goodness It's Fort Worth! We believe it's important to spread the good news, dispel misperceptions and highlight positive aspects of the local and state marketplaces.



This is particularly important because our neighbors are listening to us. Nearly all of those surveyed consider their Realtors to be an expert in local real estate matters. As your professional Realtors we are expected to have and provide an educated perspective with an accurate outlook. So we're focused on helping our neighbors and customers by providing honest, clearly communicated information about the current situation and market here in Fort Worth and across the state of Texas.

"Throughout Texas, we've been fortunate to avoid many of the negative effects of the recession so far, but it's clear we've not dodged them all," said Brooke Hunt, chairman of the Texas Association of Realtors. "The question we're all asking ourselves now is, 'Will it hit us as hard as other places and when can we expect it to recede?'"

Not just from the opinions we gathered, but by account of the economic pundits, the answers to those two questions appear to be, "No," and "Soon."

For example, the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas issued a report recently that cited the negative impact of the recession in the first quarter of 2009 for Texas. However, it also noted that the state's long-term prospects remain healthy, primarily due to continued job growth, a fast-growing labor force, and a low cost of living and doing business.

Part of that low cost of living is that, historically, Texas families have had more real estate buying power than those in other states. Data from the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University shows that, over the last four years, real estate markets in Texas have remained affordable. That's one reason *Builder Magazine* cited Texas' five largest cities as its top five "Healthiest Housing Markets for 2009."

Job growth is also central to a healthy real estate market. Though Texas' unemployment rate has increased in recent months, the Texas Workforce Commission shows it has been below the national average for 25 consecutive months and remains so today. In addition, the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University cites the diversification of those jobs across many industries as an attribute of the Texas economy – one it did not enjoy in prior recessions.

We believe that another reason for our local enduring real estate market: In 1997, some criticized Texas as old-fashioned and out-of-date when we enacted one of the strictest home equity lending laws in the country. In fact, many folks wondered why Texas Realtors insisted on an 80 percent cap (referring to the Texas law that consumers can only borrow up to 80 percent of the value of their home through a home equity loan).

We're not old fashioned. We're serious about our homesteads. We want Texans to be homeowners for life.

"It's a good thing that we didn't follow suit with other states that allow homeowners to borrow as much as 125 percent of their home's value in a home equity loan," said Hunt. "Turns out many of those loans contributed to the national mortgage meltdown that we largely dodged in Texas."



So Thank Goodness It's Fort Worth! Our TGIFW public awareness program is going to share facts like these and other truths about local real estate with consumers. You're going to notice TGIFW logos popping up here and there, on signs and newsletters and advertisements. The State association also has an "Ask a Texas Realtor" campaign in place right now; learn more about that at www.TexasRealEstate.com.

All 2,200 members, the Greater Fort Worth Association of Realtors are working diligently to serve the real estate community within the expanded Fort Worth area. We are one of more than 1,400 local trade associations nationwide that comprise the National Association of Realtors (NAR). All Realtors are members of NAR and are dedicated to a high level of ethical and professional standards. The Texas Association of Realtors is the largest not-for-profit professional membership association in Texas and represents all aspects of real estate. We advocate on behalf of Texas Realtors and homeowners. Find more online at www.gfwar.org or visit www.TexasRealEstate.com.

*Contacts: Rebekah LaMontagne, rebekah@gfwar.org or (817) 336-5165 , ext 112
Ashley Callais, acallais@phprinc.com or 817 924 2300*

