

From the Director

SFAR pursues ownership initiatives

This June, the Santa Fe Association of Realtors joins the National Association of Realtors (NAR) in celebrating National Homeownership Month and the focus on Realtors who contribute to their communities and build better neighborhoods, towns and cities. To support this initiative, NAR has launched a new website to help promote homeownership. I encourage you to visit www.realtor.org/homeownership.

NAR is not only promoting homeownership but is working with the U.S. Congress to make the new FHA and conforming loan limits, mandated by the economic-stimulus package, permanent so more Americans can access affordable financing. Together, we continue to push for a stronger, more flexible FHA program to give more first-time homebuyers access to affordable and safe financing options.

On the home front, the Santa Fe Association of Realtors is beginning the

process of hosting a Housing Affordability Dialogue designed to engage community stakeholders in identifying collaborative and effective solutions to address workforce housing. Outreach efforts are under way to garner the commitment of a variety of housing-affordability stakeholders who will identify the values and principles that will guide the dialogue process. The event scheduled to take place in September will include the involvement of elected officials and stakeholders from both the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County. A kick-off reception will be followed by two full days of collaborative work by participants to develop consensus around solutions.

Like many communities across the country, Santa Fe is challenged to meet the housing needs of those providing vital services such as police, fire, emergency workers, educators, hospital workers, and other care providers. The Santa Fe

Association of Realtors is eager to engage stakeholders in a facilitated housing-affordability dialogue. New Mexico First, a nonprofit organization founded 22 years ago by U.S. Senators Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman, has agreed to support the Housing Affordability Dialogue Planning Committee, conduct interviews with key stakeholders, and serve as facilitator for the overall event.

The Santa Fe Association of Realtors has also recently formed a Housing Sustainability Committee to support local housing projects. Chaired by SFAR board member Michael Smith, the committee is presently exploring ways to improve our community through smart-growth initiatives and neighborhood projects.

Local Realtors are proving their commitment to homeownership through these community involvement projects, the homeownership workshops they sponsor or participate in, and the



DONNA REYNOLDS

thousands of community-run programs in which they contribute. Realtors and the Association are getting out and helping others because it's just good business to be a good citizen.

Donna M. Reynolds is acting director of the Santa Fe Association of Realtors. She holds a bachelor of science degree in business from Virginia Commonwealth University and is a graduate of the Leadership Metro Richmond program.

Our water Quality

Debunking 'greening' of bottled water

The backlash against bottled water has been widely reported in the press, but this has not hindered the expansion of the \$11.5 billion bottled-water industry. Consumption of bottled water increased 9.4 percent from the 2006 level to 30.2 gallons per capita in 2007. The International Bottled Water Association forecasts increasing strong growth as consumers continue to switch from other beverages to bottled water.

One multinational bottled-water conglomerate, Nestlé Brands, is switching many of its bottled water lines to PET (polyethylene terephthalate) made with 30 percent less plastic, a 30 percent smaller label, and a recyclable bottle cap. Because the bottle is lighter, the manufacturer claims a reduction in carbon-dioxide emissions because less energy is consumed in molding the bottle. Nestlé is even building new bottling plants to conform to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building

standards and claims energy savings by creating its bottles in its own plant and controlling transportation.

Fiji Water Company has developed the Fiji Green website, claiming to be carbon-negative, saving the rainforest, reducing its packaging materials, and touting recycling efforts. The high-grade plastic used to make the bottles is transported from China to Fiji, stretch-blow-molded in Fiji and then shipped (full of water) to the United States. One researcher, Pablo Paster, concluded that a 1-liter bottle of Fiji Water contaminates 6.74 liters of water to mold the plastic and produces 0.25 kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions.

Only about 15 to 20 percent of all plastic bottles are recycled. Bottle sorting by plastic type is a major issue. Heat and handling may make plastic weak and brittle and additives in some plastics create recycling problems. Plastic bottles are commonly "downcycled" into lesser

products. The vast majority of our plastic waste becomes a raw material for China. In many cases, the products made with downcycled plastic bottles are shipped back for sale in the United States. And then there are the issues of the leaching of chemicals from plastic bottles into soil and water.

Each year, 29 billion plastic water-bottles are produced for use in the United States, according to the Earth Policy Institute. If we use the (probably conservative) figure that 80 percent of these bottles go to a landfill, that total is about 23.2 billion bottles per year, or more than 63 million bottles per day. Manufacturing the bottles requires the equivalent of 17 million barrels of crude oil, so rising oil and natural gas prices have only exacerbated the high price of virgin plastic and transportation.

Be kind to yourself and to our environment by purchasing a refillable personal bottle (aluminum or stainless



STEPHEN WIMAN

steel) and top it off with the water of your choice. EPA-compliant tap water is also a viable option, because 25 percent (per Natural Resources Defense Council) to 40 percent (per Co-op America), or more, of all bottled water consumed in the United States is actually processed municipal water.

Stephen Wiman has a background in earth science (Ph.D. in geology) and is the owner of Good Water Company in Santa Fe. He may be reached at 505-471-9036 and skwiman@goodwatercompany.com.