

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

JOHNNY HODGE

These are hard times for Realtors, but association chief sees agents gaining experience for a changing market

As president of the Northern Kentucky Association of Realtors, Johnny Hodge is among the top voices in the region for residential real estate – a tough job considering the decline of home sales, prices and trade group membership levels in recent years.

For Hodge, a Realtor since 2001 with an office in Florence, rising to the challenge has meant lobbying legislators for aggressive tax credit measures to boost the market, watching local data closely for trends and ensuring his association provides its shrinking membership with the latest tools and education to remain competitive.

Recent reports suggest that the housing market may not recover until well after 2010. Is that true locally?

"I think it's good that people are trying to be reasonable in their assessments about what the future may hold. I think we've seen some upticks in the economy both locally and nationally. I think we're on our way out, but it's going to be a long process before we're back to any kind of peak. Inventory (of unsold homes) has been dropping, but it seems in the last 30 days it has frozen. That tells me things haven't gotten worse, but we'll be watching closely over the next 60 days to see if that goes up. We've had a strong spring and summer; but after August, real estate tends to slow down in our market. Come September, I believe we'll have an idea as to where our market is really headed."

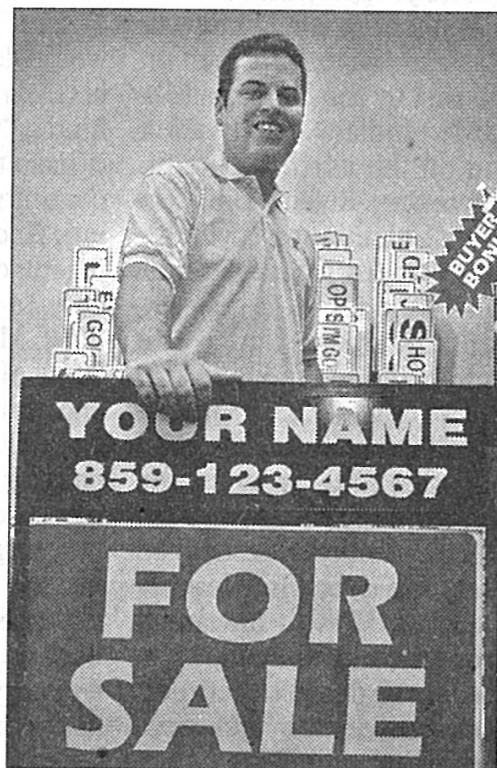
Is there any indication that the \$8,000 tax credit for first-time buyers is having an impact?

"Fifty-six percent of buyers are first-time buyers locally, which is

great. But what we're really waiting to see is if that activity will trickle upward for second- or third-time buyers who want to move up. We need to target all spectrums of buyers and borrowers to really see any fluid movement in home sales or signs of recovery. Certainly, I shudder to think what it would be like without those first-time buyers, but I think the jury is still out on how effective the stimulus will ultimately be. I think 2010 will be a much better time for real estate if we can extend the \$8,000 tax credit beyond November. I also think legislators should increase it up to \$15,000."

How are Realtors weathering the downturn?

"In Northern Kentucky we've been losing about 10 percent of our association members a year. It's sad for an association that is largely run off of nonprofit dues, but it can be a blessing for an individual Realtor who can now begin to pick some premium market share. Realtors are sharpening their blades. We've become fore-



The Enquirer/Patrick Reddy

Johnny Hodge, president of the Northern Kentucky Association of Realtors, thinks September will reveal the health of the industry.

closure and short sale experts. We do lease options. We're learning how to cater more to the aspirations of the senior residential market, which will be a huge part of what happens in real estate in the next 15 to 20 years. Really, I think this downturn will give the consumer a better educated and more experienced Realtor to work with. And those who survive this through 2011 will be among the best, because they were able to evolve out this tough time."

— **Misa Bernard-Kuhn**