

Sluggish economy slows Jamestown housing construction activity

By Sam Bari

The Jamestown building industry is feeling the crunch of a sluggish economy according to construction workers, tradesmen, and contractors.

Jamestown native Kerry Sheehan, owner of Kerry Sheehan Construction, has been a contractor on the island for over two decades. He said that builders are constructing fewer "spec homes." He attributes the slowdown to the soft real estate market.

"Whenever the real estate market slows down, the building industry will be affected," Sheehan said. "We seem to be holding our own. Large renovation projects and people who already own property are still building. Although, I do notice more conservative spending on renovations," Sheehan said.

Ken Gladding, owner of Ken Gladding Excavating, agreed with Sheehan and said the local industry is definitely feeling the pinch

of an uncertain economy. "When you have a soft real estate market, and less land available, like in the Shores area, building is going to slow down with it. Getting permits to build in high density areas gets harder every day," Gladding said. He estimated that business was down 20 to 30 percent from last year.

Some areas, however, have not yet felt the adverse effects of the economic downturn. Tom Tiernan, owner of T.M.T. Construction, a local general contractor said, "The remodeling business is doing very well. We're busy." He also said that he feels lucky because he knows "a lot of guys are out of work."

During the month of September, only three building permits were issued to build new houses on the island. Two were new construction, and one was rebuilding an existing structure. According to town hall records, most building permits were for repairs and for projects costing less than \$20,000.

Vincent Vessella, owner of V.J. Vessella Building and Improvements said, "Business is off at least 30 percent from last year. People are holding back. They're doing some repairs and partial projects. If they plan on a new roof and new siding, they might do the roof now,

and put off the siding because they don't want to spend the money right now. It's very hard for one-man operations like me."

Stephen Crowell, another local builder and owner of his own contracting company agreed with Vessella. "I think business could be off 30 to 40 percent from last year," Crowell said. "Everybody is feeling the crunch, even the big guys. And the cost of building isn't going down. Materials cost more every day," he said.

According to Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke in an Associated Press news release, "A deepening housing slump probably will be a significant drag on economic growth into next year." If this is true, relief for the building industry is not expected any time soon.

The U. S. Census Bureau and Department of Housing and Urban Development jointly announced that new construction in August of 2007 was down 19.1 percent from last year and total building permits were down 24.5 percent.

The consensus of Jamestown builders and tradesmen is that business is slow and they are available. Any Jamestowners wishing to build, renovate or repair should call now, because deals can be made.



Waiting for treats

These Keel Avenue kids just can't wait for Halloween. From left are Julia Bush, Spencer Sprague, Riley Sprague, Adam Bush and Allison Bush.

Photo by Andrea von Hohenleiten

Ophelia sessions visit the Breakers

The Child & Family Ophelia Programs will host the second Ophelia session for this season on Sunday, Oct. 21, from 4 to 5:30 p.m., at The Breakers.

The evening will include a personal and intimate tour of the well-known Newport Mansion by Trudy Coxe, CEO and Executive Director of the Preservation Society of Newport County. In addition to guiding a personal tour of the well-known estate to the girls and young women in attendance, Coxe will discuss her successful career and accomplishments as an administrator and executive. This event is free and open to all Newport County girls and young women between the ages of 11 and 18.

To reserve a ticket or obtain further information about this event, please contact Sharon Rust-Bottone at 848-4206. Reservations are required.

The Child & Family Ophelia Sessions are an innovative and inspiring series of community forums for girls and young women in Newport County. The program welcomes and engages girls and young women from diverse backgrounds in a safe and inviting environment to explore the social, psychological and cultural issues which have a lifelong impact on their development.

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Adoption info session scheduled

The Department of Children, Youth and Families is hosting a Foster Care and Adoption Information Night on Wednesday, Oct. 24, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the DCYF Office at 650 Ten Rod Rd., North Kingstown.

DCYF staff, foster, and adoptive parents will be available to explain the program and answer questions. The information night is open to anyone interested in exploring becoming a foster or adoptive parent for children in DCYF care. Stop by and learn how to make a difference in the life of a child. For more information, call Robin Perez, DCYF foster parent recruiter, at 528-3700 or the DCYF North Kingstown office at 294-5300.

Volunteer to be a friendly visitor

Child & Family Services of Newport has an immediate need for Friendly Visitors who visit the homebound elderly on a regular basis.

They have elders who are confined to their home and are waiting for visitors in Tiverton, Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport. These elders have very few social contacts and would welcome a visit from someone who cares about them. Volunteers might chat, read, play cards or take their elder for a ride. Hours are flexible. A one-year commitment preferred. Before making a commitment, the volunteer is introduced to the elder so, together, they can decide if it looks like a good match. To volunteer office at 848-4210.

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