



Home sales down for month

By Ashley Fuller
afuller@cherokeetribune.com

The housing market slowed in Cherokee County last month, but activity is picking up, according to those in the field.

There were 213 houses sold in Cherokee County last month, according to the First Multiple Listing Service, a data services provider for real estate professionals. The total could increase, as not all numbers are reported right away.

Sales are down from 242 in June and even with the number sold in the county in July 2008. So far this year, 1,271 sales have been reported in Cherokee, down from 1,518 at this time a year ago.

There were 580 new listings on the market in July, down from 596 in June and 696 in July last year. This year so far, 4,133 new listings have gone on the market, down from 5,248 at this time in 2008.

The average sale price of a house in the county was \$236,156 in July, an increase from \$207,809 in June and \$225,282 in July last year.

In an effort to entice people to make a home purchase, Coldwell Banker NRT Development Advisors has started a job loss protection program. In the event of involuntary job loss, homeowners could receive monthly benefits of as much as \$1,500 for as long as six months.

Job loss is a top concern among home buyers, according to Leslie Williamson, vice president of marketing for Coldwell Banker NRT.

"This is to ease the home buyers' concerns," she said. Job loss "is always a concern for people. Even if it has not happened, it is still in the back of their mind."

Tom O'Rourke, executive for the Cherokee Association of Realtors, said he is hearing from local offices that business has been good this month. The federal program giving first-time home buyers an \$8,000 tax credit is expiring by the end of the year, and O'Rourke said he believes that will fuel more sales over the next few months.

"At this time a year ago, people were telling me how bad it was. Now, they are telling me that things are looking up and getting better every day," he said. "It is nice to hear those words again."

Noel Italo of Keller Williams Realty Platinum Partners said she has noticed a "definite upswing" in people looking and buying.

"If the prices are right, they are going fast," she said about houses for sale in the county.