Opinion: More buyers than sellers in Tahoe housing market

By Robert Stiles

The low supply of housing inventory is giving some economists reason to believe we are in for much bigger price gains this year.

As of Jan. 31, there were 111 active single-family homes on the market in South Lake Tahoe. We haven't seen numbers that low since spring 2005. That's less than a three-month supply of housing inventory. This means that buyers are dominating the market, while there are relatively few sellers.

The tightening in supply is not expected to continue, however. I expect to see a rise in the number of willing sellers, which means inventory will hit a bottom soon.

Twenty-eight percent of the single-family homes sold during the last 90 days were bank owned properties or short sales. At the beginning of 2012 distressed sales accounted for more than half of our local sales.

Some economists are saying we have an artificial increase in housing values, but only time will tell if they are right or wrong.

The yearlong decline in the number of distressed sales as well as housing inventory has stabilized our local market values.

As of Jan. 31, the median sales price for a single-family residential home (per the South Tahoe Association of Realtors) had declined 0.4 percent from $250,000 a year ago to our current $249,000. We hit bottom in August 2012 at $234,000.

Statistics for some of our area neighborhoods: Gardner Mountain area has declined 0.2 percent in value from a year ago. Montgomery Estates is down 12.5 percent, while Y area values are up 35.9 percent from a year ago. For those living in Tahoe Keys, market values have increased 6.7 percent.

Robert Stiles is with Tahoe Real Estate Services.

USFS to pile burn on East Shore

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will begin prescribed fire operations near Logan Shoals on Feb. 6.

Crews expect to burn approximately 2 acres, weather permitting.

Operations will continue through as weather and conditions allow. Operations also continue through the week on Spooner Summit. Crews will burn approximately 10 acres per day, weather permitting.

Residents and visitors can expect to see smoke from these prescribed fire project areas. Smoke may be visible on Highway 50. The Forest Service strives to minimize the impacts of smoke on local communities. Smoke-sensitive residents should consider staying indoors and keeping doors, windows and outside vents closed. To directly receive prescribed fire updates, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Mancuso takes bronze in super G

By USSA

SCHLADMING, Austria – Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) put on a full speed attack through fog, soft snow and deep ruts to win super G bronze on the opening day Tuesday of the FIS Alpine Ski World Championships in Schladming. It was her fifth career World Championships medal and third in super G.

Audi FIS Alpine World Cup overall and super G leader Tina Maze of Slovenia captured gold with Lara Gut of Switzerland silver.

Lindsey Vonn (Vail) crashed about mid-way down the course, suffering a season-ending ACL tear.

“I think that might’ve been one of the most difficult races I’ve ever been in. It was a really long course and a lot of hurry up and wait. I didn’t know I’d be so tired at the end of the run,” Mancuso said.

Alex Hoedlmoeser, women’s head coach, said, “It was amazing how Julia attacked the course knowing that Lindsey had been hurt. She is an amazing professional. No matter what the conditions, she prepares herself for the race and today was a great example. It’s a real credit to her tenacity and ability to adjust to the challenge.”

Truckee implements bike, ski registry

Truckee residents may register their skis, snowboards and bikes with the police department. This way if they are stolen, officers will have a better chance at identifying the property.

People may register equipment online or at the department at 10183 Truckee Airport Road.

For more information, call (530) 550.2323.

Tahoe National Forest going after state money

The U.S. Forest Service will be submitting an annual application to the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division. This application will request funding for trail maintenance, restoration, development of facilities, law enforcement, and planning for off-highway vehicle access.

On Feb. 12, the Forest Service will be hosting an open house from 4-7pm so people and organizations can review the proposals. The event is at the Tahoe National Forest Headquarters, 631 Coyote St., Nevada City.

Questions, comments or letters can be directed to: Joe Chavez, Forest Trails Program Coordinator, Tahoe National Forest, 631

Coyote St., Nevada City, CA 95959; jchavez@fs.fed.us or (530) 478.6158.

Vonn out for season with torn ACL

Updated Feb. 5 2:10pm: According to U.S. Ski Team Medical Director Kyle Wilkens, Lindsey Vonn suffered a torn ACL and MCL in her right knee and a lateral tibial plateau fracture. She will be out for the remainder of this season, but is expected to return to racing for the 2013-14 Audi FIS World Cup season and the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi.

Update Feb. 5 8:05am: CNN reports: Lindsey Vonn suffered a "complex knee injury," according to the hospital where she was taken. Her injuries are not life-threatening, a hospital spokesman said.

By Guardian

Vail's Lindsey Vonn suffered a serious crash in the women's super-G on the opening day of the alpine skiing world championships in Schladming on Tuesday.

The four-times overall World Cup champion, lost balance on her right leg while landing after a jump. Her ski came off immediately, and Vonn slid off course and hit a gate before coming to a standstill.

Vonn received medical treatment on the slope for 12 minutes before being taken to hospital in a helicopter.

The race had been delayed by fog, which forced organisers repeatedly to postpone the scheduled start. It eventually

started three and a half hours later, just before a deadline which would have seen the event postponed for another day.

Vonn had trailed the race leader, Tina Maze of Slovenia, by 0.12 seconds shortly before the incident. The race continued after another 15-minute delay.

Signs welcoming people to Tahoe basin to be installed

By the end of summer there will be signs at three of the seven gateways into the Lake Tahoe Basin to let people know where the watershed boundary is.

Contractors are being sought for the project that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is overseeing.



This is what the signs entering the Lake Tahoe

Basin are likely to look
like. Rendering/Provided

“We have been awarded two grants from Nevada agencies to complete the first phase, which includes all three of the Nevada roadways. We used local designers and engineers to develop the sign design and signage plans and have the necessary permits from NDOT and building departments and are ready to begin construction this spring-summer,” Jeff Cowen, TRPA spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The face of the signs will be 6 feet by 8 feet. While they won’t be made of granite, they must look like they are. There is $12,000 budgeted for each sign.

With funds from the Nevada license plate program helping pay for the signs, an image of the plates will be incorporated into the sign design.

The signs will be east of Tramway Drive on Daggett Summit, east of the Tahoe Rim Trail parking lot on Spooner Summit, and at the entrance to Incline Lakes on Mount Rose Highway.

The goal is to find funding to put signs on the California side, too.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Poll: Americans want government out of their lives

By Aaron Blake, Washington Post

Americans have a very special message for the federal government: Don't tread on me.

That's the takeaway from a new poll from the Pew Research Center in which, for the first time in at least the last two decades, a majority of Americans say Washington actually poses a threat to their "personal rights and freedoms."

And it's not just tea party supporters, Republicans and gun owners.

Nearly two-fifths of Democrats (38 percent) say the government is a threat to them personally, as do 45 percent of non-gun owners.

Overall, the percentage of Americans who view the federal government as a threat has increased from 36 percent in May 1995 to 53 percent today. It rose late in the 1990s and then dropped again after 9/11, down to 30 percent.

Today, most Americans now feel at least somewhat scared of what the government could do to them, and 31 percent see Washington as a "major threat."

This is an important piece of data to keep in mind as Congress debates new gun legislation. While polls show broad support for expanding background checks and limiting the manufacture and sale of certain types of so-called assault weapons, the flip side of that is that many Americans are wary of their government going too far in restricting their constitutional

rights – be it on guns or anything else.

And if gun rights supporters can convince the public (and members of Congress) that the legislation creates a too-powerful federal government that impinges on people's rights and freedoms, they may help reverse their early deficit in the polls.

The American public is very receptive to such a message.

Future farms in U.S. may not include much family

By Jessica Stoller-Conrad, NPR

It may sound like a line from "The Godfather", but some agricultural specialists advise that farming isn't personal; it's business. And family farms need to think and act more like a business to survive in a competitive world, says Bernie Erven, professor emeritus in the department of agricultural economics at Ohio State University.

Last week, Erven spoke to farmers at the Growing Michigan Agriculture Conference about how to improve their practices to recruit, hire and keep the best employees by using modern methods, like social media.

But the message may be a tough sell. Family farms are an iconic American institution, and they make up nearly 96 percent of farms in America, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And it's hard for some folks to hear that the best hire might not be your sister's kid who needs a summer job baling hay.

“If you hire a family member who isn’t qualified, who doesn’t fit the position, and maybe doesn’t even want the position, then it’s … unlikely the person would succeed,” Erven says. “Thus [it’s] not helping the business and not helping the family.”

If family farms don’t approach hiring in a professional way, there are some uncertainties for both the farm and its employees, he says. “[Will] they treat adding employees as a family matter or is it a business decision?” he says.

According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, U.S. farms spend a total of $21.9 billion per year employing 2.6 million hired workers. Streamlining and standardizing hiring processes on family farms could have a significant economic impact.

New outside hiring practices could even help farm families alleviate the expectations of both parents and children. “This argument that you owe it to your children to have a place for them in the farm business, I have trouble with that. Because the other side of that coin is that then your children owe it to you to stay home, even if they don’t want to,” Erven says.

Additionally, a diverse labor force can help boost the farm’s main goal: efficient food production. For example, dairy workers who have experience working with different cattle breeds may bring fresh perspectives and new techniques — additions that can improve farming practices, Erven said.

But pushing the family out of family farms can have disadvantages, too, Jennifer Fahy, communications director at Farm Aid, says in an email. “The family farm is a place where kids grow up and learn responsibility and skills … they’re also learning values and traditions,” she says.

Fahy says that the American farming workforce is aging and in desperate need of young farmers to carry on the tradition. “A major factor in young people being interested in becoming farmers is the exposure they receive on their family’s farm,”

she says. “That process of farmers passing down their life’s work and traditions to the next generations is so important to the fabric of our food production system and culture.”

Farm managers might be able to find the most qualified employees outside of the family, but Fahy says that family tradition is also an important consideration. “There’s something beyond experience and skills at work when a family farmer can involve the next generation,” she says.

Ski report: Wind will be increasing



Wind is likely to be an issue this afternoon.

Here is the Feb. 5 ski report.

— Curtis Fong