

Have you met your new neighbors?

By Bill Bartlett
Correspondent

With very close to 30 real estate closings a month in Sisters that means virtually every day somebody from somewhere else is a new neighbor. Just who are they and from where are they coming? There is no single database per se that is easily accessed that would reveal the information so *The Nugget* has to rely on anecdotal evidence.

Who better to know than the realtors and title companies? We started with Jen McCrystal of Coldwell-Banker Reed Brothers whose current list of shoppers includes two prospective buyers from the Santiam fires, a couple from Leavenworth, Washington, and another from San Mateo, California. Coming from further away are her prospects from North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

Not everybody is from out-of-market. McCrystal says that a fair number of locals are trading close in or downtown properties for more rural spots with more acreage, especially homes that have a barn or space for horses. A few are doing the reverse, downsizing closer to town.

The market is blistering hot, realtors report, and while that translates into higher commissions, they share a concern that Sisters, already unaffordable for most young, working families is going to price those buyers completely out and cement our reputation of being dominated by retirees and empty nesters.

Agents from Cascade Sotheby's International Realty are seeing a few more Bend arrivals — nearly all age 60+ — trading traffic and urbanization for a less hectic life here. Chuck Harper at Keller Williams Zosel-Harper finds Washingtonians and Californians leading the buying surge for higher-end homes. He is still seeing the Willamette Valley being very

key. His agency recently closed with a buyer from New Hampshire.

He too lamented the lack of entry-level homes, agreeing that the market is still favoring older clients with buying power. That is not to say that there are no buyers with school-age children, as evidenced by the recent growth in school enrollment, primarily K-4.

Guy Lauziere at Ponderosa Properties is more optimistic about the demographics and sees them trending down in age with more 40- and 50-somethings moving to Sisters. He is amazed at how many all-cash deals are taking place, especially by buyers from California where they are cashing out of single-family homes with median prices of \$1.2 million, coming to Sisters and paying \$800,000 for a better home, and pocketing the difference.

In the process they are driving up the price of homes in Sisters to the point where discussion of affordable housing is only theoretical.

The short-term rental program instituted by the City at the end of 2018 has curtailed the number of buyers buying up properties as Airbnb investments, Lauziere said.

Tim Kizziar, principal broker at Stellar Realty Northwest, was most definitive in his answer: "Seattle, Portland, the Bay Area, and Bend, in that order."

He, too, is seeing more young families move in looking for an escape from the distress of the cities they are vacating.

"Since the pandemic anybody with job skills and a bit of equity has learned to work from home and there's no going back to the older model," Kizziar said.

Like Lauziere, Kizziar sees metropolitan dwellers run up big gains in their home values and eager to cash them out in favor of the quality of life offered by Sisters, along with

safe schools for their children.

Hayden Homes, who has built some 500 residences in Sisters, is essentially out of inventory, having sold out its Village at Cold Springs development a year ago and having less than a handful left in the current phase of McKenzie Meadows Village. The asking price there for a 1,621 sq. ft. home is \$507,106 or \$312 per square foot — still considered a bargain in a market where the average sales price last month was \$734,000.

Katy Wooderson, marketing director for Hayden Homes, tells *The Nugget*, "We have seen a major majority of interest and homebuyers from within...Oregon, followed by California and Washington... We really see a mix of interested buyers, from first-time homebuyers, those with families, all the way through those who are entering or in retirement."

Shelley Marsh, escrow officer at Western Title & Escrow finds California leading the pack for transplants, but only by a little. Immigration from the 'Valley' is still robust she said but her company services the occasional buyer from the northeast. She is also closing sales for second homes at a steady pace, many from Portland who can reach Sisters in under three hours.

As for emigration: "I am seeing more and more sellers in Sisters head for the east coast and southern states and a good number to Idaho, but none to the Midwest," Marsh said.

She couldn't cite cause.

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Narrative enameling...



PHOTO BY LYNN WOODWARD

Alisa Looney demonstrated her enameling technique outside Hood Avenue Art, to admiring onlookers during last Friday's Art Walk sponsored by the Sisters Arts Association. Looney merges sculpture design and narrative enamels. She loves sharing enameling techniques through workshops in her Bend studio and is currently developing online classes for enamelists.

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