

Local prices for new homes fell in March

Builders cite economic climate for first decrease in over three years

MARIO TONEGUZZI
CALGARY HERALD

Calgary new home prices fell for the first time in more than three years in March, says Statistics Canada.

Sale prices dropped 0.4 per cent from February — the largest decline among major cities and the first retreat since November 2011 — the federal agency reported Thursday, following two months of no movement.

Builders cited current market conditions and promotional prices used to attract sales as the main reasons for the decrease, it said.

On an annual basis, prices were up 2.8 per cent in the Calgary area and 1.2 per cent across the province. The StatsCan new home price index does not include condominiums or apartments, which comprise about one-third of the new real estate market.

“We’ve obviously had some challenging economic conditions, and it’s starting to put downward pressure on pricing because sales activity is a lot lower than what we’ve had,” said Ann-Marie Lurie, chief economist at the Calgary Real Estate Board. “To put some

perspective to it, last year we had price gains over nine per cent,” says Lurie. “It’s really just a matter of how long the cycle will last and what impact it will have moving forward.” A pullback in demand has caused a fall in new home construction, with new housing starts in April down to 777 homes compared to 1,592 home starts in April 2014.

Nick Ford, an economist with ATB Financial, said Calgary’s year-over-year gain was the smallest since November 2012.

“(The) new housing price numbers confirm that even in the face of an economic downturn, Albertans should still have confidence in our province’s housing market,” said Ford.

“Even though new home prices have gone down in Calgary, the decline has been small. Looking ahead, it’s still apparent that home builders see Alberta as a profitable place to conduct business.”

Nationally, the index was unchanged from the previous month but rose by 1.2 per cent from a year ago.

*With files from The Canadian Press
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Devon Bolton, left and Ron Bettin, the founders of Fitneff, demonstrate how their new product WalkTop works at Eighth Avenue Place on Wednesday. *GAVIN YOUNG/CALGARY HERALD*

Treadmill desk lets users walk, work at same time

MARIO TONEGUZZI
CALGARY HERALD

A Calgary company has developed a portable desktop that allows busy executives and other employees to get their exercise while working.

Fitneff has demonstrated its WalkTop product — the brainchild of Queen’s University MBA graduates Ron Bettin, Laurel Walzak and Devon Bolton — this week in the main lobby of the Eighth Avenue Place office towers.

“It’s a portable desk that fits onto a majority of treadmills that are built out there,” said Bettin.

“We knew there had to be a solution for introducing more mobility and activity into people’s busy lives, while still remaining productive.”

Bettin said the Fitneff grew from concept, to design, to prototype testing and its market launch all within 13 months.

“The response has been great. We’ve had buyers in Europe and in Asia already. We’re just getting the first ones out, but we’re really happy the response is exactly what we’re looking for,” he said.

The desk, which can adjust for height and incline, is manufac-

tured in St. Thomas, Ont. It’s now available through specialty retail stores that sell fitness equipment and online at Amazon.com in the U.S. Fitneff also recently signed a deal with Costco.ca to sell its products.

The downtown demonstrations this week are the company’s first foray to reach customers directly.

“The idea of walking and working while you’re doing that is a good idea,” said Jose Zaldivar, an IT worker who tested the WalkTop concept Wednesday morning. “I have my own treadmill at home and I often think wouldn’t it be nice if I could do something at the same time as you’re walking.”

The WalkTop retails for \$479, though current promotions have cut the price to \$349.

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DUO REUNITE TO CREATE NEW DESIGN STUDIO



DAVID PARKER

Bill Kumlin and Barry Sullivan met many years ago when both were working with Cohos Evamy Partners before going their separate ways with other companies. This month, the two reunited to establish Kumlin Sullivan Architecture Studio.

Like many other Calgary architects and interior designers, the pair earned their degrees at the University of Manitoba.

Kumlin first graduated from the architectural technology program at SAIT Polytechnic and then headed to Fort St. John to begin his career working for a design-build general contractor. It was there that he received a well-rounded, hands-on industry experience in drafting, estimating, project management and construction site superintendent.

He then decided to get more education in his field and made the move to the university in Winnipeg.

Returning to Calgary, Kumlin — with his wife Noreen, who remains an integral part of the company looking after its financial management — started his own registered architectural firm, William R. Kumlin, 17 years ago. He never lost touch with his clients in Fort St. John, however, and as a registered architect in that province is a regular visitor to the northern B.C. city where his work is still primarily for his general contractor friend.

In Calgary, Kumlin prospered with a variety of “mixed-bag” projects that included tenant improvement work, small office and industrial design and exterior upgrades to shopping centres.

Places of worship have been of particular interest and Kumlin had the privilege of designing the \$9 million addition to Foothills Alliance Church in Edgemont. Another of his larger projects was a \$12-million chemical plant.

Sullivan came to Calgary in 1992 and since then has worked for many of the same clients as Kumlin.

He gained his experience with Cohos Evamy, John Barlot and Wensley Spotowski before joining Gibbs Gage Architects for



AROUND TOWN

Architects Bill Kumlin and Barry Sullivan have joined forces to create Kumlin and Sullivan Architecture Studio, located in Currie Barracks. *CHRISTINA RYAN/CALGARY HERALD*

14 years. He moved to Kasian Architecture in 2012 where he was a lead architect until his recent partnership with Kumlin Sullivan.

Sullivan has spent a good deal of his time on larger projects, such as the Saddletowne Safeway Centre, South Trail Crossing Shopping Centre, Silverado Shopping Centre, Country Hills and Harvest Hills Superstores, and Oxford’s Airport Business Park.

Out of town he worked on the Foothills Field House in Okotoks as well as the High River field house. Most recently his work

has been on the design of the proposed Hilton Hotel by Prestige Capital on the north side of Airport Trail.

Kumlin Sullivan is in Currie Barracks with a staff of six, though the new entity has big plans to expand and expects to have at least 10 employees by year-end, which might mean searching for a bigger home.

NEWS AND NOTES

Scott Henuset, president of Corkscrew Media, has an air date of June 18 for the showing of his CBC Television performance special featuring Alberta Ballet

and singer-songwriter k.d. lang. His new reality show Ice Racer Showdown will debut on Country Music Television this fall.

Now he’s excited to report his Stir Films division has again been chosen to produce two more Heritage Minutes for Historica Canada.

Stir Films was the first production company to shoot Heritage Minutes in Western Canada. On the topic of the First World War, The First Minute told the story of the Winnipeg Falcons hockey team and the second, released earlier this week, tells the story of Canada’s Nursing Sisters.

Brent Kawchuk, vice-president and executive producer of Stir Films, says: “In our business we tell great stories all the time, and it’s a privilege to further our craft while creating stories that share Canada’s history.”

Themes for the two new significant moments in Canadian history are a tight secret, but Kawchuk says they will both be shot in and around Calgary.

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