

Home Sales Continue to Improve

BOSTON (AP)—Sales of single-family homes in Massachusetts shot up by about 17 percent in October when compared to the same month last year, but the median price continued to slide down.

The Massachusetts Association of

Realtors and The Warren Group in reports released Nov. 24 attributed the fourth consecutive month of increased home sales when compared year to year to the federal first-time homebuyer tax credit that was set to expire at the end of the month, but has since been extended and expanded.

Officials with both organizations say the increased sales, coupled with extension of the credit, is evidence that the housing market is recovering.

The median price of a single-family home dropped nearly 3 percent when compared to October 2008 according to both organizations.

New Jackie Kennedy Dress on Display at JFK Library

BOSTON (AP)—A deep pink silk dress worn by Jacqueline Kennedy for her second holiday season in the White House has gone on display at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston.

The first lady wore the dress to the White House staff Christmas reception on Dec. 12, 1962. The sleeveless dress by designer Hubert de Givenchy is simple in front, with

twists of drapery and a bow on the back.

The Marine Band and singing groups from the Air Force, Army and Navy entertained the 1,200 party guests. A 16-foot Christmas tree was decorated with toys, candy canes and gingerbread houses.

The museum is open year-round except on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.

Massachusetts Streamlines Renewable Energy Efforts

BOSTON (AP)—Gov. Deval Patrick signed a bill designed to streamline the state's push for renewable energy.

The new law transfers the state's Renewable Energy Trust to the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, creating a single agency responsible for encouraging the development of renewable energy technologies.

The Clean Energy Center was created by the state's 2008 Green Jobs Act. Its main job is to support

research, entrepreneurship, and job training using money from the energy trust.

The center has issued \$4 million in job training grants and is helping develop the nation's largest wind turbine blade testing facility near Boston Harbor.

The renewable energy trust is funded by a small charge on monthly bills of electric utility customers that generates up to \$25 million a year.

Hoping to Push Locally Grown Christmas Trees

LUNENBERG, Mass. (AP)—When it comes to finding that perfect Christmas tree, Massachusetts officials have two words for holiday revelers: shop local.

Agricultural Resources Commissioner Scott Soares, joined by local lawmakers, is planning to drive home the point by wielding an ax and chopping down a tree from Pierce's Tree Farm in Lunenburg.

The tree farm is one of 280 in Massachusetts and state officials are hoping to give the farms a boost by encouraging those celebrating the Christmas holiday to buy their trees from local growers.

Officials say there's plenty of variety too, from fir trees to pines and spruces.

Gov. Patrick Signs Fishing Registration Law

BOSTON (AP)—Gov. Deval Patrick has signed a law requiring state licenses for saltwater fishing in Massachusetts.

The Department of Fish and Game will propose an individual permit fee of \$10 to take effect in January. The revenue will be deposited in the state's Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund.

The federal government is requiring the registries as a means of measuring non-commercial fishing activity on the nation's coasts. If states don't create their own programs, the federal government will require anglers to register online or by telephone for a free from \$15 to \$25.

Some critics question the need for a permit to fish in the ocean and have also raised privacy concerns. And they say they suspect low initial fees will be raised once fishermen are registered.

Mass. Announces Convention Center Expansion Plan

BOSTON (AP)—State officials have announced plans to double the size of the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, even though they have not said how they will finance the project.

The plan calls for a 400,000-square-foot exhibit hall behind the main center, a new 1,000-room hotel, a 5,000-seat auditorium, and a 65,000- to 75,000-square-foot ballroom.

The Massachusetts Convention Center Authority does not own much of the adjoining land on which it plans to build, nor have state officials determined how to pay for a project that could cost \$1 billion.

Convention center authority Executive Director James Rooney says the expansion is needed to make Boston a top meeting destination. Rooney says the city has lost bids to host conventions because the current facility is inadequate.

Northern New England Launches Ski Season

AUGUSTA, Maine (AP)—As the economy lurches toward recovery, northern New England's ski industry is viewing the upcoming season with optimism, saying the amount of snow nature sends the region is a much bigger factor in determining how well the ski areas fare.

Improvements continued through the off-season at the three states' resorts, although not on a scale as when times are better. Like other businesses, the ski areas are finding new ways to feed their patrons' enthusiasm while being creative in luring potential schussers in.

New Hampshire ski areas, for example, are sending out text messages on the latest deals and promotions.

Ski areas are also banking on their proximity to bulging eastern markets that are within a day's drive of resorts in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, hoping to draw skiers who might hop on a jet in better times and wing it to slopes in the West.

"At the end of the day, it all comes down to snow," said Parker Riehle, president of the Vermont Ski Areas Association. Historically, when the snow is abundant, the ski areas do well, he said.

That's borne out as well in New Hampshire, where an all-time high as measured by skier visits was recorded two years ago. But even after the economy tanked last season, enough skiers showed up to give the industry its third-best winter, thanks in large part to the plentiful snowfall, said Karl Stone, marketing director for Ski New Hampshire.

"If it snows, it seems like we're doing pretty good," said Stone.

In Maine, the severe recession last winter sent many skiers and boarders to the smaller, family-friendly ski areas for which the state is known, said Greg Sweetser, executive director of the Ski Maine Association. While skier visits were down 2 percent in the state last season, Maine gained a little of New England's market share, Sweetser added.

Nationally, the outlook is positive, said Troy Hawks of the National Ski Areas Association. The industry drew 57.4 skier visits last winter even as the recession raged, accounting for the fourth-best season on record, NSSA said. Hawks said a lot of it has to do with the nature of skiers and snowboarders.

"People are passionate about skiing and riding. They still seek the sport out. It's really a lifestyle they choose," said Hawks. "Even during a poor economy, the ski industry holds up well."

Skier enthusiasm isn't everything. While ski areas try to outdo each other by opening first and strive to kick off

their seasons by Thanksgiving, it's the back end of the season that's more critical to success, said Vermont's Riehle.

"In terms of any karma with the snow gods, I would gladly trade a Thanksgiving opening for a strong March," Riehle said.

With money tight, ski areas are concentrating mostly on improved snowmaking and grooming, with trails added on some mountains in the region. In Maine, a new 44-acre gladed area been added at Saddleback in Rangeley, and a new trail's been added from the peak at Shawnee in Bridgton.

Special night skiing dates are being introduced at Mount Abram in Greenwood. Sugarloaf in Carrabassett Valley and Sunday River in Newry improved their hotels.

In New Hampshire, skiers who want to stay up to date on the latest deals and promotions can sign up to receive text messages from "Moe Snow," a bouncing blue snowball character created by Ski NH and the state's tourism department. The marketing campaign includes a Web site, Facebook fan page and Twitter feed with

such tongue-in-cheek postings such as "If a lizard can sell insurance, then a snowball can type!"

Gunstock in Gilford, which is completing a two-year \$3 million expansion, has a new quad chairlift along with two new trails and two extended trails. Pats Peak in Henniker has a new lift-serviced terrain park. Cannon Mountain in Franconia Notch has been improving its Notchview and Peabody Base lodges.

In Vermont, a new Tram Haus Lodge at Jay Peak is scheduled to open in February. It will have 57 studio, one- and two-bedroom suites, a new restaurant, small coffee shop and bar.

At Middlebury Snow Bowl, a 40-year-old Worth Mountain double chair has been replaced with a fixed-grip triple.

Stratton Mountain added freestyle terrain and Sugarbush in Warren added 75 acres of wooded terrain.

Key Web sites to check for additional information: Ski Maine Association: www.skimaaine.com, Ski New Hampshire: www.skinh.com, Vermont Ski Areas Association: www.skivermont.com.

Defunct Theater Has Buyer

BEVERLY, Mass. (AP)—A Rhode Island theater owner plans to buy the defunct North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly and reopen for performances by spring.

William Hanney tells The Salem News he has signed a purchase and sales agreement with Citizens Bank to buy the property and expects to close the deal soon. Citizens bought the theater at auction last month for \$3.6 million.

The 54-year-old facility went out of

business in June under \$10 million in debt. The property, including 26 acres and three buildings, is assessed at \$12 million.

The city has scheduled a hearing for Dec. 10 on a request by Hanney to continue to operate the property as a theater.

Hanney owns Theatre by the Sea in the Matunuck section of South Kingstown, R.I., as well as 10 cinemas across New England.

MassEcon Creates Web Listing of Business Sites

BOSTON (AP)—The Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development has created a Web site listing over 70 market-ready sites around the state to promote expansion opportunities for businesses.

The registry is aimed at letting both in- and out-of-state companies that Massachusetts has a ready inventory of properties available.

The Web address is www.massecon.com/readymass.


Gov. Deval Patrick unveiled the site at the Sixth Annual Team Massachusetts Economic Impact Awards.

MassEcon was founded in 1993. It's a private, non-profit partnership of business, industry and government focused on fostering economic growth in the state.

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