

# Home buyers' interest perking

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SANTA CRUZ — It's true, there is more than warm sunshine brightening the local real estate scene.

Low interest rates and good weather are bringing out the lookers, according to agents. There are even some buyers.

A state real estate trade group reported Thursday that home sales in California rose for the third consecutive month in January. There was a decline in the Monterey Bay region in January over December 1991, but those figures reflect combined Monterey and Santa Cruz county numbers.

Local real estate agents say that pent-up demand is starting to bust loose, particularly in the lower price ranges, which in this county means from about \$200,000 to \$300,000.

"There is a lot of activity," said George Graf, an agent in Scotts

Please see HOME — A10

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## Home sales

Continued from Page A1

Valley. "Interest rates have got people looking."

Howard Allen, president of the Santa Cruz Association of Realtors, said he believes consumer confidence is picking up, perhaps a reflection of the recent rains that put a dent in the drought. Now the current good weather is making people feel less anxious, he said.

"I've seen a pick-up in the lower end of the market since the first of the year," said Allen, who added, "It's not rocketing by any means."

Statewide, sales were 11.4 percent higher in January than a year ago on an annualized basis, according to the California Association of Realtors. Sales in the San Francisco Bay Area and Santa Clara County were up sharply, the association reported.

Locally, sales were a little less than 3 percent higher this January than last, according to figures gathered by the local association of Realtors.

"I've talked to people who've been on the fence," Allen said. "They've been waiting for the right time to buy and they're starting to call."

In Watsonville, Brenda Wood thinks the good weather has a lot to do with a recent surge in activity. "It's the green grass and blue skies," she said. Wood, who is president of the Watsonville Association of Realtors, said she sent 16 copies by fax to parties interested in a piece of land she has listed.

Now that interest rates have ticked up a bit, more prospective buyers have jumped into the market," Wood said. Rates rose in the second half of January.

Leslie Appleton-Young, the state Realtors' vice president of research and economics, said she expects February's numbers will show continued improvement in the market because January sales were negotiated before December's drop in interest rates. However, she cautioned that "low consumer confidence will likely restrain significant improvement in California's housing market over the near term."

It's still a buyer's market, said Wood, as prices are coming down slightly. The average price of home sold in January was \$265,556, down 2 percent from a year earlier, according to Mary O'Keefe, executive

### Local home sales

Here are statistics of sales of existing single-family homes on less than one acre in Santa Cruz County.

Period	Sales	Avg. price
Jan. 1990	80	\$249,769
Jan. 1991	74	\$271,416
Jan. 1992	76	\$265,556
1990	1,427	\$256,380
1991	1,417	\$262,954

Santa Cruz Association of Realtors

director of the Santa Cruz Association of Realtors. That is 6.3 percent higher than the average figure reported in January 1990.

The state association reported the median price from homes sold in the Monterey Bay Area was \$244,830. Median is the midpoint where half the homes are more expensive and half are less. Statewide, the median fell from \$196,950 in December to \$195,420 in January but was up from \$189,490 in January last year.