

The National Association of Realtors®, “The Voice for Real Estate,” is America’s largest trade association, representing more than 1.3 million members involved in all aspects of the residential and commercial real estate industries.

**Remarks by Pat V. Combs
2008 NAR Immediate Past President
Coldwell Banker Schmidt Awards Dinner
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Introduction

Thomas Edison once said, “Many of life’s failures are people who didn’t know how close they were to success when they gave up.”

While many other real estate markets across the country only recently began to see a decline in home sales this, those of us here in Michigan have been experiencing a down cycle for several years due to heavy job losses.

In this kind of market, you have two choices: give up, or stay positive and work harder. And, I am proud to be here with you tonight as we recognize those who worked hard and stayed positive, despite all of the challenges we face.

You have proven that if you are the best at what you do, you can succeed in any kind of market. Thank you for inspiring us.

Let me take just a few minutes to explain how NAR is helping us all stay positive and help build confidence and grow our businesses in the current environment.

Reaching Consumers

NAR is giving us some new resources to help us reach out to consumers here in Michigan and explain why real estate is still one of the best investments around.

Surround Sound Strategy

First, we are implementing a “surround-sound” strategy that will help us generate positive news stories about opportunities in the real estate market.

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This strategy is aimed at bringing homebuyers who are currently on the fence back into the housing market.

In February, we will have a new toolkit available on realtor.org for all state and local associations. These kits will contain messages for specific markets, letters to the editor and tips on how to pitch stories to the local media and reach out to community organizations. They also will include NAR research and news releases that highlight positive trends consumers may not be aware of.

For example, here in Grand Rapids, we know that prices have been declining in recent quarters. But, what consumers do not know is that many homes are now under-priced. That means home prices are now more affordable than ever.

In fact, the average home price in Michigan is low compared to the national median home price. Construction also has fallen sharply, helping to limit excess inventory – another bright note.

Low mortgage rates and affordable home prices are a good combination for home sales. That means NOW is a great time for someone to buy a home here in Grand Rapids and build wealth.

We can use this information and other resources provided in the toolkits to explain what is really happening in the market. The more consumers we can reach with our message, the more business we can generate.

Public Awareness Campaign

Another great resource we can use to reach consumers is NAR’s popular Public Awareness Campaign, which is now in its eleventh year.

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This year’s campaign features new national radio and television spots. The campaign has always focused on the value of hiring a REALTOR®, but this year our ads also emphasize the value of becoming a homeowner.

The 2008 ads counter some of the recent negative national media reports by highlighting the facts about housing as a primary way families can build wealth.

As always, we have provided additional print and online materials that you can customize for your local real estate markets. But this year’s campaign also directs consumers to a new Web Site – www.HousingMarketFacts.com. This site provides more information about the benefits and value of owning a home, identifies important public policy issues and includes direct links to different sections of Realtor.com.

I encourage you all to check it out and send potential clients there, too. The information is first-rate. For more information, just visit www.realtor.org/awarenesscampaign.

Local Market Reports

NAR’s Research department also provides some excellent resources to help REALTORS® reach out to consumers here in Michigan and explain what is happening in the market.

For example, did you know that you can find home price and economic information on your region and metro area online at www.realtor.org/marketreports?

That’s right – I recently spent some time looking at the Grand Rapids Analysis. Reports on the Lansing and Detroit Regions also are available online. Each one contains valuable insights from the experts at NAR on what is happening with home sales, prices, job growth and other economic factors.

It’s a great tool that can help you provide better guidance to both buyers and sellers.

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The Research Department also provides a wealth of reports and studies that can tell us exactly what consumers are looking for in a home and what they expect from us, including our homebuyer and seller survey and the popular cost versus value report.

You can find all of this information at www.realtor.org/research.

Legislative Update

Second, NAR is working with lawmakers to help restore confidence in the real estate market and protect consumers.

We achieved a major victory for consumers caught in costly mortgages, when President Bush signed the Mortgage Cancellation Tax Relief Act in December. I am proud to say that our Senator, Debbie Stabenow, was the lead sponsor of this bill in the Senate. Her support is a credit to our successful advocacy here in Michigan.

NAR also is helping to make affordable financing available to potential buyers through landmark FHA Reform. We expect this bill will go to conference early this year.

President Bush recently signed a bill that continues the Terrorism Risk Insurance Program for seven years.

And, for the first time ever, Congress also passed a two-year moratorium on banks entering the real estate business, which will take effect early next year. We also have record support for a permanent ban through the Community Choice in Real Estate Act.

Thanks to our success in 2007, REALTORS® are in a prime position to succeed on many other key priorities in 2008, including GSE Reform, Flood Insurance Reform, Natural Disaster Reform, Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Mortgage Reform.

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Once again, I thank all of you who participated in our political advocacy efforts through RPAC and grassroots, and I encourage you to stay involved this year.

In 2008, the RPAC fundraising goal is \$10 million. That’s a lofty goal, and we can not simply rely on those who have given before. If you haven’t donated yet, please do so early. And talk to your members about the important of participating in our advocacy efforts – through both RPAC and grassroots.

Explain to them how our legislative success impacts their bottom line and their reputation as the voice for consumers in the transaction. If they understand how they benefit, they will participate.

Second Century Initiatives

Finally, NAR is helping give us an edge over the competition with some exciting new programs that will carry REALTORS® into the next century.

As you know, this past May, NAR’s Board of Directors approved funding for 13 bold initiatives that will help us achieve our goals over the long-term. We are calling them the Second Century Initiatives, and in 2008, NAR will focus on four of them.

First, NAR will seek to build a direct relationship with the consumer.

Consumers share our interests – in the transaction and on key public policy issues. Imagine the difference we could make, if the Voice for Real Estate spoke for 10 million consumers – in addition to our nearly 1.4 million members. As part of our enhanced outreach, NAR is working on a consumer web site. And we will improve REALTOR.com.

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Second, NAR will create a new technology venture that will give us a seat at the table in Silicon Valley. Called Second Century Ventures, it will enable us to work with investors to create technology that benefits our industry and is owned by our members.

Third, NAR is working to create a National Real Estate Gateway. The Gateway will include information about every parcel of property in the U.S.

Finally, after close to two years of study, member survey, and due diligence, NAR’s Board of Directors voted to submit a plan to charter a new REALTORS® Federal Credit Union and provide initial funding.

This credit union will be a fully independent, credit union member-owned legal entity. Its groundbreaking, internet delivery system will offer 24/7/365 access, and it is being designed to meet the unique personal and business financial services needs of REALTORS® and their families.

Rest assured, we have spoken directly with members of Congress, and this initiative will not impact our efforts to keep banks out of the real estate business. In fact, nearly every government agency, as well as the U.S. Congress, has a credit union. This is simply another member benefit.

We will keep you posted on all of these initiatives in the months ahead.

Conclusion

Martha Washington once said, “The greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our disposition, not our circumstances.”

NAR gives us the resources we need, but it’s up to each and every one of us to focus on the positive opportunities in the market, not the negative headlines. At the end of the day, we all have the strength to succeed – no matter what happens in the market.

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Thank you, again, and congratulations to all!