

Home values up in district

Data shows home prices are rising.

District's levy problems caused problems for housing market.

By Lisa Knodel
Contributing Writer

MORROW — Eight consecutive levy defeats took a toll on property values in the Little Miami Local School District.

"We received many phone calls from prospective home buyers before the levy passed. They knew home prices were lower in our district, but they were also concerned about the quality of education for their children and whether they were making a wise investment by purchasing in Little Miami," said Superintendent Greg Power.

Little Miami even received phone calls about which surrounding districts offered open enrollment from house hunters who hoped to get the best of both worlds — low home values in Little Miami and more educational offerings with fewer fees at a nearby school, he said.

Power said although the housing market recovery isn't his area of expertise, he knows more families are choosing Little Miami to educate their students. Enrollment is expected to increase by 300 students for the 2012-2013 school year — the first year of enrollment growth since the district fell into fiscal emergency.

"The condition of a school district has a huge impact on property values," said Monica Blake, a sales associate with Sibcy Cline Northeast. "Typically, the buyers' No. 1 criteria is that they want to be in a good school district. I hear this even from buyers that do not have children. They are concerned about resale value in the future."

Blake said when the district made cuts, clients contacted her hoping to sell their homes and move to another school district.

"When severe cuts were made to the curriculum, pay-to-play was initiated and busing was minimized, I had several people contact me immediately about selling their homes, as they were concerned about their children's future education at Little Miami," she recalled. "However, many residents were not able to sell their homes due to the declining property values; between the levy failure and the housing crisis, Little Miami's home values plummeted."

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Interest in area is returning

Little Miami

continued from A1

Data from the Cincinnati Multiple Listing Service (MLS) indicate home values are rising in the district since passage of a levy last fall and the subsequent restoration of services.

Average home prices in the district fell steadily from \$182,612 in 2009 to \$179,589 in 2010 to \$168,601 in 2011.

However, both average and median sale prices appear to be on the rise.

In fact, average home sales increased nearly \$20,000 from the first quarter of 2012 to the second quarter, growing

from \$165,273 to \$183,769. Median sale prices appear to have rebounded to 2010 values.

Warren County real estate agents Elizabeth and Bill Spear of RE/MAX Elite said while the year's first quarter data didn't show expected gains, the second quarter provided a much clearer indication that recovery is underway. Values for the second quarter either exceeded or matched 2010 values, and the average sales price mirrored 2009 values.

"This response aligns with what we're seeing with our Little Miami School District homes for sale," Elizabeth Spear said. "For instance, our two Michel's Farm listings have been getting plenty of activity and one even went under contract in 17 days."

The Spears said prior to passage of the levy, sellers were concerned about

how the district's situation would impact their attempts at selling their home, while home buyers were hesitant to consider purchasing in a district in turmoil.

The couple also tracked MLS data back to 2005 and compared number of homes sold, average sales prices and median home prices in the Little Miami, Lebanon, Kings and Mason school districts prior to levy passage.

They found that the quantity of homes sold in Little Miami had dropped by nearly a third, the average sales price by 18 percent and the median sales price by 14 percent. At the same time, sales prices had dropped in other districts but not as severely and had begun recovering and gaining during 2011 while Little Miami homes continued to lose value.

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HOME SALES

2009: 467 homes sold for an average price of \$182,612

2010: 416 homes sold for an average price of \$179,589

2011: 434 homes sold for an average price of \$168,601

2012 (1Q): 95 homes sold for an average price of \$165,273

2012 (2Q): 129 homes sold for an average price of \$183,769

Source: Cincinnati MLS