

Fort Worth's condos 'holding own' in national economy

BY ALESHIA HOWE

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Developers of downtown Fort Worth's The Tower have just made it easier to feel the breeze at 375 feet.

As of last month, the last two available units at The Tower – both penthouses – have reduced pricing.

Michael Yarrito is a broker with Garrison Partners Realty, which is handling the leasing for The Tower's developer, TLC Realty Advisors. Yarrito said the prices were lowered in June for a quicker sale.

“These are the last two units left in the building from the developer and they've lowered the prices to provide a great opportunity to somebody to purchase these great units,” Yarrito said.

Yarrito said both penthouses have seen a lot of traffic in recent months.

The condos, 4,000 square feet and 5,580 square feet, are listed at a reduced per square foot price of \$266 and \$291, respectively.

Yarrito said the 4,000-square-foot condo would require an additional \$50 to \$100 per square foot finish-out.

“We think these are priced very competitively for this market and we are sure they will be snatched up,” Yarrito said. “There are only four condos at this height in all of Fort Worth.”

Andy Taft, president of Downtown Fort Worth Inc., said The Tower's lowered price isn't a negative indicator for the downtown condo market.

“Clearly if they have not sold them then the asking price is higher than the market is willing to pay, so now they're offering them at a price the market is willing to bear, which is exactly what you would expect a developer to do,” Taft said.

According to Nasser Haghghat, director of research at Downtown Fort Worth Inc., there are currently 814 condominium units in downtown with an additional 197, including the Omni and Villa de Leon, set to come online by 2010.

Haghighat reports that according to Downtown Fort Worth Inc. findings, downtown condominium sales price per square foot has ranged from the \$220s to the \$240s since 2004.

Taft said downtown condo sales numbers are “holding their own, even while the national condo market is getting very sluggish.

“Going forward, there will be a new wave of higher-end condo units delivered to the market,” Taft said, mentioning the \$300 plus per square foot projects. “At that price range the market is untested, but [Villa de Leon and Omni] developers tell me that pre-sales are encouraging.”

Taft added price per square foot depends largely on intangibles such as the height of the unit and view from the unit.

For a different take on downtown condominium living, the Omni Fort Worth Hotel will offer up 89 high-rise residences on floors 16 through 33 of its posh building currently under construction on the 1300 block between Houston and Throckmorton streets. Deven Barry, sales director for 1301 Throckmorton, Omni Residences, said 30 of the 89 residences are available in the Omni, which is set for completion in January 2009.

Barry said the Omni condominiums range from 1,800 square feet to 4,500 square feet and price per square foot ranges from \$465 for mid-level residences to more than \$550 per square foot for penthouses. Barry added there are only two of the original seven penthouses available and all penthouses on the structure’s top floor have been sold.

“We’re having a great summer so far,” Barry said. “Interest is high.”

Villa de Leon is downtown’s third condo project currently under way atop the bluff overlooking the Trinity River on the northern boundary of downtown Fort Worth. Scheduled for completion in 2009, the six-story condominium complex is being built by Fort Worth Developer Tom Struhs and will feature 23 high-end custom units with two or three bedrooms.

The development will include a spa, underground parking and sweeping views of the river. Residences range from 1,122 square feet to 4,586 square feet and sales prices range from \$786,000 to \$2.2 million according to Struhs. The average price per square foot is \$412.

Struhs said of the 23 units, five are currently under contract and one sale is pending.

“[Villa de Leon is] a high-end development and it will be comparable to The Tower and The Omni products,” he said. “Some people will want to live in a high rise over a hotel or in Sundance Square and some are going to want to live on a bluff overlooking the river, but still be in downtown. That’s just a choice we are offering right now in downtown – we’ve got something for everybody.”

Contact Howe at ahowe@bizpress.net