

SOUND OFF

“This is your opportunity to express your feelings, concerns, and opinions about any Real Estate Issues. No names or swearing will be allowed. We do not want to offend anyone visiting our website. So, go ahead, yell, scream, and holler – in writing!”

Deborah

Send to: soundoff@realestateagentsarepeople2.com

HOMEOWNERS' INSURANCE ISSUE

I am awaiting an article written by members of ACT II – All Churches Together. The Homeowners' insurance organization is spearheaded by the CBCCO, which is the Coastal Baldwin Churches Community Organization. They are faith-based community organizers who focus on issues that cause pain in our community. CBCCO is one of eight or nine such organizations within Baldwin County, AL, allied in a federation known as ACT II. Quite a number of churches are members of one or more of these community organizations. Their sponsor is Ecumenical Ministries (EMI) in Fairhope, which provides them with professional assistance.

January 28th, 2009

I attended my first meeting with ACT II in Baldwin County, Alabama last night regarding the Homeowners' Insurance Initiative and I was very impressed. This organization is determined to confront the Homeowners' Insurance Issue head on, with skill and careful research. The members that I met last night impressed me with their faith, their wisdom and their desire to help our community become united in order to make the changes that are needed. From my point of view as a Realtor, the issue of the Homeowners' Insurance has two effects – one to my job as a Realtor and one as a homeowner in Baldwin County, AL. I realize that this is not just “our” problem; it is spreading across the country as we speak. With State Farm Insurance's announcement that they will be pulling

their Homeowners' Insurance out of Florida, I fear that this and the ensuing reactions from other Insurance companies will continue the downward spiral of our Housing industry. This country will not come out of our downturn without the Mortgage and Insurance issues resolved. And we can come out of this "Recession". But, it will take all of us working together towards that goal.

As a working Realtor, my biggest challenge is to find a Buyer qualified for a mortgage – only to turn around and have their Homeowners' insurance quote throw that Buyer right back out of their loan approval. When you are dealing with adding an additional \$200+/monthly to your house payment – it becomes a major problem. Even with real estate prices and mortgage interest rates at record lows, if the potential Buyers can't afford to buy, then you are going nowhere! And the only way we will get the attention we need to bring down the prices for Homeowners' Insurance will be through a combination of things:

1. Numbers carry weight. If our elected representatives see that we are truly together in our desires and our determination, we can get results. Our representatives work for us – we elect them. You can and will make a difference in their next election! Let them know how you feel, write letters, call, write articles/letters to the editor in your local newspapers. Show up in large numbers to get their attention at local meetings/town hall meetings. We tend to become enthusiastic about a cause until we get bored with it or find another cause to take its place. **DO NOT GIVE UP ON THIS HOMEOWNERS' INSURANCE ISSUE.** It will not go away; it will not get better without your organized efforts to deal with it, now!
2. Educate yourself. Know the facts about your cause. Attend a meeting of ACT II – find out what they are all about and how they intend to help YOU. That's right, they are here to help YOU!
3. Follow through. I believe you will certainly remember this cause when your next Homeowners' Insurance Bill comes due. Don't wait till then – act now! Become involved.

If you would like more information about the organization known as ACT II, please call Stan Virden @251-967-4287, 251-209-1984 - or email Stan @ vivahaus@gulftel.com.

Website: www.hhii.com

February 1st, 2009

Last night I attended Senator Richard Shelby's "Listening Session" at 5 Rivers on the Causeway. It was an open forum where anyone was allowed to ask questions. I accompanied members of ACT II (to listen and learn) – who attended so that they could discuss with Senator Shelby the topic of Homeowners' Insurance in Baldwin County, AL. The Senator listened, but I'm not sure he understood what was being asked. He kept referring back to the Flood Insurance Issue. His goal is to spread out the cost of Flood Insurance along the entire south and east coasts of the U.S. in order to make it more affordable. I have no problem paying for Flood Insurance – it is affordable now. My problem is the Wind coverage with my Homeowners' Policy. As of May, All State Insurance has informed me they will no longer carry Wind coverage. And the last quote I received for Homeowners' Insurance was well over \$3,500 for a non-waterfront home! If Baldwin County brings in such a huge amount of tax revenue to Alabama (well over 25%), why can't we spread the cost of our Wind coverage across the state? Don't all the other counties in Alabama benefit from the money our county puts into the State coffers? As a resident of Baldwin County, I am afraid that if our Insurance Issue is not addressed and solved, you will eventually see only the wealthy able to afford property in our area. Where will the people who service the condos, restaurants and stores live – the people who keep this economy going? They will not be able to afford to live in Baldwin County. The latest quotes on Homeowners' Insurance will be the final death knell for many who are already struggling to pay for their homes and stay out of foreclosure. The point I'm trying to make is this – I am all for the American way – I applaud anyone who can make a profit fairly – God Bless them! Especially in our current economy! But do the Insurance companies have to make so much

from us that they literally put us out of our homes? And can't the rest of the citizens of Alabama help Baldwin County stay the premier Resort Area for the state by spreading out the cost of our insurance across the state as well as still benefiting from the money we bring to the State?

I want to hear your opinions on this subject and more.

Email me at: soundoff@realestateagentsarepeople2.com

February 9th, 2009

I attended Governor Riley's "State Of The State" luncheon today and I was very encouraged by the first subject the Governor opened his speech with – Homeowners' Insurance in Baldwin County, Alabama. Governor Riley spoke the same words I've posted on this subject – that all the residents of Alabama benefit from the revenue created by Baldwin County's economy – and will also benefit by the handling of our Homeowners' Insurance Issue. He said rates are coming down. He also stated that Senator Trip Pittman and our other representatives from Baldwin County are working with the Governor's office constantly on addressing and formulating ideas on how to get this issue under control and make our Homeowners' Insurance more affordable. The Governor stated that he was recently presented with four possible scenarios on how to solve our Insurance crisis. I do not know what these scenarios are, but I am anxious to hear and see the ideas.

Now, I have not seen or heard of any of the Homeowners' Insurance rates in our area dropping as of yet. I gladly anticipate the announcement that they will – and will continue to follow the news as it happens. In the meantime, I will try to keep the subject open for our readers to comment on. Please send your comments to:

soundoff@realestateagentsarepeople2.com

March 7, 2009

I accompanied the ACT II organization to meet w/Senator Pittman, following a meeting with Representative Steve McMillan a few days before. Senator Pittman and Representative McMillan have called for citizens of Baldwin County to appear in Montgomery on Wednesday, March 11th in the House of Representatives to give testimony before a Legislative Insurance Committee that is considering several new insurance bills: consult alisondb.legislature.state.al.us/acas/ACASLoginMac.asp?SESSION=null. March 11th is set aside to hear stories of our Homeowner's Insurance Issue – and it is an issue – on how the rate hikes, loss of wind coverage and higher deductibles are negatively affecting our lives, work, economy. You can attend with an organization, as an individual, speak or simply appear for a show of numbers. This is our opportunity to really let our State Government see the faces of the people and we will become more than just numbers. If you want to help w/carpooling or need a ride, contact Michelle Kurtz @251-928-3430. If you can't attend, but would like to have your story heard, please send it by email it to: blindog@bellsouth.net

March 11, 2009

I just got back late this afternoon from a trip to Montgomery – to testify before the Banking & Insurance Committee about Baldwin and Mobile Counties Homeowners' Insurance Crisis. I sat in the Senate House and after I gave testimony from my point of view, as a Realtor and a resident in Baldwin County, Alabama, I listened to 2 ½ hours of testimony. We heard heartbreaking stories of loss or threat of loss of homes from several elderly people who broke down in tears, a Habitat for Humanity spokesperson spoke about their clients who have already lost or are facing loss of their homes because of the increase in insurance rates, homeowners who are taking out reverse mortgages to pay for their homeowners insurance - and many more. We heard over 30 concerned citizens testify – and you could have heard a pin drop in the large room. It was dramatic and real. Senator Pittman, Senator Ben Brooks, Representative

McMillan and other southern Alabama district legislatures are all working on our behalf to bring rates down. They are fighting a big battle and an even bigger adversary – the Insurance Industry! Our representatives have introduced several bills to help bring our Homeowners Insurance rates down – but they warn it will take time. Let's all pray that they can move quickly and they can help us avoid more losses of our neighbors' homes to foreclosure and short sale. I fear we are in for a long fight – but at least the first “bricks” are being laid. It is the first positive step anyone in our area has seen!

March 13, 2009

I received this email today, following a phone call from a very upset woman who has just been hit by the Homeowners' Insurance issue – for a second time. This woman “says it all” about our homeowners' insurance issue!

I am so thankful I found your website. In 2007 Allstate Insurance dropped my homeowner's policy because I live south of Hwy 98 in Baldwin County. I live ONE BLOCK south of 98! ONE BLOCK! At the time, I thought "no problem I'll find insurance anywhere" NOT SO. I called everyone in the phone book with no luck. I finally found coverage through a company who charged me \$4200.00 a year for wind/hail coverage. My house payment went up \$300.00 a month! We had to sell some of our possessions just to make our house payment. Our house was built in 2003. When we bought it, we never thought insurance could cause us to almost lose our home. After a year with this company we could no longer afford this insurance. I found a company that saved us quite a bit of money, Lloyd's of London. I was so happy that we could afford our home once more. Yesterday I got a letter in the mail saying that Lloyd's was 'non-renewing' our policy. Once again I don't know where to turn. I have spent all day today on the phone trying to find insurance. No one will cover me because of where I live. I suppose I will have to go to the "beach pool" which terrifies me. If we do not have wind/hail coverage we will lose our home because our mortgage says

we have to have coverage. How are we supposed to have that coverage, when NO ONE WILL INSURE US? We have excellent credit. We have never missed a house payment. But we might lose our home because of insurance?

I'm so thankful I found this website! I only wish I knew about the trip to Montgomery, so I could have gone with you all. I don't know what we are going to do. I have made phone calls to Montgomery and our Governor and Congressmen. I have even been on WKRG channel 5 about the insurance crisis.

I am terrified.

Nancy N.

Nancy – contact the organization ACT II (All Churches Together) – they are working on convincing our legislatures to help us in lowering our Homeowners' insurance rates - I'll email you're their contact number. They are a “bulldog” group of well organized, Christian citizens who care about all of us and are determined to make a difference! I am so sorry for your stress – all who live in Baldwin and S. Mobile counties understand. At this time, the Wind/Beach Pool is about the only option. Many are facing the same problem – and I'm afraid more will be receiving the “non-renewal notices” within the next few months. Keep in touch! I'm praying for you and all our concerned citizens facing the same crisis.

Deborah