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ONE UPSIDE of metro Denver's soft housing market is a recent boost in business for some local painting companies. Sellers are sprucing up prior to listing, and owners who are staying put are trying to keep up their investment. | A5



Slumping housing market pays off for painting firms

BY PAULA MOORE
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One upside of metro Denver's soft housing market is the recent boost in business for some local painting companies.

Homeowners trying to sell their homes are painting them — inside, outside or both — to get the best possible price, and owners waiting for the housing market to improve before selling are painting to keep up their property value.

"People are feeling the housing crunch, and looking for any edge," said Jay Picerno, owner of Fresh Coat Painting Inc. of Denver. "The feeling among some people is if you don't paint, you don't sell. Sellers have to be competitive."

Picerno's business doubled in the last three months — getting 60 percent to 70 percent of it from Realtor referrals, which are up from 20 percent normally. His largest increase is in painting homes on the market for \$350,000 to \$550,000.

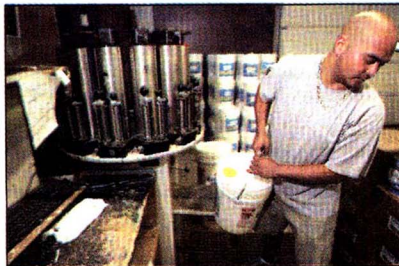
Fresh Coat's exterior paint jobs generally cost \$1,500 to \$3,500, and interior ones start at \$200 per room. The company has 10 employees, eight of them painters.

"We're getting mostly owners of tract homes trying to differentiate themselves, and owners of homes that haven't been touched in 25 years," Picerno said.

Colorado Commercial Painting Inc. of Denver used to focus on painting commercial buildings, but this year has increased its residential painting work, according to owner Wayne Wright.

"The residential painting market is more competitive than ever," he said. "I've got people negotiating with me to put on one coat of paint."

Wright's requests for estimates on paint-



THOMAS COOPER

Ryan Urban moves around paint drums after mixing in colors at Belcaro Paint & Decorating Center.

ing homes have doubled recently, but his materials costs also have gone up 10 percent this year. Those materials range from paint, which can include petroleum products, to masking tape and caulking.

Realtors such as Julie Montgomery, broker associate at Re/Max Masters Inc. in Greenwood Village, encourage clients selling homes to make sure they look good — which means painting them. She has referred clients to Fresh Coat.

"Home sellers need to put their best foot forward," Montgomery said. "For homes that are presented well and priced well, it's a seller's market."

Sellers also can make their homes more attractive by replacing outdated carpet and wallpaper, cleaning up clutter and sprucing up the yard. Those upgrades can cost \$10,000 to \$15,000, but get sellers a much better price for their homes, according to Montgomery.

"You need your home to look like a model home," Montgomery said. "If you present a home properly to the market, it will sell regardless of location."

For the large number of red brick homes in metro Denver, gray-green and taupe are popular trim colors, according to Lynn Clayton, designer at Belcaro Paint & Decorating Center in Denver. For homes on the market, empty interiors should be painted in neutral colors such as off-white.

Business also has increased at Belcaro Paint in the last few months, according to President Christine "Cindy" Harris. "People aren't quite as afraid [to spend] now, or they're seeing that in Colorado, we're a little bit better off than back East," Harris said.

Spring and fall are the paint store's top-selling periods; summers generally are slow because of the heat.

TIPS

What to do to get your home ready for sale

1. Replace old or outdated wallpaper and carpet.
2. Get rid of clutter.
3. Paint exterior and/or exterior in neutral colors.
4. Mow the lawn, pull weeds and otherwise improve yard appearance.
5. Pay special attention to entry area — paint front door and polish hardware, add flowers, etc.