

For more news
about RACC
activities, see
page D1 and
the Business
Digest today!

Realtor Connection

714 S. Scarboro Ave., Lecanto, FL 34461

352-746-7550

www.raccfl.com

Great American Realtors Days

Citrus Realtors trek to Tallahassee

CHERYL LAMBERT
Florida Realtors Key Contact
and RACC Legislative Chair

On Jan. 9, the Realtors Association of Citrus County along with almost 1,000 Florida Realtors attended Great American Realtors Days in Tallahassee to discuss the Realtors' legislative Priorities with all of their representatives from both chambers. These priorities are but not limited to the following:

- **Assignment of Benefits**
Reduce Assignment of Benefits (AOB) abuse that drives up insurance premiums for property owners.
AOB allows policyholders to assign their post-loss insurance benefits to a contractor, such as a water remediation company or roofer, so the contractor can charge the insurance company for its work directly.
But a growing number of contractors have been inflating the cost of repairs. When the insurance company refuses to pay the claim, the contractor files a lawsuit. Insurers typically pay these inflated claims to avoid the high cost of litigation, and pass the cost onto policyholders.
We requested that as lawmakers they consider legislation to stop AOB abuse and protect consumers from higher insurance rates.
It's time to stop the abuse and protect consumers from higher insurance costs.

● **Vacation Rentals**



During the 2018 Great American Realtor Days in Tallahassee, local representatives met with, pictured above, Rep. Ralph Massullo (pictured with Cheryl Lambert at top), Sen. Wilton Simpson (above left) and Rep. Blaise Ingoglia (above right).

Enact legislation concerning vacation rentals that treats homeowners equitably.

Homeowners have made their properties available as vacation rentals long before the Internet arrived, but the growth of websites such as Airbnb and VRBO have made it easier. These sites have created new financial opportunities for homeowners and expanded the options available to consumers who live in, or travel to, Florida.

However, many local governments view this exercise of private property rights as an under-regulated disruption to their communities and have responded by attempting to establish new ordinances, inspections and fees that are designed to discourage vacation rentals.

There are several stakeholders in the discussion about vacation rentals, not the least of which are property owners.

We asked that as lawmakers they consider solutions, they should keep in mind the following:

- Website platforms such as Airbnb, VRBO, HomeAway and others expand lodging options for visitors, who also spend money at restaurants, retail stores and other local businesses.

- The potential for rental income is attractive to individuals who buy a second home for future retirement.

- Since 2014, cities and counties have passed 38 separate ordinances affecting vacation rentals, some with the intent of preventing them altogether. Several of these ordinances — such as requiring a background check for every occupant — make compliance burdensome.

State lawmakers need to take a leadership role on this issue and pass legislation that does not undermine property rights.

- **Affordable Housing**
Increase funding for the housing trust funds.

The state and local government housing trust funds were created in the early 1990s to help Floridians in good times and bad. They are supported entirely by a portion of the doc stamp taxes charged on every real estate transaction.

For thousands of families, these funds are the only way to

realize the American dream of homeownership. They also provide housing rehabilitation and rental assistance to Florida's homeless, veterans, seniors and persons with disabilities.

Last year, the Legislature allocated \$270 million for affordable housing projects, the highest funding level in a decade.

We applaud lawmakers for their financial support. But there is still a lot more work to be done. The need for affordable housing is particularly great when you factor in the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma and the influx of Puerto Ricans to Florida following Hurricane Maria.

We requested as lawmakers to discuss funding levels for the housing trust funds, they should keep in mind the following:

- State economists estimate that \$314.08 million will be available for the housing trust funds in Fiscal Year 2018-19.

- If all monies collected are fully appropriated for housing, it will create nearly 32,700 jobs and \$4.6 billion in positive economic impact in just one year, while creating homes that will last far into the future.

- In the past 25 years, the housing trust funds have helped more than 200,000 families.

Allow the housing trust funds to help families become homeowners through public-private partnerships that give back to the community.

- **Business Rent Tax**
Continue reducing the business rent tax.

We applaud the 2017 Legislature for lowering the sales tax on commercial leases to 5.8 percent, saving businesses more than \$60 million a year. Florida is the only state in the country that charges a business rent tax. These rents are subject to a local option sales tax as well, which can be as high as 2 percent.

Small businesses — from the local diner and hair salon to boutique retail stores — are disproportionately impacted by the tax. We urge lawmakers to continue lowering the tax to provide businesses with the capital to expand, hire, improve benefits and raise salaries.

We requested that as lawmakers they discuss the fiscal impact of cutting the business rent tax.

The current status of these Realtor Priorities is as follows:

- **ASSIGNMENT OF BENEFITS (AOB)**
The House passed HB 7015. While this is great news, the Senate bill we are supporting, SB 62, is still awaiting consideration in its first committee. The main difference between the two bills is the manner in which attorney fees are treated. The Senate bill preserves one-way attorney fees for policyholders but extinguishes them for contractors. The House bill allows BOTH insurers and contractors to recover attorney fees, depending on the size of the recovery.
- **VACATION RENTALS**
House Bill 773 by Rep. Mike La Rosa (R- St. Cloud) would allow municipalities to enact a local law, ordinance, or regulation to regulate activities that arise when a property is used as a vacation rental provided the regulation applies uniformly to all residential properties without regard to whether the property is used as a vacation rental. Last legislative session, Rep. La Rosa filed similar legislation that made its way through the legislative process but ultimately died when the Senate and the House could not come to an agreement. The bill has been referred to the Government Accountability Committee and the Commerce Committee. Senate Bill 1400 by Sen. Greg Steube (R-Sarasota) preempts vacation rentals to the state which would prohibit municipal governments from regulating vacation rentals. The bill also requires licensing and inspections of vacation rentals by the state. The bill has been referred to the Community Affairs, Regulated Industries and Appropriations committees. Neither bill has been scheduled to be heard at this time.
To help call attention to their bills, Rep. La Rosa and Sen. Steube held a press conference last week which attracted nearly 100 people in support of the legislation.
- **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**
Senate Bill 874, sponsored by Sen. Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples) passed its first committee of reference, the Community Affairs Committee by a unanimous vote of 6-0. This bill would exempt the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Government Housing Trust Fund from a provision authorizing the Legislature, in the General Appropriations Act, to transfer unappropriated cash balances from specified trust funds to the Budget Stabilization Fund and General Revenue Fund. The bill has two more committee stops.
- **BUSINESS RENT TAX CUT**
The Tax cut package will be developed during the third and fourth week of session.



Pictured above are members/staff of RACC attending 2018 Great American Realtor Days in Tallahassee, January 2018. Front row, left to right, are: Cheryl Lambert, Jeanne Pickrel, Gitta Barth, C.J. Dixon, Kerry Rosselet and Paula Anspach. Back row, left to right, are: Denise Helt, Ruth Edwards Tony Pauelsen, Rob Tessmer Jr. and Nancy Dunning.

Business Partners help CASA

The Annual Business Partner Showcase was held on Friday, Oct. 13, 2017, with a theme of Game Night. Each vendor decorated their booth in the theme and vies for a chance to win the Judge's Choice Award, the Realtor's Choice Award and the opportunity to showcase their business. The night was packed full of fun with drawings, goody bags, good food and drink, with real estate agents and business partners sharing a wonderful evening.

The RACC Business Partner Showcase is also a fundraiser to raise funds to benefit a Citrus County charitable organization. This year, the Business Partner donation check in the amount of \$2,237.00 was presented to CASA representative Deb Peterson. Thank you to everyone that participated. To learn more about RACC Business Partners, please go to the RACC website at: www.raccfl.com, or call 352-746-7550.



Pictured, left to right, are: Megan Ennis (Citrus Lending), Melissa Seney (Bird Insurance Group, LLC), Donnie Bass (RACC 2017 President - Citrus Real Estate Services), Shari Justice (Stewart Title), Deborah Peterson (CASA) and Josh Holland (HomeTeam Inspection Service).

A message from the President of the Realtors Association of Citrus County

Happy 2018, Citrus County!

The new year brings the promise of a real estate market that offers rewards to those who choose to participate. Whether you are a primary homeowner, home buyer, landlord or investor, 2018 looks wonderful. Home prices are climbing at a sustainable pace in nearly all sectors. Mortgage rates remain at near historical lows and the economy is providing opportunities across the spectrum.

Choosing a Realtor to help you sell or buy property is one of the most important decisions a person makes in their lifetime. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being exchanged. Many legal, personal and



long-term choices must be made. A professional Realtor is trained to help you through this process. The smartest choice is a Realtor who is a member of the local Realtors Association of Citrus County. They will be best equipped with the local market knowledge and information to make your transaction the best it can be.

Times of improving markets bring opportunities to good citizens as well as those who would

try to take advantage of the unwary. During the real estate boom of the mid 2000s, Citrus County saw an influx of new companies and people engaging in the real estate market. The Realtors Association of Citrus County has a mission to protect the industry, consumer and our fellow citizens from dishonest dealing and scams. While nobody can guarantee the integrity of all parties, selecting a Realtor provides additional safeguards. The Realtors Association of Citrus County and the local Realtor members are a safe, professional, trust worthy and ethical source for all your real estate needs. 600 members strong, we know trusted local vendors to handle title work, inspections, repairs and much more.

The rising market is a great opportunity that everyone should enjoy. I hope to see you taking part as a homeowner, buyer, landlord, investor or any other of the vast wealth building opportunities in property ownership.

Best regards,
CJ Dixon,
2018 President
Realtors Association
of Citrus County

Citrus County Summary of Key Real Estate Statistics

As reported January 2018

	NOV. 17	DEC. 17	CHANGE	TREND
Closed Sales	218	229	+11	Seasonal Dip
Median Sales Price	\$166,829	\$173,694	+\$6,865	UP
Day on Market	54	37	-17	Down
Months of Inventory	4.4	4.2	-2	Down

The numbers and trends indicate a market that is low on inventory and will see price increases. The holiday season produces notable dips in sales with a strong homebuyer season in the spring and summer. A balanced Buyer/Seller market displays 6 months of inventory. Citrus is in a strong seller's market at 4.2 months. The seller's market is expected to continue to be fueled by historically low interest rates and strong economic news. New home construction will rise to satisfy the shortage of homes listed for sale.

2018 OFFICERS

President
CJ Dixon
President Elect
Ruth Edwards
Treasurer
Linda Cridland
Secretary
Kim DeVane
Past President
Donnie Bass



DIRECTORS
Margit (Gitta) Barth
Kerry Rosselet
Tony Pauelsen
Cheryl Nadal
Jeanne Pickrel
Kelly Tedrick