

Bankers, so far, stay put in homes

Loss of banking jobs
doesn't necessarily mean
owners are rushing to put
houses on selling block.

BY NANCY STANCILL
Home Editor

The 43-year-old Charlotte man lost his Bank of America job in February, but he's not rushing to put his house on the market.

He's hoping to stay here and find another job or start a consulting business. His severance package should provide for the family of four through most of 2009.

"We never bit off more than we could chew," he said of buying his southeast Charlotte home, now worth about \$450,000.

His story is typical of what local business experts and Realtors say they're hearing as banks lay off Charlotte-based employees. Wells Fargo & Co., which bought Wachovia a few months ago, hasn't said how many Charlotte jobs it will chop. Bank of America is eliminating 35,000 jobs companywide over three years. It also won't say how many Charlotte jobs will disappear.

"It's going to be very gradual," said Mark Vitner, a senior economist in Charlotte with Wachovia Corp., now a division of Wells Fargo. "You're not going to suddenly wake up and say, 'Where did all the bankers go?'"

He predicted that many will stay in the region because prospects for jobs in the financial-services sector will be better here than most other places.

Realtors, especially those who work in Myers Park, Eastover and other affluent areas, say they have talked with banker clients who have lost their jobs or fear losing them soon. But few want to list houses for sale - yet.



Cottingham

Dan Cottingham, a principal of Cottingham-Chalk/Bissell-Hayes, said one client who lost a high-level job recently wanted to know what the family's house would sell for,

but is looking at "entrepreneurial opportunities" here.

"That type of individual can work from here as well as anywhere else," Cottingham said.

Valerie Mitchener, a co-owner of HMProperties, said she knows out-of-work bankers, but they're staying put for the moment. "They've gotten their children in schools (they like) and they've made friends."



Mitchener

She said she has clients who lost their financial-services

jobs a year ago, and they're still here.

"These are well-educated, financially savvy individuals and they're prepared for getting through this," Mitchener said.

David Huss, who works for Allen Tate Realtors in the Ballantyne area, said he heard from clients in

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late January and February when they found out bank bonuses were going to be cut substantially.

He said a few who bought large custom houses with big payments may end up selling.

John Morgan, president of Urban Building Group, a firm that does substantial business in high-end renovations said his clients' outlook depends on their place in the banking world.

The investment bankers, whose Wall Street-related commissions are drastically down, aren't interested in doing anything, he said.



Morgan

The financial bankers are doing renovations, but the practical kind that make use of existing space.

Some of those contracts lately have been for enclosing porches or carports and modest kitchen and bath renovations, he said.

He also has noticed that his company's sales cycle - the time between making a bid and starting the work - has lengthened from about six weeks to three or four months. That's because clients are often scaling back the work and taking more time to make decisions, he said.