

# *Housing Hokum*

Many Americans are hanging on to the hope that a recovery in the housing market will somehow drive a broader economic recovery that will put us back on a pathway toward ever-growing national prosperity. Yet the very first Americans (the Indians, that is) would have been quite perplexed by such a strange idea. If some white settler had shown up and told them that if they would just build a lot of teepees, everyone in the tribe would stay warm, well-fed, well-clothed, and decked out in the latest headdresses and turquoise jewelry, they would immediately have suspected that he had been taking some "bad medicine."

They knew very well that tribal prosperity was first and foremost dependent upon good hunting grounds and farmlands. Teepees didn't magically lure a bunch of buffalo into the area. In primitive and modern societies, people build houses in order to remain near the source of their economic livelihood, not as a means of creating it when it doesn't already exist. Americans will start prospering once again when they start making things that others want to buy and doing things that others are willing to pay for. In the 21st century that means we're going to have to be really good at math, science, and engineering. If the only things we know how to make are Snuggies and Frappaccinos, and the only things we know how to do are flip burgers and greet people coming through the door at Walmart, we can forget about a recovery in the housing sector. It's time to dispense with all this hokum about building our economic recovery on the housing market and focus instead on developing a highly educated and skilled workforce that will revitalize our manufacturing sector so that we can compete in the global economy.

A few enlightened politicians have publicly addressed this urgent need, but they don't seem to be able to do much about it. You can always vote for the good guys and hope that things will eventually turn around. In the meantime, it's best to prepare yourself for economic survival in case the rosier predictions don't materialize. How can you do this? By learning as much as you can and developing a skill set that you can charge money for. Knowing how to build teepees or sell them to other members of the community is probably not going to be a reliable way to put meat on the table. So if you are a contractor, real estate agent, or interior decorator, you would be wise to start learning how to hunt. In the modern world that means developing the technical skills that the current job market demands. Unfortunately, your options may be somewhat limited.

Healthcare always seems to offer pretty good prospects, since whenever other people in the community get sick, they will generally spend whatever is necessary to get better rather than put the money into a new television set or couch. Since all

the easy loans dried up and people can't run out and buy a new house once things start breaking, you may be able to make a good living by learning how to fix things that most people can't fix themselves, such as broken pipes and faulty wiring. If you're after the bigger game of the white collar variety, there will be few options other than spending a lot of years getting a good education in a marketable field.