



Posted on Fri, Apr. 29, 2005

HOLLYWOOD

## Potential buyers keen on condos

Long lines of would-be buyers showed up Thursday to get a head start on buying condos in a newly converted Hollywood apartment complex.

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The scene looked like fans waiting to buy tickets to a rock concert.

Long lines greeted the first day of sales Thursday at a Hollywood apartment complex that went condo. Realtors, prospective buyers and investors, lined up at the Hollywood Parc complex, 500 S. Park Rd., for a chance to buy one of the 272 units.

"It's buggy and itchy here," said Realtor Jennifer Ludmar, who camped out since Tuesday to be first in line for the Thursday VIP condo sale. "But it's a cut-throat industry, and I will go the extra mile to get the sales."

With South Florida's housing market still hot, Thursday's prospective buyers were willing to camp out on lawn chairs and get sunburned in an effort to purchase a home.

Ludmar spent the night in the back of a Lexus SUV, just to get a head start on the competition.

The developer of the property said he didn't know how many units sold on Thursday, but he said more than 1,000 people showed up looking to buy. At least 50 people were waiting in line Thursday morning, hours before the 2 p.m. opening.

"It's pretty impressive," said Omar Hernandez, chief executive of BH Capital Partners, developer of the project.

Condo conversions are rental apartments turned into condominiums. They have become increasingly common in South Florida in recent years.

At Hollywood Parc, one-bedroom apartments start at \$149,900, two bedrooms start around \$169,000, and three bedrooms cost about \$224,000.

As of March, the median cost for a single-family home in Broward was \$320,875, but the median price for condominiums or town houses was \$172,000, according to the Realtor Association of Greater Fort Lauderdale.

Two Hollywood police cars parked alongside the line of would-be buyers, and security guards urged people to stay calm.

"This is all crazy. It's crazy," said Gus Rivero, an investor who waited in line for a chance to buy. "Some people screaming, but no guns yet!"

Rivero said he will rent or sell the condo in a short time, hopefully for a profit.

This was not the first time South Florida buyers have camped out or formed long lines outside sales offices to get first dibs on new or converted condos.

In July, for instance, potential condo buyers camped out overnight so they wouldn't miss out on units at Radius, a new development on Hollywood's Young Circle.

To buy a condo on Thursday, it was necessary to get on a "VIP" list by registering in advance at the Hollywood Parc website. The "grand opening" for the public to buy will be May 15.

David Dabby, a Miami real estate consultant with the Dabby Group, said camp-outs are not uncommon when the condo market reaches its peak. The same thing happened before South Florida's condo market collapsed in the early 1980s.

At that time, an oversupply of suburban condos, rising interest rates and a national recession led to a 35 percent drop in suburban condo prices and thousands of foreclosures in South Florida.

Dabby said he couldn't predict what will happen to the condo market this time. On the one hand, Broward is not as oversupplied with condominiums as Miami-Dade. But investors are now buying Broward condos in which the monthly payments -- mortgage, condo fees, insurance and taxes -- may exceed the amount the investor could expect to collect in rent.

That's a danger sign, Dabby said. Investors are betting that they can afford to lose several hundred dollars a month because they can sell in less than a year for a five-figure profit.

Hernandez said no more than 20 percent of the units will go to investors.

David Caruso lives across the street from Hollywood Parc. He stood in line from 10:15 a.m. on Thursday, after calling the office and learning a line was already in place.

"Hopefully, I am able to get one," said Caruso, who wants to buy a two-bedroom unit. "A lot of the times, these condos are sold out to investors."

WLRN-Herald News reporter Michael Hibblen and Herald staff writer Scott Andron contributed to this report.