

A Buyer's Guide to North Alabama

475 Providence Main Street • Suite 302 • Huntsville, AL 35806 • 256.585.6000 • athomeshuntsville.com

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Look for these "Did You Know?" boxes throughout this booklet. You might discover some interesting facts about the North Alabama area.

A Word From the Broker,

What to expect in your homebuying experience:

Your home buying experience will begin with an informal "get to know each other" meeting. We will also begin discussions on what we can expect from each other and how the home buying / selling process works.

Here's an introduction of a few things we will cover.

Agency: Who represents who in Alabama real estate transactions.

The Loan Process: Why being preapproved benefits you!

The Real Estate Contract: What do the legal terms mean? Why are the contract dates important? Who pays for what? We'll make sure you are familiar with the contract so that you will be comfortable with your decision when it's time to move forward.

Inspections: We'll cover the home inspection, radon inspection, and termite inspection.

The Home Buying Process: What does your dream home look like and where is it located? If you have photos of your current home, we'd love to see them! Feel free to bring them or send them to us via email.

We will also delve into things to watch for when purchasing a home in Alabama including HOAs, buyer beware, disclosures, and so on.

Upon our first meeting, we will go over the most recent market statistics, educating you about our market here in North Alabama. Each area is different and knowning the market will help you decide where to position your offer when it's time!

Our job is to protect you each step of the way. If we go over these very important items in the beginning, we will all benefit.

Our motto at @Homes Realty Group is one that we mean: The consumer comes first, always. Together, we will make the home buying process as stress free as possible, teamwork all the way!

If at anytime you have questions or concerns, I have an open door policy. Feel free to use the information below to contact me and I will do my best to help you, I promise!

Elizabeth



Huntsville is home to several semi-professional sports teams including the Huntsville Stars (AA Baseball team of the Milwaukee Brewers), the Huntsville Havoc (hockey) and the Alabama Vipers (arena football).



About Elizabeth Cooper Golden

Elizabeth is the founding broker of @Homes Realty Group in Huntsville, Alabama. While she's very involved in coaching and guiding her agents, her true passion is and has always been helping buyers and sellers. Elizabeth has been buying, selling, and investing in real estate for the past 20 years. Need help with relocating? Elizabeth has lived in Chattanooga, Atlanta, Reno, St. Louis, Topeka, Kansas City, Washington D.C., Nashville, and now, Huntsville. As you can see, she knows a thing or 10 about relocating. The corner stone of Elizabeth's professional philosophy is her strongly held conviction that the real estate business is not really about real estate, but more importantly, about long term relationships. For more on Elizabeth, google her!



Where Consumers are First, Always.

About @Homes Realty Group

Want proof that not all real estate companies are the same? Keep reading. If you're receiving this Buyer's Guide, chances are you've either heard about us, spoken with us, or used our website www.athomeshuntsville.com. Either way, we're thrilled that you've requested this material and would be honored to help you find more than a house, but an entire community to call home. See, we're not just about houses, but also about relationships. Of course, we know houses and without a doubt, we know our market. But our business revolves around transparency, trust, and relationships first. With that as our foundation, ensuring that you live where you love comes easy.

Huntsville's Cummings Research Park is the second largest research park in the United States and the fourth largest in the world.

Huntsville • Alabama •

Top Ten Lists and Other Acknowledgements

One of Five Communites Leading the Economic Recovery in 2010 - USA Today #1 Huntsville - 2010 Top Ten Overall Cities - RelocateAmerica.com #1 Huntsville - 2010 Top Ten Recovery Cities - RelocateAmerica.com #10 Huntsville - 2010 Top Ten Earth Friendly Cities - RelocateAmerica.com #1 Huntsville - 2010 Job-Growth Prospects - MoodysEconomy.com #8 Huntsville - Best Places for Business and Careers - Forbes.com #1 Huntsville - 2009 Best Places to Launch Startup Business - CNNmoney.com #1 Huntsville - 2009 Best Cities - Kiplinger.com #8 Huntsville - 2009 Best Performing Cities - MilkenInstitute.org

- #2 Huntsville America's Next 25 Recovering Job Markets Businessweek
- #9 Huntsville The World's Smartest Cities Forbes.com
- #4 Huntsville Five Cities to Rise in the Next Economy The Christain Science Monitor
- #2 Madison America's 10 Best Places to Grow Up USNews.com





Moody's Economy.com





What is there to do in Huntsville?

Shopping

Shopping in Huntsville consists mainly of three popular malls. **Bridge Street Town Centre** is an upscale, outdoor mall with lots of retail stores, restaurants, and a great movie theater called **Monaco Pictures**. **Madison Square Mall** is right on University Drive, making it convenient to various restaurants and other stores in the area. **Parkway Place Mall** is on South Memorial Parkway, offering a few different retail options like Abercrombie and Gap among others.

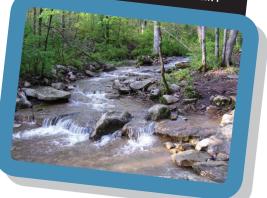
Outdoor Activities

There's an abundance of outdoor activities to take advantage of in the greater Huntsville area. If you're a hiker, biker, or camping enthusiast, **Monte Sano Mountain** offers a beautiful getaway with numerous trails, a nice campground, and a state park with gorgeous views. If you're into picnics and perhaps feeding ducks with the kids or your significant other, **Big Spring Park** provides a nice venue downtown. And of course, there's no lack of golf in the Huntsville area with a **Robert Trent Jones course at Hampton Cove** and a solid municipal course among many other options in the area. There are also several playgrounds, parks, and dog parks to be discovered.

Indoor Activities

If you're new to Huntsville, you'll want to make at least one trip to the **U.S. Space & Rocket Center** to see what it's all about. Adults may be interested in the **Station #2** at Bridge Street, a Dave & Buster's style place, or perhaps **Scene Lounge** for dinner and a drink before or during a movie at **Monaco**. There's also the **Art Museum** downtown, or **Merrimack Hall** for performing arts. For children, **Early Works Museum** makes a great, educational starting point, as does **Sci-Quest**, a hands on science center.

Monte Sano Mountain









Bridge Street Town Centre



Huntsville Metropolitan Quick Statistics Based on 2008 Estimate

Population	395, 645
Persons Under 18	24.1%
Persons 65 and Over	12.5%
White Persons	73.3%
Black or African American Persons	21.8%
American Indian or Alaska Native Persons	0.6%
Asian Persons	2%
Hispanic or Latino Persons	3.2%
High School Graduate or Higher	86.8%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	33.9%
Mean Travel Time to Work (Minutes)	22
Home Ownership Rate	89.6%

www.hsvcity.com www.huntsvillealabamausa.com www.huntsville.org www.hsv.k12.al.us www.madisoncity.k12.al.us www.greatschools.org www.thisishuntsville.com www.athomeshuntsville.com





John Hendricks, founder of Discovery Communications, grew up in Huntsville, Alabama and graduated from the University of Alabama in Huntsville with a bachelor's degree in History. Discovery Communications is a broadcasting firm which owns the Discovery Channel, TLC, and Animal Planet.

Purchasing Chain of Events

Purchasing Chain of Events



This step is a must. Before we physically see any homes, you need to begin the pre-approval process with a lender of your choice.



Once we find the right home for you, we'll contact the listing agent and make an offer. The seller will have the option to accept, counter, or reject your offer. Keep in mind that although the seller is in negotations with you, they can still accept an offer from another buyer. You can feel secure about acceptance of your offer only after we have a binding agreement between both parties.



Coordinating the Loan

Once we attain a binding agreement, I'll send a copy of the contract along with other pertinent information to your loan officer in order to initiate the approval process.



Usually within 10 to 14 working days of a binding agreement date, you will need to have your home inspection completed. We recommend that you be present during the home inspection allowing the inspector to explain his findings and go over care and maintenance of certain items. A septic tank inspection may also be necessary.

Repair Addendum

Once we receive the results from your home inspection, you may submit a request for repairs to the seller. Repairs are negotiable and may not exceed a predetermined dollar amount specified in the contract.

Termite Inspection

Termite inspections are paid for by the purchaser and required by the lender within 30 days of closing. If the home is currently under a termite bond, you may have it transfered.

You'll need to call the utility company to have your service transferred on the day you take possession of your new home.

You'll need to talk to your insurance agent to have your homeowners insurance transferred to your new address. If you're relocating from another area, you'll need to find an agent to set up coverage. If you need assistance, we'll be happy to make recommendations.

Final Walkthrough

Closina

Usually, within 48 hours of closing, we will conduct a final walkthrough of the property to verify that the home is in working order and that repairs have been made to your satisfaction.

Congratulations! We'll attend closing together, sign all of the required paperwork, and you'll receive the keys to your new home.

Home Insurance

Utilities Transfer













In terms of population, Huntsville is the fourth largest city in Alabama. However, geographically, Huntsville is the largest city in Alabama.

Getting Started • The Approval Process •

Huntsville was the first capital of Alabama and was known at that time as Twickenham. It was renamed "Huntsville" in 1811 after its first settler, John Hunt.

Be Prepared to Give Your Lender...

- Social security numbers for both you and any co-borrowers.
- Copies of checking and savings accounts statements for the past 6 months
- Evidence of any other assets (bonds, stocks, retirement programs, etc.)
- Recent paycheck stubs
- W2 withholding forms or income tax returns for the past two years
- A list of all credit card accounts and approximate amount you pay each month
- A list of account numbers and balances on outstanding loans (car, student loans, etc.)
- The name and address of someone who can verify your employment
- Residence history for the past two years
- Sales contract for the purchase of your new home (if available)
- Homeowner's Association information with contact information if necessary

Criteria for Loan Applications...

Lenders consider may things when deciding to extend a loan. Not all lenders use the same factors but there are some common guidelines when evaluating.

- **Capacity** Lenders will review your employment history to determine if you have the capacity to repay your debt obligations. How long have you been working at your current job? How much is your future earning potential?
- Credit Lenders will review your credit history, consider how much debt you have in curred, and how you manage your debt responsibilities. Do your pay your monthly bills on time?
- **Character** Lenders will look at how you pay your bills. They will also take into consideration any pending lawsuits or bankruptcies.
- **Collateral** Lenders will evaluate the value of the property, a source of protection for the money borrowed. The lenders want a guarantee that they will get back the money they lend. What are the chances that the property's value will decrease?

Famous and often controversial baseball sluggers Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire played for the Huntsville Stars prior to their major league careers.



Frequently Asked Questions

How does my agent get paid?

When a person has their home listed, they go through a real estate agent / brokerage. The listing agent represents the seller and it is their job is to sell the house for a desired price, negotiating on the seller's behalf. The seller will pay the listing agent an agreed upon commission rate to list and sell their house. From that commission, the listing agent will pay us, your buyer's agent. As your buyer's agent, we negotiate on your behalf and see you through from house hunting to closing. However, the seller pays our commission - you do not pay any REALTOR® fees.

What if I want to build?

Either during or before the home searching process, you may decide that you want to build a home or purchase one that is already under construction. In this case, your agent will work just as they would if you were buying an existing home. The builder is the seller and is usually represented by a listing broker. Therefore, your agent will serve as your buyer's agent and again, the commission will be paid by the seller / builder. If you talk to a builder who happens to be at a house you're looking at on your own, just be sure to mention that you are already working with an agent. Otherwise, the builder may not feel inclined to pay our commission as we were not present when you first saw the home. We will work with the builder's agent throughout the building process.

What if I'm out looking at houses on my own?

Sometimes, people like to drive around and look at houses on their own, which is totally normal and even encouraged. Whether it be listings we send you or houses that you simply happen to drive by, always call your buyer's agent for more information or to see the home. We will be happy to arrange an apointment. If you call the number on the sign which is the listing agent, they may be resentful if they show you the home and we write the contract.

How should I approach open houses?

At some point, you may decide to attend one or more open houses over the weekend. If you see something you like, just be sure to tell the attending agent that you are already working with a buyer's agent. Trust us, agents want to know this up front because most of the time they are there to get prospects. If you are interested in the house, give your buyer's agent a call and they will be glad to accompany you on another visit to the home.

How Should I Approach a For Sale by Owner Home?

If you notice a home for sale by owner, simply let your buyer's agent know about it and we will be happy to set up an appointment to go with you and view the home. Most FSBO sellers are willing to pay the buyer's agent commission to bring them a buyer. However, in the unusual case that a FSBO is unwilling to work with a buyer's agent, we will not be able to negotiate the sale on your behalf and represent you in the transaction, unless you agree to pay our commission.

What is Earnest Money?

When you make an offer on a house, you are required to provide earnest money, which is usually in the form of a personal check. The amount is typically between one and two percent of the home's purchase price. Once a contract is accepted by both the selling and buying parties, the check will be deposited into an escrow account and credited to the buyer at closing.

What are Closing Costs and How are They Paid?

When you purchase a home with a mortgage, there are several people involved in the transaction. They include the appraiser, insurance company, home inspector, title company, and closing attorney. Some of these professionals have fees that must be paid. In addition, there are property taxes to consider which are always prorated. You're amount of closing costs will vary depending on how much you put down on your new home. If you put down twenty percent, you can save on mortgage insurance. Closing costs can also vary depending on what day of the month you close. Most people like to close near the end of the month because lenders charge interest from the day the loan is funded until the first day of the following month. Also, if you are getting any discount points from your lender, they will be included in

closing costs. Typically, you can expect your closing costs to be about four to five percent of the loan amount, but again, this depends on several different factors. When you discuss your options with your lender, ask them for an estimate of what your closing costs would be based on the purchase price you are considering. Also, some programs will allow you to finance your closing costs as part of the purchase price. Be sure to discuss these options with your lender. Last but not least, asking the seller to pay for a portion of your closing costs is an option when writing your offer.

What Takes Place at Closing?

Your buyer's agent will accompany you at closing which will be arranged with the closing attorney. Be prepared to sign your name more than ever unless you are a celebrity or professional athelete. Once we're done at closing, you'll leave with the keys to your new home!



Wikipedia founder, Jimmy Wales, was born in Huntsville, Alabama.

Obstacles
What could go wrong?

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

When you're purchasing home, there's a lot that goes into the home purchasing puzzle. With all the different steps involved, sometimes we may encounter an obstacle or three. What's that? We can't guarantee a perfect transaction with no problems? Well, you know the saying: "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." What we can guarantee is that we will be with you every step of the way and offer our experience when things get bumpy. While there are things that can go wrong, the good news is that we've seen or heard just about every problem out there. So when someone or something goes awry, we know what to do and who to call.

Here are 88 possible types of turbulence or obstacles that we could encounter.

The Buyer / Borrower...

- 1. Does not tell the truth on the loan application.
- 2. Submits incorrect information to the lender.
- 3. Has recent late payments on their credit report.
- 4. Found out about additional debt after the loan application.
- 5. Loses job.
- 6. Co-borrower loses job.
- 7. Income verification shows lower income than what was stated on loan application.
- 8. Overtime income is not allowed by underwriter for qualification.
- 9. Makes large purchase on credit before closing.
- 10. Experiences illness, injury, divorce, or other financial setback during escrow.
- 11. Lacks motivation.
- 12. Gift donor changes mind.
- 13. Cannot locate divorce decree.
- 14. Cannot locate petition or discharge of bankruptcy.
- 15. Cannot locate tax returns.
- 16. Cannot locate bank statements.
- 17. Difficulty in obtaining verification of rent.
- 18. Interest increases and borrower no longer qualifies.
- 19. Loan program changes with higher rates
- 20. Child support not disclosed on application.
- 21. Borrower is foreign national.
- 22. Mortgage payment is double the previous housing payment.
- 23. Bankruptcy within the past two years.
- 24. Borrower / Co-Borrower does not have steady two-year employment history.

- 25. Borrower brings in hand-written pay stubs.
- 26. Borrower switches to job requiring probation period just before closing.
- 27. Borrower switches to job from salary to 100% commission income.
- 28. Borrower / Co-Borrower / Seller dies.
- 29. Family members or friends do not like the home buyer's choice.
- 30. Buyer is too picky about property in the price range they can afford.
- 31. Buyer feels the house is misrepresented.
- 32. Veterans DD214 form not available.
- 33. Buyer spends money needed for down payment & closing costs, coming up short at closing.
- 34. Buyer does not properly "paper trail" additional money that comes from gifts, loans, etc.
- 35. Does not bring cashiers check to title company for closing costs and down payment.

The Seller

- 36. Loses motivation to sell (job transfer does not go through, reconciles marriage, etc.)
- 37. Cannot find suitable replacement property.
- 38. Will not allow appraiser inside the home.
- 39. Will not allow inspectors inside home in a timely manner.
- 40. Removes property from the premises the buyer believed was included.
- 41. Is unable to clear up leins against their property short on cash to close.
- 42. Did not own 100% of property as previously disclosed.
- 43. Thought getting partners signatures was "no problem" but it was.
- 44. Leaves town without giving anyone Power of Attorney.
- 45. Delays the projected move-out date.
- 46. Did not complete the repairs agreed to in contract.
- 47. Seller's home goes into foreclosure during escrow.
- 48. Misrepresents information about home & neighborhood to the buyer.
- 49. Does not disclose all hidden or unknown defects and they are subsequently discovered.
- 50. Builder miscalculates completion date of new home.
- 51. Builder has too many cost overruns.
- 52. Final inspection on new home does not pass.
- 53. Seller does not appear for closing and won't sign papers.

The REALTORS®

- 54. Have no client control over buyers or sellers.
- 55. Delays access to property for inspection and appraisals.
- 56. Unfamiliar with their client's financial position do they have enough equity to sell, etc.
- 57. Does not get completed paperwork to the lender in time.

- 57. Inexperienced in this type of property transaction.
- 58. Takes unexpected time off during transaction and can't be reached.
- 59. Jerks around other parties to the transaction has huge ego.
- 60. Does not do sufficient homework on their clients or the property and wastes everyone's time.

The Property

- 61. County will not approve septic system or well.
- 62. Termite report reveals substantial damage and seller is not willing to fix or repair.
- 63. Home was misrepresented as to size and condition.
- 64. Home is destroyed prior to closing.
- 65. Home not structurally sound.
- 66. Home is uninsurable for homeowners insurance.
- 67. Property incorrectly zoned.
- 68. Portion of home sits on neighbors property.
- 69. Unique home and comparable properties for appraisal difficult to find.

The Escrow / Title Company

- 70. Fails to notify lender / agents of unsigned or unreturned documents.
- 71. Fails to obtain information from beneficiaries, lien holders, insurance companies, or lenders.
- 72. Lets principals leave town without getting all necessary signatures.
- 73. Loses or incorrectly prepares paperwork.
- 74. Does not pass on valuable information quickly enough.
- 75. Does not coordinate well, so that many items can be done simultaneously.
- 76. Does not bend the rules on small problems.
- 77. Does not find liens or any title problems until the last minute.

The Appraiser

- 78. Is not local and misunderstands the market.
- 79. Is too busy to complete the appraisal on schedule.
- 80. No comparable sales are available.
- 81. Is not on the lender's approved list.
- 82. Makes important mistakes on appraisal and brings in value too low.
- 83. Lender requires a second or "review" appraisal.

Inspectors

- 85. The pest inspector is too busy to schedule inspection when needed.
- 86. The pest inspector is too picky about condition of property, hoping to create work for themselves.
- 87. The home inspector is not available when needed.
- 88. The inspection reports alarm the buyer and the sale is cancelled.

These are things that REALTORS® deal with all the time. With great planning, many of these items can be avoided. But, when something comes up, usually knowing the right people to call can make all the difference in solving the problem. If any of these issues arise, don't panic - we've got your back!



Huntsville is home to Michael Durant. Durant is the pilot on whom the movie "Black Hawk Down" is based.



The movie "Constellation" starring Gabrielle Union, Zoe Saldana, and Billy Dee Williams was filmed in Huntsville.

Market Reports

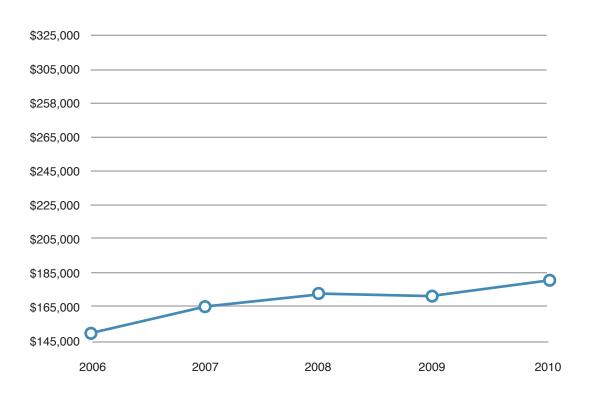
@Homes Realty Group is all about tranparency, integrity, and technology. But, there are other important aspects of real estate, including market statistics. In fact, we think statistics are so important that we are including sold data from the past four years in this guide. In the next several pages, you'll see charts for various areas of North Alabama. These charts include data on sold home prices as well sold price per square foot.

We consider this sort of thing our forte. If you need any help understing the data you see, or if you'd like more detailed statistics for a more specific area or time span, feel free to ask. We'll make sure you get the information you're seeking.

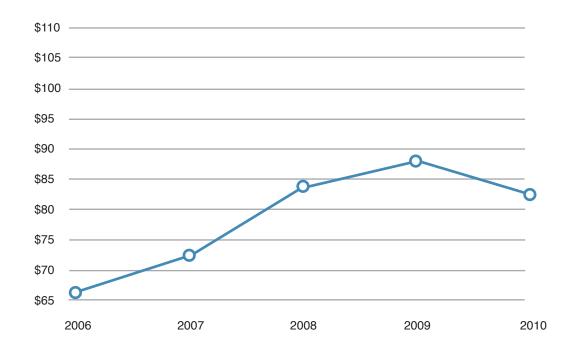


Huntsville

Average Sold Price

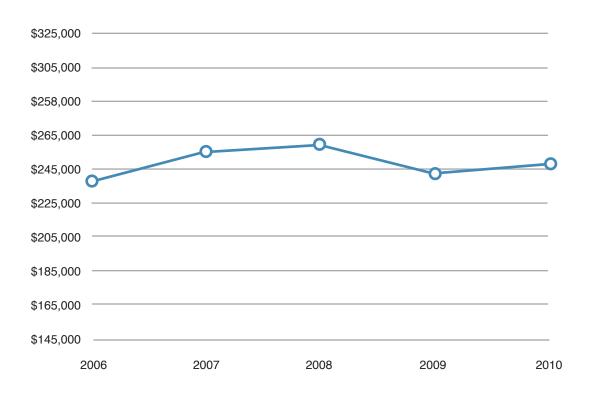


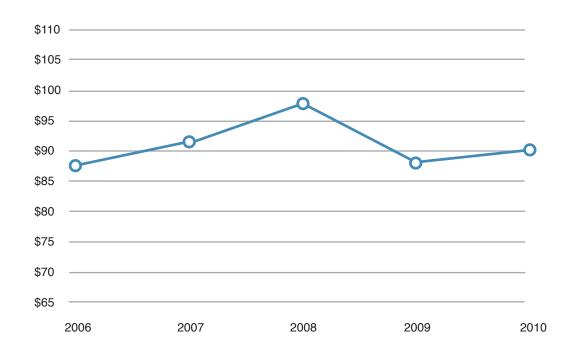
Average Sold Price Per Square Foot



Madison

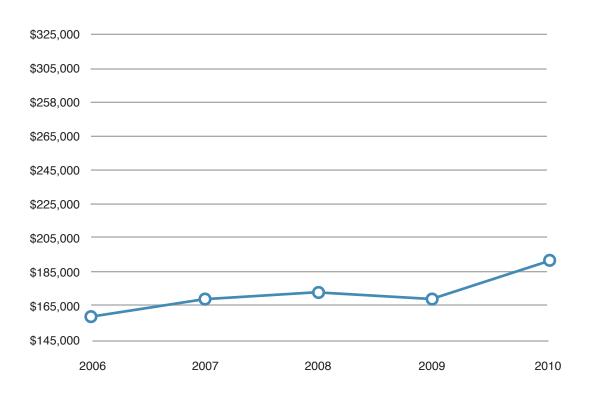
Average Sold Price

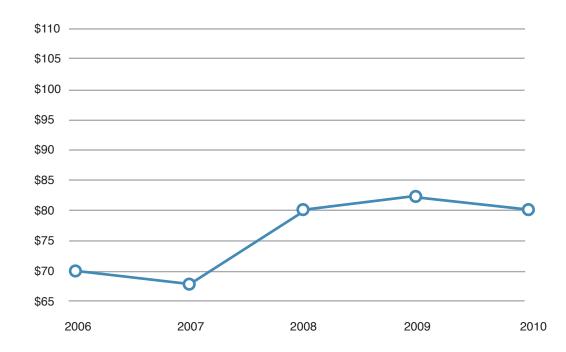






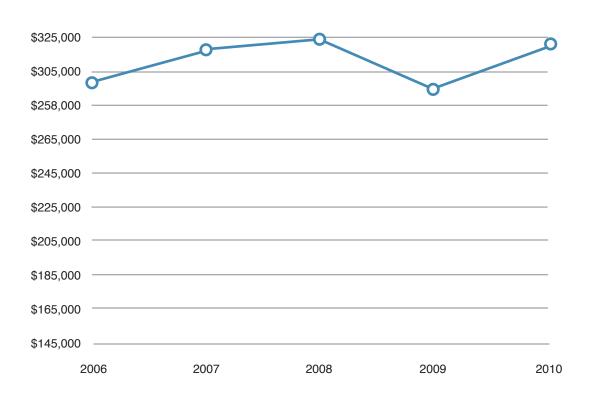
Average Sold Price

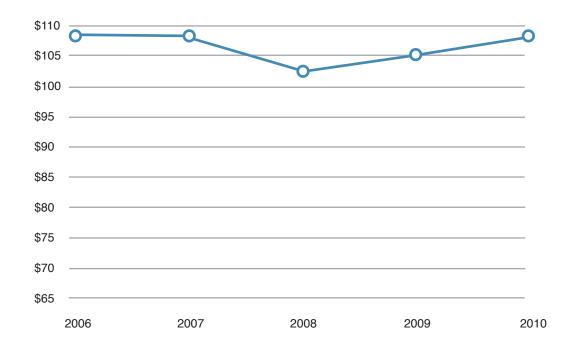




Hampton Cove

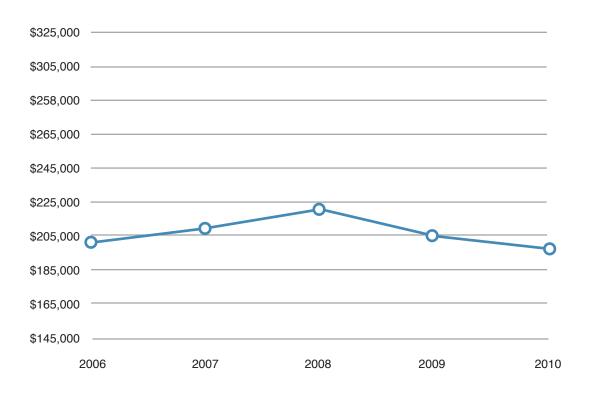
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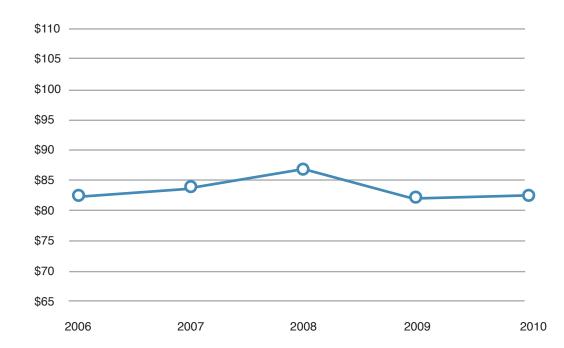






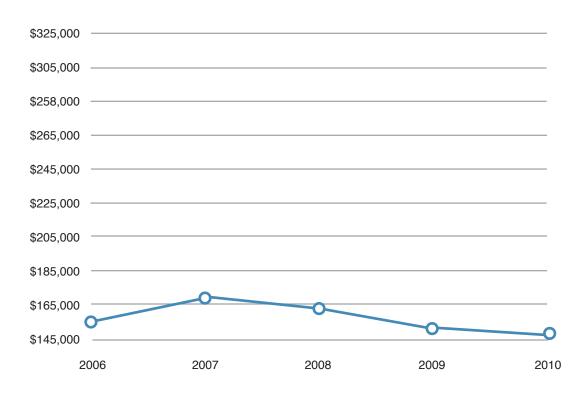
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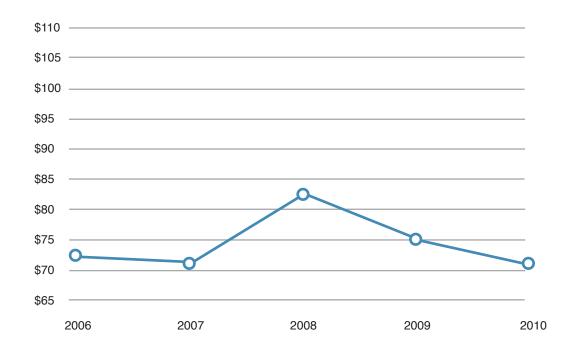




Limestone

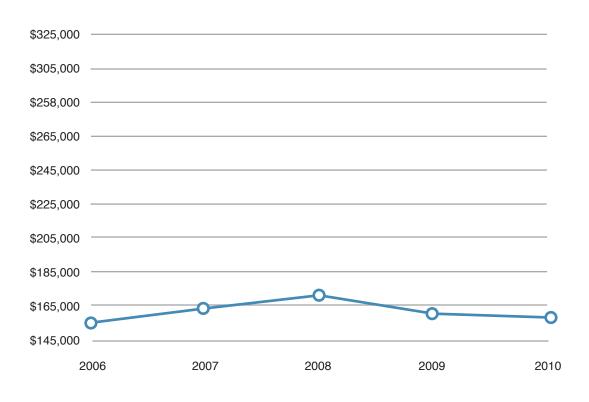
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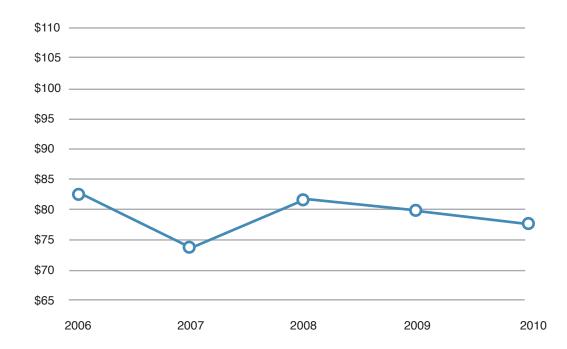




Madison County

Average Sold Price





Trusted • Resources •

Lenders



Sharon Andrews

WR Starkey Mortgage 8089 Highway 72 West - Suite D Madison, AL 35757 Office: 256.721.2433 Cell: 256.509.LOAN (5626) Email: sandrews@wrstarkey.com Web: www.LoansWithSharon.com



Reliance b a n k

Julie Davis

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Home Inspectors

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Eddie Richardson

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HomeTeam Inspection Service 104 Meadowglen Drive Madison, AL 35757 **Cell:** 256.721.3330 **Email:** ht508@hometeaminspection.com **Web:** www.homteamsinspection.com/handback.asp

Home Insurance

Natalie Cain

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Craig Wiggins

All State 4040 Balmoral Drive Huntsville, AL 35801 **Office:** 256.881.1100 **Fax:** 256.881.1102 **Web:** www.allstate.com/craigwiggins

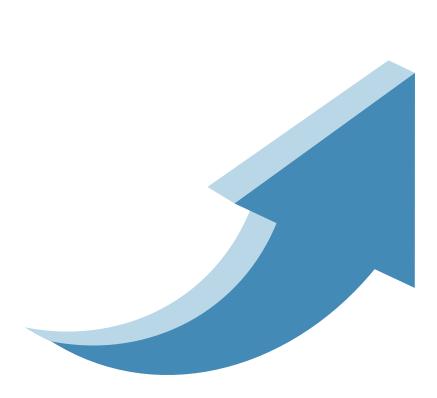
Our Social Identity

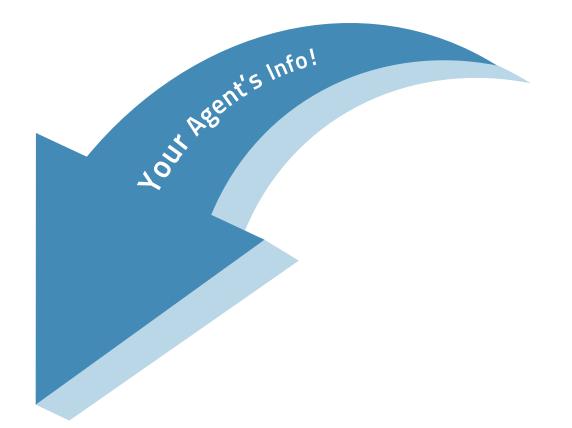






www.youtube.com/athomeshuntsville





did you know?

Huntsville's Monte Sano State Park, a great place for hiking and camping, covers over 2,000 acres of land.

Great Deals • From our Friends •

HOMEWOOD SUITES BY HILTON Huntsville - Village of Providence



The Homewood Suites-Huntsville in the beautiful Village of Providence is the ideal "home away from home", whether you are relocating to the area, working on a temporary project, or simply enjoying a much needed vacation.

You will love the convenience of being just minutes from Research Park, Redstone Arsenal, downtown, shopping, attractions and numerous restaurants.

Best of all...our guests can save up to \$25 per day from their travel expenses just by enjoying the extra amenities we offer with each stay, such as the daily full hot breakfast and Monday-Thursday dinner with drinks.

HOTEL SERVICES AND AMENITIES

- * Complimentary Suite Start[®]full hot breakfast every morning
- * Fully equipped kitchens in all guest suites
- * Monday Thursday Welcome Home®Reception with dinner and drinks
- * On-site convenient Suite Shop
- * Guest laundry facility and valet dry cleaning services
- * 24 hour business center and fitness room
- * 665 square feet of flexible meeting space
- * Outdoor pool and patio with gas grills
- * Complimentary wireless internet throughout hotel
- * Every suite features extra space for working, relaxing and entertaining
- * 100% Suite Assurance Guarantee

2009 Award Winning Hotel

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