

Progress Business booms in Pa.

By Dave Richardson
February 09, 2006
Times Herald-Record

Milford, Pa. - Kenny Peereboom's grin is infectious as he surveys the row of glass cases loaded with fresh meat that fill his store.

He talks about what keeps his loyal customers coming back.

"Great customer service, and quality products at a good price," he says.

For Peereboom, owner of Prime Time Meats in Milford, it's a simple formula that's allowed his business to capitalize on the continuing growth in booming Pike County.

The fastest-growing county in Pennsylvania, its population jumped nearly 13 percent between 2000 and 2003.

And those numbers continue to swell, thanks to an influx of transplants, from Orange and Rockland counties and from northern New Jersey, seeking relief from skyrocketing real estate prices.

That influx has nearly doubled the number of building permits issued in the county from 2001 to 2005.

That kind of news is music to the ears of home builders like Ed Nikles.

"Last year (2004) was a record year for us, and 2005 was pretty much the same," Nikles, 63 and in the building business for 42 years, said. "Now 2006 is looking even better."

Nikles built 63 homes in Pike County in 2004, and another 53 in 2005. He said buyers faced with sticker shock in higher-priced markets see Pike County as a more wallet-friendly option.

"Our principal buyers come from the whole northern New Jersey area," Nikles said. "We get a lot from Orange County and Rockland County, too. I think people just got priced out of the market in Orange County, and came here to get a better bargain."

Commercial real estate also appears to be booming in Pike County, and not just along the so-called Million Dollar Mile - a stretch of Route 209 between Matamoras and Milford now bristling with big-box stores and other businesses.

Along the Delaware River in Dingmans Ferry, Realtor Roy B. Hull said commercial properties are in high demand in the area around Route 739.

"There's been a noticeable increase in commercial property for sale over the past three to six months," Hull said. "There's more activity now than we've seen in a long time."

Hull said virtually all of the commercial properties his office lists are either sold or under contract, and he's about to close a deal on a 10,000-square-foot commercial building.

With commercial space selling and leasing for as much as \$18 a square foot, up from \$10 to \$12 a square foot just a few years ago, there's big money to be made.

Rising prices in Pike County make properties attractive investments to businesses. And prices are still low enough that prime real estate can be had for a fraction of what it would cost in New Jersey, just across the Delaware.

"It's mostly people from Jersey looking to relocate or expand their businesses up here," Hull said. "They're looking at selling property for \$2 million they may have paid \$300,000 for. Others have successful businesses in Jersey but they see the growth potential up here and they want to tap into it."

Back at Prime Time Meats, Peereboom looks ahead with excitement to his own slice of the Pike County boom.

He's getting ready to move himself and his 10 employees into a new, 12,000-square-foot building he built to allow his business room to expand. He'll offer an expanded deli section and seafood to go along with the hand-cut, super-fresh meat that's his bread and butter.

The building will also house a mortgage brokerage and a pharmacy. And it will give Peereboom some much-needed breathing room to continue doing a job he loves.

"I love the one-on-one with the customers," he said. "You get to know them. They come in the door and our guys already know it's three pork chops or whatever. We see their kids grow up. It's almost like we become part of the family."

"I know we're growing," Peereboom said. "Hopefully this will let us do what we do a little bit better."

