

Business Barometer March 2009

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People Seek Pizzazz, Spend on Homes

A landscaping and garden center operation in Camden, Ark.

Water features, fountains and statuary sell well. Anything that adds pizzazz to the garden does well. In a bad economy, people tend to want bright colors, so when I do bedding plants in the spring, I'll add more color.

The weather causes business to remain slow at the start of the year. We don't get going until the weather warms up. Fall was great though.

I'm looking forward to a good spring. When things are a little more depressed, people start spending on their homes; they fix up their spaces.

People Invest in Homes, Not Stock

A water feature contractor in Grantville, Ga.

The cold and rainy weather of the past two months kept business slow. We started getting phone calls for residential quotes and pricing the last two weeks. We picked up a few good jobs and bid on about nine others.

I expect business to return, especially with more people investing in things around the home instead of putting their money in stocks because they keep going down. Most people understand that their homes will go back up in value, so they choose to invest in it now.

Green Products Gain Show Interest

A water garden designer and contractor in Ankeny, Iowa

We were up about 30 percent last year, which made 2008 our best year ever. We're not working right now because of the weather, but we just finished our first winter home show and received more leads this year than the past three.

Rainwater harvest is our new thing, with major interest in the systems displayed at the winter show. People expressed excitement about the green product. I heard a lot of talk about rainbarrels and other green options.

Installations Slow, Products Move

An aquatic plant nursery that designs, installs and maintains aquatic gardens and fish in Tucson, Ariz.

Our scheduled maintenance accounts on ponds, waterfalls and other features remain good. Algae products sell well along with fish and fish products. Plants sales dwindled this year.

This usually is our busiest time of year for installations, but the housing market slowed us down. To compensate, we let some people go (temporary layoffs) and cut back hours.

Fountains Enhance Homes, Business

An aquatic plant nursery in Dania Beach, Fla.

We sell a lot of pottery and other items that enhance people's homes. Because people travel less, they invest in their own spaces and create their own oasis.

We also sell many smaller fountains — under 5 feet tall. The large pieces don't move well around here, because so many people live in condos and smaller properties. Disappearing fountains remain popular

At this point, product moves and we can pay our staff and the bills, including buying new merchandise. In this economy, it's about keeping my head above water, and I enjoy coming to work each day.

Slow Start for the New Year

A water feature contractor with a specialty nursery in Cumming, Ga.

We're cautiously optimistic. Our water garden business and water construction business are a little off. People take more time to commit now. They want to design in phases, which is slower.