



April 11, 2004

*We Mean Business*

Search Editorial Content:

Go

[Advanced Search](#)

- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [The Daily](#)

[Home](#)

[Subscribe](#)

A promotional banner for the "2004 Book of Lists". It features the Colorado Springs Business Journal logo on the left and right sides. The central text reads: "2004 Book of Lists", "New and Improved", and "Over 70 Lists Packed Full of Leads".

### **Multi-family specialist compiles market report**

In other apartment news, Ron Spraggins, CCIM and owner of Commonwealth, an apartment brokerage, has compiled research on apartment rents, tenant profiles and sales figures. His work drew praise from one of the city's largest property management firms.

Steve Engle, president of Griffis-Blessing, cited Spraggin's work after reviewing the apartment broker's 2003 market report, which was completed in February.

"He confirms what we are seeing in our own properties," Engle said. "He delves not only into geographical data but into classes of property and concludes that better quality rental properties have filled up at the expense of lesser properties. That is consistent with what we're finding."



May 7, 2004

*We Mean Business*

### **Multifamily market trends key to successful investment**

by Becky Hurley  
05/07/2004

Some commercial and multifamily brokers derive pleasure from the sales process. Others enjoy crunching numbers to determine cap rates, internal rates of return or cash flow.

In a special class, however, are the deal-makers who thrive on creating a "big win" environment for investors, based on pre-sale market analysis, on an examination of high-return investment opportunities and a working knowledge of market dynamics.



CSBJ Photo

The latter, as Ron Spraggins, president of Commonwealth Investments has learned, comes from years of experience - his own began in the mid-1970s. As a contemporary of Colorado Springs' commercial real estate industry pioneers such as Steve Schuck, John Olive and Steve Engel, Spraggins founded the city's first multifamily brokerage in 1975.

He once owned Broadmoor Villa Apartments, Glen Pond and Country Club Gardens. Today the veteran broker is mentoring his sons, Shane and Ryan, on the intricacies of the multifamily market and on what constitutes a good investment.

To owners and property managers such as Steve Engel at Griffis-Blessing, this attention to the subtleties of the business pay off in increased profits. "In our business you have to pay attention not only to what year a property was built and the rents a one or two bedroom unit will generate, but to the quality of the structure - the 'class' of property you operate," he said. "You have to also figure in the cost of marketing and incentives."



### **Investors focus of data-rich report**

Engel credits Spraggins and Commonwealth with providing some of the cleanest and most helpful data available in the Pikes Peak region apartment market. The Commonwealth 2004 Apartment Market Survey, compiled and published in January includes data from 313 apartment complexes of 20 or more units and encompasses more than 30,000 apartments.

Unlike other analysts, including the University of Denver's Gordon Von Stroh, who publishes the Pikes Peak Apartment Association's market status report, Spraggins' team breaks down rents and buildings, not just by quadrants of town, but into seven distinct neighborhoods.

"You can't say that an apartment near Old Colorado City falls in the same category with newer product near MCI in Mountain Shadows," he said. "And all buildings constructed pre-1980 are not alike. In Southwest Colorado Springs, you've got an older property like the Regency Towers Apartments which certainly qualifies as a Class A property. You can't lump it in with average units built in the 1950s off Cheyenne Road or Nevada Avenue."

The report defines Class A apartments as the "best" complexes in terms of location, amenities and quality of construction. Residents are typically white-collar and able to afford single family homes.

Class B units are in complexes surrounded by neighborhood settings. Amenities typically include a pool and formal play area. The properties are better maintained and have better curb appeal than Class C complexes. Tenants are described as young families and single parents who value school district location.

Class C properties are found in transition areas between commercial sectors and residential neighborhoods. They often are clustered with other apartment complexes, offer amenities similar to Class B complexes, but may not be as well-maintained. Tenant population is varied, and price, more often than location, is most important.

Commonwealth's team also divides multifamily rents into "street rents" and "economic rents" - differentiating what asking rents are for new tenants in contrast to street rents minus concessions.

"Since the 11,000 troops were deployed a year ago, we saw complexes giving away everything from one or two free months rent to washers and dryers or bicycles to attract new residents," he said. "Especially for investors who own 200 or 300 units, that cost mounts up and must be figured in to any P&L."

Engle said that Spraggins' analysis is "right on."

"Like him, we are seeing tenants migrate from Class C or B apartments to the amenities of Class A complexes," Engle said. "That has come about because low interest rates, a slow job market and troop deployments which created higher vacancies in all local

properties. As a result, landlords have offered aggressive incentives and have lowered rents to attractive levels."

That trend may soon level off, however. Returning troops have swelled occupancy rates at properties such as Creekside at Palmer Park, a \$20 million-plus new Class A complex completed by Griffis-Blessing for an investor in 2002. A spokesman for the 333-unit property said a \$250 move-in incentive continues, but a four to five percent vacancy rate means tenants are willing to pay anywhere from \$800 to \$1200 per month (on a 12 to 15-month lease) for a one- or two-bedroom unit.

#### Reflecting on past highs and lows

An individualist who doesn't always subscribe to others' definition of a "hot market", Spraggins finds some top sales per unit statistics generated since 2000 to be contradictory. His office bases its work on the assumption that apartment investors like to buy low and sell high.

"Looking back, 2000 was the top of the market - the time to be selling, not buying," he said. "Almost all who bought earlier in the 90s made fantastic returns. Class A properties that sold in 2000 for \$84,000 per unit won't see a positive return for years because the average price of Class A units sold in 2001 dropped to \$71,000 and remain at that level in 2004. That means investors who have owned real estate for four years have not yet seen appreciation back to the price they paid in 2000."

Through four recessionary cycles, the broker has made an avocation of tracking "street rents", "economic rents" and tenant migration statistics, all of which are key to long-term investor gains.

In the preface to the January 2004 report, Spraggins included yearend 2003 migratory trends in the tenant population - noting that Class A vacancies were down to 12 percent while vacancies at Class B complexes soared to 17 percent. Perhaps surprisingly to those outside the industry, Class A complexes in good geographic areas were enjoying 90 to 98-percent occupancies.

Spraggins also notes that while "location, location, location" is an accepted real estate mantra, in the case of multifamily investment, "timing, timing, timing" may be more accurate. "I've seen investors lose money in a great location if they purchased at the wrong time," he said.

To illustrate, he recalls advising his clients to buy in 1990 when vacancy rates hovered at 14 percent and had been higher than 12 percent since 1984. By 1994, vacancies had dropped to 1 percent. "The largest rent increases in our history occurred through 2000," Spraggins said. "Building values rose on some complexes from \$10,000 per unit to over \$50,000 per unit. Once again, the idea, like all investments, is to buy low and sell high."

#### Looking into

the crystal ball

While Spraggins enjoys recounting stories of past "big win" investments - including a 4,300-percent return on one client's \$200,000 investment in the Wildridge Apartment complex, purchased for \$4.6 million in 1991 and sold in 1993 for \$8.6 million - he remains focused on the future.

"Our research indicates that the market will basically remain unchanged in 2004 unless new apartment households exceed the new units being added," he said. "When this happens the vacancy rate goes down, allowing rents to start escalating, which in return, increases the value of the apartment complex."

Commonwealth's research reports that 300 units will come on line in 2004, but notes that 440 more are "on hold," pending the return of a robust apartment market.

Spraggins sees the return of the troops as a boon to the market, but cautions that the privatization of Fort Carson's post family housing is well under way. He points to 840 new apartments units added in Phase I, with additional units planned for Phase II, according to GMH Military Housing estimates.

-Editorial@csbj.com

[\[go to home page\]](#) \_\_\_\_\_

Copyright © 2004, The Colorado Springs Business Journal All Rights Reserved.  
[Terms & Conditions of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

WASHINGTON DC PAPER INTERVIEWS RON SPRAGGINS, CCIM & PRESIDENT OF COMMONWEALTH, AREAS OLDEST APARTMENT FIRM



## Rocky Mountain News (CO)

July 5, 2003 Section: City Desk/Local Edition: Final Page Number: 4A

### WAR COSTLY TO SPRINGS

M.E. Sprengelmeyer

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Every day the troops are away in Iraq, the Colorado Springs economy keeps paying a steep "cost of freedom."

Four months into the deployment of about 11,000 soldiers from Fort Carson, the absence of the troops is taking a toll on local businesses, sales tax coffers, the housing market and even school district budgets.

Some economists say the financial effects are more severe than they had predicted, although things could have been much worse if El Paso County had not expanded other sectors of its economy in the past decade.

"Colorado Springs has a diverse economy, and the military and defense industry are just one part of that - albeit a large part," said economic consultant David Bamberger. "Deployments are a bump in the road."

That bump is slowing down the area's recovery from the downturn in the high-tech industry, Bamberger said.

Earlier this year, he projected that a one-year deployment would take \$280 million out of the local economy. He has since revised the projection to \$310 million. How is that impact felt?

\* In the housing market. The departure of soldiers' families has contributed to double-digit apartment vacancy rates that were already high because of a glut of new units. In southeast Colorado Springs, some complexes near Fort Carson reported losing 30 percent or more of their tenants overnight, and landlords have been forced to drop rents, said Ron Spraggins, president of Commonwealth, an apartment brokerage firm.

\* In the job market. Bamberger estimates that 2,300 jobs have been lost in local businesses as an indirect result of the troop deployment, contributing to an unemployment rate still hovering around 6 percent.

## Slowdown in real estate? No way. Apartment market booming

By RUMALI F. SPRAGGINS

Although there has been turbulence in the real estate market in recent years, Colorado Springs' apartment market is now one of the favorite buying locations for investors from across the country.

This situation raises two interesting questions: First, why is this happening? Just a few years ago, one couldn't give an apartment away. And more important, what factors contributed to changing this attitude?

Several factors could be cited, but when all is said and done, it comes down to the basics: Astute investors know that timing is just as important as the magic real estate word, location. The question is, "What is the correct time?"

In dealing with the local market for 23 years, it's apparent that research of simple supply and demand is the key. Supply is obviously defined as looking at the existing units in the market and determining what new products are going to come available, or come on-line, in the future.

In the same way, demand is simply forecasting the increase in population and determining the average household size so you can determine how many new households will happen each year. A household is a unit that requires a dwelling unit.

Next, you have to forecast how many of these new households will go to apartments. Then, comparing supply to demand you can predict what will happen. (We've covered this in two paragraphs. Obviously, hours and hours are required to obtain and decipher these facts... and also important is a "gut feeling" about the local market, economy, etc., which only comes from years of experience in that local market. Getting on the street and burning a lot of ketchup (if necessary) increases in base jobs, those that bring in new dollars to the local economy, is a critical factor.

The following is why we experienced the overbuilding problem during the mid-1980s. The vacancy rate in 1983 was estimated at 8%:

New Apartment Construction	Inventory	Plus
780 (1983)	1,000 (1983)	1,780
1,000 (1984)	1,000 (1984)	2,000 (1984)
1,000 (1985)	1,000 (1985)	3,000 (1985)
1,000 (1986)	1,000 (1986)	4,000 (1986)
1,000 (1987)	1,000 (1987)	5,000 (1987)

Since 1988, approximately 30,000 new apartment units were added to the supply side. The increase in demand for the same period, however, was only 18,000. It doesn't take much to see that this created some obvious vacancies. In fact, the vacancy rate went from 4% in 1984 to over 15% in 1986. Then came the recession.

1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
14.0%	13.0%	12.0%	11.0%	10.0%	9.0%	8.0%

According to the Apartment Guide, a quarterly apartment survey provided by the Freedbeck Ross Company, vacancy was 3.5% as of March 1993. **Rent Increases**

Class A three-bedroom rents have increased approximately 20% during the last year. Two-bedroom rents are up 18%, and one-bedroom rents have increased 13%. Projections are for 40% to 45% increases during 1993. The average rent per square foot of approximately 60 cents, however, isn't much higher than 1984 levels. Overall rents for A complexes were \$432 for a one-bedroom unit; \$576 for a two-bedroom unit; and \$752 for a three-bedroom unit (as of March 1993).

### Sales Market

What follows is a summary of 1992 apartment sales for Colorado Springs, over 30 units:

	Units	\$ Value	\$ per sq ft
Class A	332	14,291,000	27.37
Class B	248	10,455,000	17.28
Class C	300	4,942,000	11.81
Total	1,280	29,688,000	17.32

Comparing these figures to a summary of apartment sales (per unit price) in Colorado Springs over 30 units is also revealing:

	1991	1992	% Change
Class A	22.72	27.37	20.0%
Class B	14.99	17.28	14.5%
Class C	9.07	11.81	29.6%

It should be noted that the above is an average of 1992 sales. Current market prices for Class A complexes is in the \$30,000 to \$25,000 per unit range; Class B is in the \$20,000 to \$25,000 per unit range, and Class C is in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 per unit range.

Investors currently are looking at 9% to 10% return on cash (cost-on-cost) for A buildings, 4% to 12% for Class B, and 13% to 17% for Class C. IRR's are from 18% to 22%. Look for these returns to go down 1% to 2% by year end.

These prices are still approximately 70% of replacement cost (new construction).

Don't look for a construction boom like we experienced in the past. This won't happen due to the following. The 1986 Tax Act changed the law on applying "paper losses" from apartment ownership to other income. New construction will have to make economic sense. The majority of the pre-1986 construction was funded by tax losses not cash.

# Colorado Springs and the Southern Front Range *Focus*

1993

## Industry experts analyze Colorado Springs' real estate markets

### Office market

#### Palmer McAllister Company

The Colorado Springs office vacancy rate has dropped to 14.9%, the lowest surveyed since 1983, and an impressive fall from the 18.5% level reported one year ago. Leasing activity is up 10.2% compared to one year ago, and absorption of office space has increased nearly ten fold during the same period. The northern and eastern market areas have accounted for the vast majority of activity, while the (D) and southern market areas have been relatively stagnant thus far in 1993. The average lease rate for available office space is virtually unchanged from the levels reported one year ago: \$6.23 NNN versus \$6.24 NNN.

dropped from 21.5% to 18.1% during this same period. Lease rates for available space have increased 1.4% since last year and now stand at \$6.33 NNN, unchanged from year-end 1992.

MARKET	1992	1993	% CHG
TOTAL	11,740,874	12,771,151	10.1
NE	2,577,233	2,827,740	9.7
SE	2,072,233	2,152,153	3.8
SW	1,094,421	1,051,421	-3.9
D	441,900	441,900	0.0
S	555,127	598,937	7.9

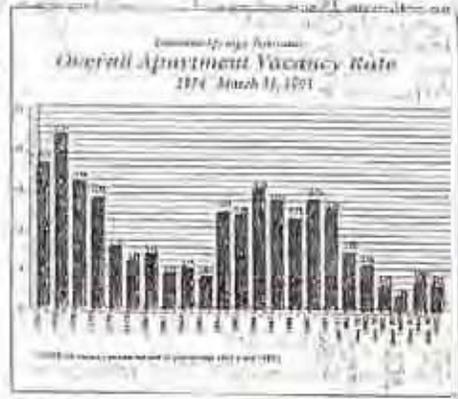
MARKET	1992	1993	% CHG
TOTAL	11,740,874	12,771,151	10.1
NE	2,577,233	2,827,740	9.7
SE	2,072,233	2,152,153	3.8
SW	1,094,421	1,051,421	-3.9
D	441,900	441,900	0.0
S	555,127	598,937	7.9

### Apartment market

#### Apartment Guide and Frederick Ross Company

The information provided in *The Colorado Springs Quarterly Apartment Survey* is the largest compilation of apartment data in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It has been taken from the Colorado Apartment Guide, Inc., data bank as of March 1993. The majority of all apartment complexes consisting of 20 or more units have been included in this survey. The data bank consists of 378 complexes, representing over 26,000 apartments. The data contained in this report is maintained through daily interaction with apartment resident managers and their leasing agents.

Source: Ron Spaggiari, CCIM, Frederick Ross Company



### Industrial market

#### Palmer McAllister Company

Industrial market activity during the first quarter of 1993 is comparable to the levels reported one year ago. Leasing activity is down by 1.5%, and absorption was off 79.0% compared to the first quarter 1992. Vacancy rates have increased marginally during the past year, to 12.1% from 11.9%. The weighted average lease rate for vacant industrial space stands at \$4.26 NNN. Strong leasing activity in light of minimal absorption is due to current industrial users moving from one building to another and, to a lesser degree, new companies taking space vacated by other firms leaving the area.

MARKET	1992	1993	% CHG
TOTAL	11,740,874	12,771,151	10.1
NE	2,577,233	2,827,740	9.7
SE	2,072,233	2,152,153	3.8
SW	1,094,421	1,051,421	-3.9
D	441,900	441,900	0.0
S	555,127	598,937	7.9

### RTC sales

#### Source: Turner Commercial Research

The Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) controls approximately 40% - approximately \$1.5 billion +/- - of the area's foreclosed property. The remaining 60% is in the hands of federal banks, insurance companies, the Small Business Administration and

(continued on page 27)