

LOCAL

Ventura County home sales, prices both crept up last month

Tony Biasotti
Ventura County Star | USA TODAY NETWORK

The median price of a single-family home sold in Ventura County last month jumped more than 10%, and sales volume was also up after more than two years of decline, according to the latest data on California's real estate market.

Ventura County's real estate market since 2020 has been characterized by two related trends: a lack of homes for sale and a high price for those that are sold. In February, the trend of rising prices continued while the trend of few homes on the market reversed itself a bit.

The median price is the point at which half of the homes sold for more and half for less. In February, the median price of a home sold in Ventura County was \$890,000, up 10.6% from a year earlier, according to data released this week by the California Association of Realtors.

That's not the highest price ever for the county — the median was more than \$900,000 from May through November of last year, peaking at \$962,500 in September — but it's the highest ever for the month of February. The real estate market tends to be seasonal, with prices and sales volume lowest in the winter.

The number of sales in February was up 14.2% from a year earlier, after showing 15.8% year-to-year growth

See HOME, Page 4A

Oxnard musician, activist Cola Boyy dies at 34

Wes Woods II
Ventura County Star | USA TODAY NETWORK

Oxnard musician Cola Boyy, who performed at the 2019 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and whose unique disco music garnered a passionate local following, has died.

Matthew Urango, 34, died March 17 in Oxnard, according to the Ventura County Medical Examiner's Office. The cause and manner of death are pending and could take about three months to determine, authorities said.

The self-proclaimed "disabled disco innovator" performed on the same Coachella lineup as fellow Oxnard artist Anderson .Paak.

More than just a musician, Cola Boyy also used his platform to fight for disability rights, tenants rights and others, said Carolyn Mullin, executive director of the nonprofit Oxnard Performing Arts Center Corp., which oversees the city-owned venue.

He was committed to Oxnard and chose to stay and involve his community, she said.

"You would see that in his music videos that were shot in Oxnard and featured people in Oxnard," Mullin said.

Mullin said Cola Boyy has been an honorary nonprofit board member since 2019. He will remain a board member in memoriam, which has been done for others, she said.

"I don't think any of us saw this coming," Mullin said about his death.

David Stalsworth, 19, of Oxnard, is a musician who became friends with Urango through the local music scene. "To someone who had never met him, I would say he was one of the fun-



Oxnard musician Cola Boyy, whose legal name is Matthew Urango, in an undated photo. The charismatic performer and activist fought for disability rights. PROVIDED BY DAVID STALSWORTH

niest, most talented people you'd ever meet," Stalsworth said in an email. "An absolute joy to be around to say the least."

Stalsworth said it's difficult to pinpoint the sound of his friend's music. Urango pulled inspiration from every style, he said.

"He was always making some of the most unique songs I've ever heard," he said. "The impact he left on Oxnard musically and culturally is immeasurable."

Luis Guereca, 51, of Oxnard, is an independent filmmaker who followed Cola Boyy's career and would see him regularly at concerts in the city supporting other artists.

"Whenever he walked into a room there was a vibe he created," he said. "He always played it low key and didn't let any of his success go to his head, and people loved that about him."

Guereca watched Cola Boyy perform at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center

with other local bands.

"He just had that place jumping," he said. "When he took the stage, there was just this incredible energy he brought. I've never seen a crowd react that way to any other show ... it was exciting."

One of the last concerts Cola Boyy promoted on social media was a headlining Nov. 25 performance at The CFF in Oxnard, with proceeds going toward the Palestinian youth movement.

He released his first five-song EP "Black Boogie Neon" on the Record Makers label in 2018. His debut 10-song album "Prosthetic Boombox" was released on the same label in 2021.

He worked with thrash metal and punk hardcore groups, but he released an album putting his own spin on disco.

Mullin, of the performing arts center, said Cola Boyy's music was constantly evolving.

See COLA BOYY, Page 4A

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Thousand Oaks man gets 19 years in online sex case

Staff reports Ventura County Star

A Thousand Oaks man has been sentenced to 19 years in prison for violent sex crimes against two teenage girls whom he was accused of sexually extorting online.

Connor Joseph Kerns, 21, was sentenced Tuesday in a Ventura courtroom. He had previously pled guilty to three felony charges: forcible rape, forcible oral copulation on a minor over age 14 and forcible sexual acts on a minor under 14.



Kerns

Prosecutors said Kerns contacted a 16-year-old girl through the Snapchat messaging application in July 2021 and conversed with her repeatedly before coercing her in to sending him sexually provocative pictures of herself. Another Snapchat user with the name Dexter — who in reality was Kerns — allegedly contacted the girl, saying he had hacked Kerns' account. He threatened to post the victim's provocative pictures online unless she agreed to send him nude images of herself, according to a news release from the Ventura County District Attorney's Office.

Authorities said she complied but then Kerns used the second account to demand that the girl engage in numerous sexual acts with him in person. She did so out of fear to end the abuse but

"This sentence sends a clear message that such despicable acts won't be tolerated, and sexual predators will face full prosecution. We hope it serves as a reminder to parents to stay vigilant and discuss social media risks with their children."

Benjamin Moreno, prosecutor

ultimately contacted law enforcement after he continued making demands, prosecutors said.

Officials said they later learned that he had used similar tactics in January 2022 to victimize a 13-year-old girl from Los Angeles County. The girl told her parents, who reported it to the Los Angeles Police Department. He was arrested about six months later and charged with multiple felonies in Ventura County Superior Court, officials said.

Prosecutor Benjamin Moreno said the severity of the sentence highlights what he called the defendant's "appalling crimes while demonstrating the perils of social media."

"This sentence sends a clear message that such despicable acts won't be tolerated, and sexual predators will face full prosecution," he said in a statement. "We hope it serves as a reminder to parents to stay vigilant and discuss social media risks with their children."

Home

Continued from Page 3A

the month before. That's a major reversal. Before January, sales volume had dropped almost every month since the summer of 2021, sometimes by as much as 50% from the prior year.

There were many factors that combined to make home sales scarce in 2022 and 2023, with the rise in mortgage interest rates near the top of the list.

"We are really, in many ways, climbing out from the bottom in terms of home sales," said Selma Hepp, chief economist for the real estate information firm CoreLogic. "Last year, we were at the lowest levels we've seen going back to 2007."

The thing holding back sales in California, she said, has been lack of inventory, not lack of demand. In other words, there haven't been many homes on the market, but the ones that do go up for sale are still selling quickly.

"We're normalizing now," Hepp said. "I do think 2024 will be better than 2023."

That doesn't mean that people trying to buy a home will get much relief from high prices, though.

In its recent forecast report for Ventura County, the California Lutheran University Center for Economic Research & Forecasting predicted that prices will continue to rise through at least 2026, with the median topping \$1 million within the next two years. The main reason for our high prices, CLU's economists said, is our lack of new housing. Ventura County is now the least affordable metropolitan area in the nation for homebuyers, according to data from the National Association of Realtors that take into account both home prices and wages.

Tony Biasotti is an investigative and watchdog reporter for the Ventura County Star. Reach him at tbiasotti@vcstar.com. This story was made possible by a grant from the Ventura County Community Foundation's Fund to Support Local Journalism.

Cola Boyy

Continued from Page 3A

"It was so catchy and energetic," she said.

Mullin wasn't always aware that Cola Boyy, who rode a scooter to get around, used a prosthetic leg, which was referenced in the "Prosthetic Boombox" album title. He was reportedly born with spina bifida, scoliosis and kyphosis.

Cola Boyy had been working on a new album that was scheduled for release this summer, she said.

In January, he posted on X, formerly Twitter, that he spent three days "in the hospital with bronchitis/pneumonia I'm back home now nothing can stop me from getting this new record out!"

A memorial tribute concert to help raise funds for the family is being planned, Mullin said.

"He was one of the shining stars of Oxnard and it's a shame more people don't know that," she said. "The fact he did what he did in his life is amazing."

Wes Woods II covers West County for the Ventura County Star. Reach him at wesley.woodsii@vcstar.com, 805-437-0262 or @JournoWes.

Litter

Continued from Page 2A

All projects must be started by June 30 with receptacles or landscape ordered, installed or nearing completion of installation. This deadline is necessary because the first assessment of the

grant-awarded projects' successes will also be due by June 30.

Of course, as with most grants, receiving money also requires spending money. As part of the application, applicants must explain their "service plan for monitoring receptacles or long-term maintenance and irrigation plans for the beautification project." Applicants must identify the department responsi-

ble for managing the plans and explain how the maintenance will be funded long term. The applicant must also agree to collect litter assessment data five times in one year and identify the individual responsible for coordinating the data collection.

If you know a park with insufficient trash cans, or a beach with trash cans missing tops and ravaged by seagulls,

get in touch with the public agency in charge of the site and tell the staff about this grant opportunity. You can find the application at surveyMonkey.com/r/KCBDemonstrationProjects24.

David Goldstein, an environmental resource analyst with the Ventura County Public Works Agency, can be reached at 805-658-4312 or david.goldstein@ventura.org.

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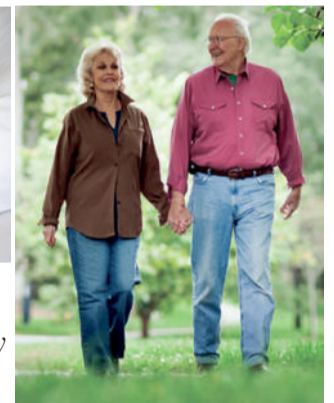
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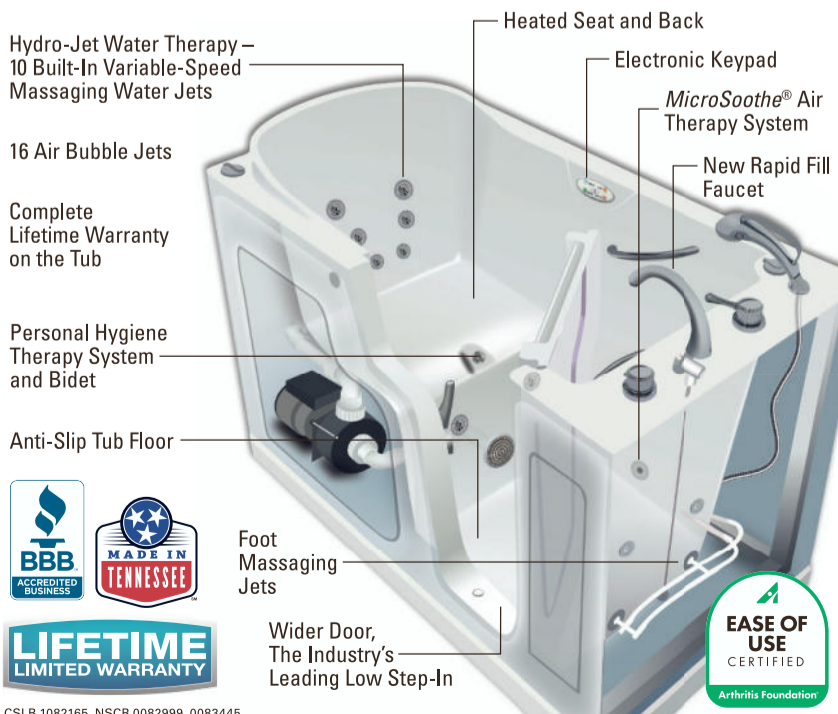
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