

BUSINESS

APPLE SCORE

QUARTERLY PROFIT UP 73 PERCENT. 3D



▲ DOW: 13,785.07 (+68.12) ▲ S&P 500: 1,518.09 (+7.05) ▼ NASDAQ: 2,648.17 (+8.31) ▲ OIL: \$75.88/bbl. (+\$2.32) ▼ 10-YR NOTE: 4.90% (-0.05%)

SECTION EDITOR ANNE VASQUEZ, 954-356-4670, alvasquez@sun-sentinel.com

MARKET WATCH 2 • BUSINESS TOPICS 3 • STOCKS 4 • MUTUAL FUNDS

BRIEFING

STAFF REPORTS, BLOOMBERG NEWS AND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fed regional survey shows modest growth

The economy registered modest growth in the early summer, considering how consumers and some businesses were buffeted by both high gasoline prices and the sour housing market.

That's the gist of a Federal Reserve region-by-region survey, released Wednesday, which also showed the economy clearly has emerged from a rut at the beginning of the year and is now growing, albeit slowly.

On the inflation front, consumer prices continued to increase "at a moderate rate," the Fed report said. Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke told Congress last week that he expects the economy to grow gradually through the course of this year and to strengthen a bit next year. He said that inflation remains the chief concern.

THE HELP TEAM CONSUMER ALERT

Contractor court now in session

Consumers have forum for complaints

BY MC NELLY TORRES
STAFF WRITER

After brutal 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons caused a deluge of complaints against South Florida contractors, Broward County officials decided to provide a venue for consumers and contractors to settle disputes outside of court.

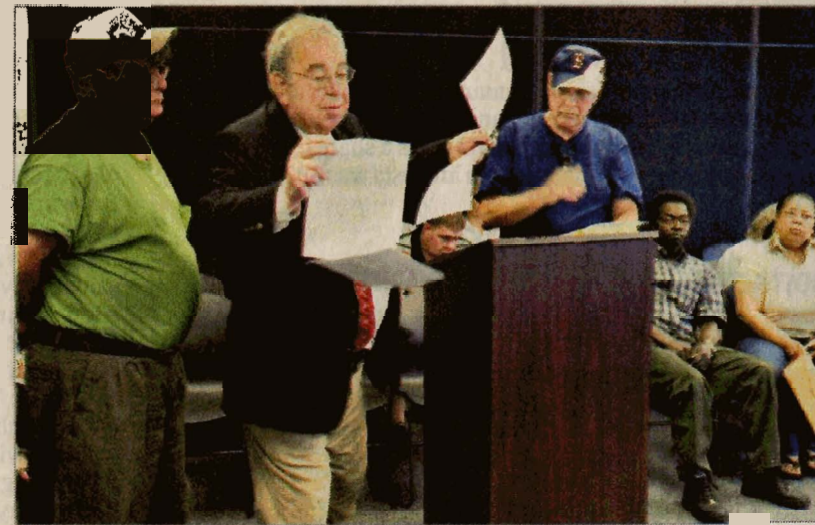
The setting is similar to a trial. Both sides present evidence and argue their cases in front of a judge.

But at these proceedings, the judge is a hearing officer contracted by the

county, and the disputes are related to construction projects. It's homeowners against contractors. On Wednesday, Broward County officials held the third of what might be called "contractor court" hearings.

Each case is "tried" after a homeowner lodges a complaint and an investigation has been completed, said David Burgueño, chief investigator with the county's contractor licensing enforcement division.

"The hearings are civil by nature, but the county's Central Licensing



SETTLING DISPUTE: Prince White, left, owner of P. White Roofing, consults with lawyer Maurice Graham as James Howell, an independent contractor, presents his position before Broward's Central Examining Board. Joseph and Alice Smith, seated, had complained about a roofing job. Staff photo/ Colleen K. Cummins

Examining Board has to approve the final outcome," which is binding, Burgueño said. He said county officials plan to hold the hearings twice a

month.

Kurt Eismann, director of the Pal

■ HEARINGS CONTINUES ON 2D

MARKET WATCH

BLOOMBERG NEWS AND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Dow Jones industrials on Wednesday rose 68.12, or 0.50 percent, to 13,785.07, after trading up more than 100 points and down more than 40.

Broader stock indicators also rose in shaky trading. The Standard & Poor's 500 index climbed 7.05, or 0.47 percent, to 1,518.09, and the Nasdaq composite index advanced 8.31, or 0.31 percent, to 2,648.17.

Aaron Rents Inc. (RNT US)

Shares fell the most since February 2001, losing \$3.17, or 12 percent, to \$24.05. The office and residential furniture-rental company cut its 2007 earnings forecast to a range of \$1.50 to \$1.60 a share, the company said.

NutriSystem Inc. (NTRI US)

Shares fell the most since January, losing \$6.88, or 11 percent, to \$56.90. The operator of an online weight-loss program said it expects to earn as much as 82 cents a share in the third quarter. The average estimate from analysts was 89 cents.

MOST ACTIVE

NYSE	VSO	Last	Net Chg	Volume
FordM	5.7	7.97	-29	107722700
Corning	3.0	24.71	-1.48	47213500
Pfizer	0.6	24.78	-1.11	44972400
EMC Cp	2.1	18.91	-1.4	43161800
Citigrp	0.8	49.21	-10	41206000

NASDAQ	VSO	Last	Net Chg	Volume
PwShs QQQ	27.4	49.40	+0.7	151981600
Amazon	13.3	86.18	+16.93	54616000
SunMicro	1.5	5.24	+0.1	52569400
Microsoft	0.5	30.71	-0.9	52407400
Cisco	0.8	29.91	+1.5	50918500

AMEX	VSO	Last	Net Chg	Volume
SPDR	63.7	151.61	+31	243659800
iShr2K nya	154.8	80.70	-30	153295200
SP FncI	139.5	34.70	+1.6	74215300
SP Engy	51.0	73.30	+1.15	32604200
PRUSHQQQ	265.6	42.82	+1.1	28485800

DIARIES

NYSE	Wed.	Tues.
Advanced	1319	349
Declined	1994	3004
Unchanged	104	68
New Highs	43	75
New Lows	429	353
Vol. (00)	41367071	40555801

NASDAQ	Wed.	Tues.
Advanced	1352	532
Declined	1691	2536
Unchanged	118	106
New Highs	54	47
New Lows	237	271
Vol. (00)	24481606	24194258

AMEX	Wed.	Tues.
Advanced	489	308
Declined	722	916
Unchanged	94	89
New Highs	19	32
New Lows	91	80
Vol. (00)	8500940	8038967

BIGGEST GAINERS

BIGGEST LOSERS

Consumers have a place to take contractor disputes

HEARINGS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1D

Beach County Contractors Certification Division, said the county has no such venue, but is considering a program that mirrors Broward's hearings.

The new program debuted this year as complaints filed against contractors in Broward and Palm Beach counties have continued to be among consumers' top concerns. A total of 3,000 complaints were filed against Broward contractors in 2005 and 2006, and 805 have been filed since January, Burgueño said. Last year, 483 cases were filed against contractors in Palm Beach County and about 302 cases have been filed so far this year, according to the Palm Beach County Consumer Affairs Division.

Among the cases tried Wednesday was that of Joseph and Alice Smith, who spent

months waiting for Washington Brothers Roofing to honor the contract it signed in March 2006 to replace a roof on their Fort Lauderdale home. The Smiths gave the company a \$3,000 deposit.

"He represented himself as a licensed roofer," said Alice Smith, 60.

But a second contractor, P. White Roofing, contended Washington Brothers subcontracted the job to the company, which pulled the permit for the Smiths' home.

Attorney Maurice Graham, speaking on behalf of P. White Roofing owner Prince White, contended that he completed the job even though records showed a final inspection failed.

After hearing from both sides, hearing officer Lisa Marie Macci found White, whose license is on probation, to be at fault for pulling a city permit without a direct contract, fail-

ing to supervise a job and abandoning the project. White must pay \$1,400 in restitution to the Smiths and complete the job within 30 days or face a \$500 sanction. White also must attend the county Central Licensing Examining Board's monthly meetings for six months. If he fails to do so, he will be fined \$1,200.

To have a case heard, Broward residents first must file a complaint against contractors licensed by the county. If investigators determine the complaint has merit, it may be referred for a hearing. For more information, or to file a complaint, go to www.broward.org/building/.

Mc Nelly Torres can be reached at mntorres@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4208 or 561-243-6600, ext. 4208.

TIPS FOR HIRING CONTRACTORS

Before hiring a contractor, get three estimates specifying quality and type of materials to be used and how long it would take to complete the work. Ask for references, check out previous work and the contractor's license number.

To research companies or agents registered with the state go to: <http://ccfcorp.dos.state.fl.us/corpweb/inquiry/corpenu.html>.

In Broward County, to verify if a contractor has a license, call the county's Central Examining Board's unlicensed activity section at 954-765-4890 ext. 245, or go to www.broward.org/building.

In Palm Beach County, call the licensing department at 561-233-5525 or www.pbcgov.com/pzb/ contractors to check a license and file a complaint.

— Mc Nelly Torres

Artists develop business skills

INSTITUTE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1D

preparation for gallery inter-

Sailboat Bend neighborhood; applications are being accepted through July 28.

A practicing artist for 20

MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Broward County www.broward.org/building/ Web site at

with other artists.

A veteran in mixed media art, Kichar, 51, who recently expanded his repertoire in public art such as tile mosa-