

Good News in Tough Times continued...

KENN RENNER The number of real estate agents in the Austin, Texas, area has shrunk 30 percent since last year, reflecting a decrease in average monthly home sales in 2008 of more than 50 percent, according to Realtor Kenn Renner. However, after seeing his sales double the first two months over the same period last year, the head of Renner Realty is aiming for a 50 to 65 percent increase in 2009-he hopes to reach \$20 million. Symbolizing his optimism is the early March listing of an \$800,000 home that sold in four days, prompting the seller to remark, "This is a God thing." "We surrender the whole business to Him," says Renner, a member of Glory House Christian Center. "With the power of prayer and our model of doing things-people are looking for that. They want encouragement." Though an independent agent for 25 years, Renner says last fall God directed him to become an affiliate of Keller Williams Realty. The Austin-based franchiser is now the nation's third-largest residential real estate firm. Renner liked the priorities of co-founder/chairman Gary Keller: God first, followed by family and then business. "As a stereotype, [business owners] put business first," Renner says. "It's proven that God first is more biblical." Though not a direct beneficiary of the federal stimulus bill, Renner says one provision of federal legislation adopted in February helped boost his business. The bill changed what had been a \$7,500 no-interest loan to an \$8,000 tax credit for first-time homebuyers. The provision didn't attract much attention from the news media-or Renner, until God told him to send out postcards to his tenants directing them to call him about federal housing assistance. "God said, 'Get the word out,'" Renner recalls. "Nearly everybody who calls me has no idea about the \$8,000 credit. Part of it is revealing what's already there. It's really being aware of the signs of the

times. It's a pretty exciting time." Another step he took recently was adding a note to his Web site that for every home sale, Renner Realty donates \$360 to Fullness in Christ Ministries, a Texas ministry founded by charismatic pastor Ras Robinson. That sum helps educate a child in Peru or the Philippines for a year. "It's one of the ways I'm letting people know this is a Christian business," Renner says.

DENNIS FEDORUK The current downturn is the third Dennis Fedoruk has weathered since he started The Brainy Baby Co. in 1995. However, thanks to increased direct-to-consumer products, his company's sales more than doubled the first two months of 2009. Although he doesn't expect that to continue, Fedoruk still forecasts an increase of 20 to 30 percent for the year. "There's a certain amount of an evergreen nature to our business," says the president of Brainy Baby, which produces videos, books and other products for toddlers. "It is children's education; we have 4.5 million new babies every year; and people will spend money on educational products for their children." Aside from such customary factors boosting sales, Fedoruk sees God's signature written all over a healthy 2009. He talks about the phone ringing and bringing unexpected business or word of distribution into another country. Brainy Baby items can now be found in some 200 nations through sales outlets or video downloads. Although the company's products are aimed at general markets, Brainy Baby is working on a faith-based line for release later this year. The new items will be one way the company can acknowledge the Father behind its prosperity. "God never fails," says Fedoruk, who attends a nondenominational, charismatic church in a suburb of Atlanta. "I believe He is behind everything we do. We never worry; we just practice Matthew 6:33 ['But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you'] and go about God's business." Although he believes a stream of negative media reports has magnified the public's gloomy outlook, the executive says God has been teaching him to remain steady in today's recessionary environment.

Acknowledging that he could constantly worry if he let his mind "go wild," Fedoruk says God has assured him that if he stays on the course He set without turning right or left, things will be all right. "If you're doing what God tells you to do, you're definitely beating a different drum," he says of bucking the trend. "As believers, we know that. We're not always beating the drum of popularity, but if you just stay focused on what you're doing, God will see you through."