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## **Polk Home Permit Hot Streak Continues**

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The Ledger

LAKELAND -- Just because summer is ending doesn't mean Polk's real estate market is cooling off.

Polk County's builders pulled 980 single-family home permits in August; 359 more than a year ago. This total just continues the hot streak Polk's home market has experienced throughout the summer.

June had the second highest total of building permits since The Ledger started keeping records in 1994. During that month, 1,119 permits were pulled for new construction. July's totals rank fourth with 932, but October 2004 still tops the charts with 1,404 permits.

But that could change with the coming month, building officials said.

"I am going to get a bunch in next month before these new impact fees go into effect," said Tim Wallace, Lake Alfred's building and zoning director. "Things are going to start looking really good."

Earlier this month, Polk County commissioners approved raising school impact fees by 435 percent. The impact fee will rise from \$1,607 to \$8,596 for a new, single-family home.

The new fees take effect Dec. 1.

Amy Palmer, Auburndale's community development director, also expects a dash to get home building permits approved before the tax is imposed.

"A lot of new subdivisions are coming in," she said. "Four are under construction and will be ready to plat before the end of the year. I think we will see a lot of builders apply for permits before the impact fees take effect."

Auburndale saw a boost in permits from 14 in August 2004 to 25 last month.

Housing permits in unincorporated Polk County had one of the largest increases last month, from 500 in 2004 to 791 this year. That translates to a 58.2 percent increase.

For the same month last year, Eagle Lake did not post any permits. But this year, builders have pulled 10 permits for two new subdivisions.

"We are doing pretty good over here," said Lisa Freeman, Eagle Lake's building clerk. "We have

some new subdivisions going in. That is what has it going up for us."

Builders already have two subdivisions platted in the city and three more are on their way, she said.

Lake Wales approved 39 permits, 77 percent more from August 2004. Winter Haven also had double-digit increases, approving 69 permits, 53 percent more from last year.

Haines City, Lake Hamilton and Polk City's numbers were not available.

Davenport and Lakeland were the only cities to show declines in new home building permits.

In August, builders across the nation started 2,010,000 homes. This is a 1 percent decrease from last year. Since July, construction starts on new homes and apartments decreased 1.3 percent.

The Ledger reports building permit totals because Polk County does not track housing starts.

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