Agents survey damage and new business in Irma-ravaged Jacksonville

Millie Kanyar

Even the most gung-ho recreation adventurists wouldn't envy Realtor Millie Kanyar, who right now could go fishing out of her backdoor, she quipped.

Kanyar's Jacksonville, Florida, home is still powerless thanks to Hurricane Irma's brutal visit this week, and her location next to a creek meant witnessing higher water levels on her property than ever before.

Water receded quickly in the nation's largest city by geographic measure, but the damage remains after Irma brought unprecedented flooding and storm surge to the metro of 1.6 million on Monday.

"With the debris it is like a war zone, but it's not the Keys," said Michael Starling, an agent with Jacksonville-based First Coast Sotheby's International Realty.

Starling had ventured to check on his downtown office but found there was no power or internet. He assessed the aftermath from a friend's office space nearby.

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A damaged home in Kanyar’s neighborhood.

The area was hit with a deluge of water when the storm surge came up the St. Johns river, which divides the city in two, gushed over the sea walls, and poured over the urban core into the nearby areas of San Marco and Riverside. Both locales are dotted with 100-year old residential homes.

Michael Starling

Flooding surpassed Hurricane Dora’s 1965 record by one foot as the city was hammered with 60 inches of rain, the National Weather Service reported. Flash flood warnings were issued for the beach towns that hug Jacksonville’s eastern edge.

Like many Jacksonville residents, Kanyar faces the repercussions of fallen trees and downed power lines; she and some of her neighbors are hooked up to a generator until further notice.

After “a crazy 48 hours,” Starling said he expected things to return to normal relatively quickly.

Realtors in the area are already mobile, inspecting listings, checking on properties under contract for clients, letting people know if their houses survived and cleaning up. As Kanyar spoke to Inman she was taking a photo of a property for a seller client.

Kanyar is grateful that the state had enough notice to anticipate Irma’s arrival in what has already been an unforgiving hurricane season.

Angela Carter

Meanwhile, Angela Carter, a Realtor associate with Florida Homes Realty & Mortgage in Jacksonville, evacuated to Georgia with her daughter before the storm hit her coastal city.

She's traveling back today to check on a $1.8 million listing near the beach, in addition to a number of new listings that she landed in the last week. The source? Investors ditching their inventory to get out of Jacksonville. The former rental homes range from $230,00 to $775,000 in value.

Usually the market slows down at this time of year, but investors have been blowing up Carter's phone looking to offload rentals. "That's a good thing for our low inventory market," she said. "The concern for us is: Will the consumers be able to afford the insurance on the homes if they are in a flood zone, for instance? People love to be by the water; it's just the reality of living in paradise."

One group, however, has been noticeably absent from Carter's inbound calls since Thursday: buyers, who in Jacksonville often include a mix of snowbirds, first-time buyers and military personnel.

She theorizes that wary clients may be holding their breath for Hurricane Jose.

Email Gill South.

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