

BEST *Places to* LIVE

What makes a great neighborhood? That depends on whom you ask, but most people agree that real estate values and quality schools figure heavily into determining where people, especially those with growing families, want to settle down. There are many great places to live in the I.E., so if you're thinking of a change of address, now might be the time to take the leap.

BY TAMMY MINN

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ore bang for your buck. That's one reason parts of the Inland Empire are enjoying growth, while other California areas remain stagnant. According to the state's Department of Finance, out of California's 58 counties, just six—including Riverside—grew by 1.3 percent or more, ahead of the state average of 0.9 percent between July 1, 2013 and July 1, 2014, the most recent time period for which statistics are available. Others were San Benito, Placer, Contra Costa, Alameda, and San Joaquin.

In addition, Riverside and San

Bernardino counties combined have about 4.2 million residents and are among the state's nine largest counties, sharing that distinction with Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Santa Clara, Alameda, Sacramento, and Contra Costa. These counties contain 70 percent of California's residents.

And that brings us to housing, which is where more bang for your buck comes in. After a rugged few years, the shine is returning to the Inland Empire housing market.

"It's more normal," says Nancy Hughes, a Realtor with Rancon Real





IF YOU'VE been considering a move, now might be the time to take the leap. Check out the statistics on the following pages to see where you might find your next great neighborhood.

Estate in Temecula. In a career that's spanned more than 30 years, she's witnessed all types of booms and busts, but the most recent was a doozy.

During the Great Recession when the bottom fell out of the economy and the real estate market tanked, the region was hit hard. Foreclosures and short sales were abundant, and investors swooped in to take advantage of them.

But that's history. "We are starting to see home equity sales and inventory increasing slightly, which is great news for this region," says Brent Lee, a broker with Windermere Tower Properties in Riverside. "Home equity sales are 70 percent of the current market. This scenario is what the doctor ordered for a housing recovery," he adds.

At one time, cash-rich investors outbid regular homebuyers to snatch up bargains and turn them into rentals or flippers. Now, buyers with a range of desires are wading into home ownership, says Rancon's Hughes. First-timers, move-up buyers, and baby boomers looking to downsize are all perusing

vice president and chief economist of the CAR, says there are still some challenges in the real estate market:

- Home ownership rate for 18- to 34-year-olds is still falling
- Household formation is very slow
- Millennials (those born from about 1980 to 2000) are marrying later or not at all, and they have hefty student loans and dim prospects for high-paying jobs
- Overall, baby boomers are delaying retirement and staying put longer
- Housing inventory is better but still well below normal
- Many people are still unemployed or under-employed.

Even so, roughly 42 percent of potential home buyers can afford a house in the Inland Empire, compared to 20 percent in Orange County and 30 percent in Los Angeles County, making it an appealing prospect for potential buyers, the CAR says.

With inventory tight and the market percolating, it's a seller's market that is leading to multiple offers and many frustrated

term obligations, and having cash ready for a down payment. "But even people who have had short sales more than two years ago can buy now," says Hughes. She's seen some buyers snag 90 percent jumbo loans (usually for homes costing more than \$417,000), "so things have really improved," Hughes says.

Mundy agrees that buyers need to have their financial ducks in a row.

"Pre-qualification and money in hand are most important in the buying process. Money is flowing in the streets, and there are still some low-end financing programs available," Mundy says.

However, buyers need to do a lot of research to find the perfect loan product for their needs, she adds.

Also boosting the market are low interest rates, which most experts think will hold at least a while longer.

But it's not just homebuyers interested in Inland Empire real estate. Home builders are taking note, too. With existing inventory tight, there's room for new construction.

"WE ARE STARTING TO SEE HOME EQUITY SALES AND INVENTORY INCREASING SLIGHTLY, WHICH IS GREAT NEWS FOR THIS REGION."

— BRENT LEE, WINDERMERE TOWER PROPERTIES, RIVERSIDE

the prospects. It's a trend seen throughout the region.

"Families are the cornerstone of our marketplace," says Perrie Mundy, broker-owner of The Perrie Mundy Group in Redlands. In her area, "Starter homes are selling very rapidly and higher-end homes have just started moving," she says.

It helps that the Inland Empire has affordability on its side, as the California Association of Realtors (CAR) points out. Home values in neighboring counties are pricing out many buyers, causing them to look inland. According to CAR, the median price of homes sold in April 2015 by county were:

- San Bernardino: \$219,150
- Riverside: \$333,520
- Los Angeles: \$426,580
- San Diego: \$530,810
- Orange: \$705,190

It's easy to see why the Inland Empire holds appeal. But Leslie Appleton-Young,

buyers, says Windermere's Lee. He's seen some homes sell within 30 days, so quickly that he's able to negotiate a "seller rent back" to allow them time to find a new home before moving out and avoiding moving twice.

But Mundy notes sellers still must be realistic. "It's important for them to know how important the condition of their home plays into a buyer's decision to purchase. Also, the price is most important in determining time on the market, as well as the ultimate selling price. I call it 'staying within the envelope of value,'" she says.

Every home has its own personality. "It's up to the seller and the broker to figure that out and bring out the best in each property," Mundy says.

In a competitive market, it helps for buyers to get pre-qualified. Money is there, says Temecula's Hughes, but lending institutions have returned to the conventional practice of vetting potential buyers by asking for proof of income, credit history, existing debt, long-

One of the largest projects is Ontario's New Model Colony where 50,000 homes are expected to be built in the next 20 years. But other sites are also taking shape, such as Warmington at Stellan Ridge in Riverside, Live Oak Estates in LaVerne, Charleston Estates in Redlands by Melia Homes, and William Lyon's SkyRidge development in the Woodcrest area of Riverside, to name a few.

Windermere's Brent Lee says he recently got a call from "a world class builder" asking for information on schools in the area because his company is investigating the possibility of building high end luxury homes.

"We think the UCR Medical School and the potential of new businesses related to the research and technology of the medical school are making companies take notice and consider expansion into the Inland Empire," Lee says.

"We are clearly in a recovery mode, and the future looks bright," he adds. ■

HOT *Properties*



Tremont Ranch, Redlands

\$998,000

Located on more than 10 acres, this 5,382-square-foot home includes four bedrooms and three-and-a-half baths. Wooden floors and high vaulted ceilings create an open feel indoors. The kitchen includes built-in cabinetry and views of the surrounding canyon. At the bottom of the driveway there is a massive barn area perfect for RV parking and an office. This is the dream home for anyone looking to escape the city life. Offered for \$998,000 by Perrie Mundy, The Perrie Mundy Group, 214 E. Olive Ave., Redlands; (909) 307-0616, redlandsrealestate.com



Canyon Crest Estates, Riverside

\$979,000

This 3,733-square-foot home has four bedrooms, four baths, three fireplaces and a three-car garage on a half-acre lot. In addition to numerous interior amenities, the home has a gourmet kitchen that features white cabinets, an island, and a walk-in pantry. The master suite includes 10-foot ceilings, crown molding, French doors, city lights view, and a gas fireplace. There are also two guest bedrooms and an office, which could be another bedroom. The home is listed for \$979,000 by Brent Lee of Windermere Tower Properties, 7197 Brockton Ave., Riverside; (951) 369-8002, windermertower.com



Santiago Ranchos, Temecula

\$899,000

Located on 2.26 acres in the custom home community of Santiago Ranchos in Temecula, this 3,460-square-foot home includes four bedrooms and three baths, as well as plenty of room for RV or boat parking, or sport field or equestrian use. Indoors, a large kitchen includes granite counters, an island, a huge Jenn-Air six-burner stove plus grill, and beautiful tile and cabinetry. The pool and spa are perfect for relaxing and enjoying the peaceful surroundings. Offered for \$899,000 by Nancy Hughes, The Nancy Hughes Group, Rancon Real Estate, 27740 Jefferson Ave., Suite 100, Temecula; (951) 704-4644, thenancyhughesgroup.com



Mountain Retreat, Oak Glen

\$1,095,000

Privacy, tranquility and sunsets are among the amenities that come with this 3,587-square-foot Old World Spanish style home in Oak Glen. The property includes four bedrooms, three fulls baths and a half bath, gourmet kitchen, and a master bedroom with a fireplace and private patio. In-law quarters, areas for outdoor entertaining, and a play area for children round out the amenities. The home is offered for \$1,095,000 by Renee Affaitati, Century 21 Showcase, 7835 Church St., Highland; (909) 797-4745, raffaitati@mac.com

HOT *Properties*



Historic Bungalow, Riverside \$990,000

Built in 1909, this 3,800-square-foot California bungalow includes five bedrooms and four baths, as well as an office, hardwood floors, wood-beamed ceilings, and original wood wainscot paneling accented by original windows with square stained glass accents. The entry and living room include original built-in cabinets with beveled glass. The remodeled gourmet kitchen includes a 5-burner Wolf range, double oven, built-in refrigerator, instant hot water, dark granite countertops, and white custom cabinetry. Potential buyers must submit prequalifying documents prior to viewing. Listed at \$990,000 by Collette Lee, Windermere Tower Properties, 7197 Brockton Ave., Riverside; (951) 369-8002, windermertower.com

Upland Colonial \$2,995,000

This six-bedroom, seven-bath Colonial style custom home sits on 1.45 acres on a privately gated lot in Upland. The property includes a separate parcel of about 15,000 square feet that is ready to build on. The foyer features soaring ceilings and crystal chandeliers. The dining room can seat 16 and has an adjoining butler's pantry. The gourmet kitchen includes professional grade appliances and a center island with a prep sink. In addition, there is a large kitchen nook area and a great room that includes a wet bar and fireplace. All have balconies overlooking the grounds and infinity pool and spa. The property is offered for \$2,995,000 by Laura Dandoy, Re/Max Resources in Claremont; (909) 398-1810, lauradandoy.com



Single Story Dream, Riverside \$749,900

Located in Riverside's Hawarden Hills area, this custom Spanish style home has Old World charm, but modern amenities. Built in 2014, the 3,000-square-foot home includes four bedrooms, two full baths and two partial baths. The great room, which opens to the kitchen, is perfect for family living or entertaining. The gourmet kitchen includes knotty alder cabinetry, a double oven, stainless steel appliances, and quartz countertops. Energy efficient upgrades include dual-glazed windows and exterior doors, a tankless water heater, two high efficiency, horizontal mount HVAC systems, and recycled wood laminate floors that meet VOC standards in California. Drought resistant landscaping and a water-saving drip system provide a green backdrop for this Spanish masterpiece. The home is offered for \$749,900 by Collette Lee of Windermere Tower Properties, 7197 Brockton Ave., Riverside; (951) 369-8002, windermertower.com

REAL ESTATE

Sales of existing homes saw prices continuing to increase, reflecting an improving economy and stabilizing market. In January 2015, the median price paid for a home in California was \$376,000, up year over year by 6.5 percent from \$353,000 in January 2014. January 2015 marked the 35th consecutive month in which the state's median sale price has increased on a year-over-year basis. Of the existing homes sold statewide in January 2015, 6.7 percent were foreclosures. Foreclosure resales peaked at 58.8 percent in February 2009. The drastic decrease in foreclosures and short sales are positive signs that the residential real estate market is returning to normalcy, according to Inland Empire real estate experts. The chart below reflects existing homes sales for 2014.

City	Single Family Home Median Price Dec 2014	Price Per sq ft	City	Single Family Home Median Price Dec 2014	Price Per sq ft
LOS ANGELES COUNTY	\$475,000	\$324			
Claremont	\$595,000	\$302	92395	\$163,000	\$100
Diamond Bar	\$676,000	\$339	Wrightwood	\$220,000	\$162
La Verne	\$549,000	\$310	Yucaipa	\$272,000	\$161
Pomona			Yucca Valley	\$125,000	\$87
91766	\$312,000	\$250	RIVERSIDE COUNTY	\$290,000	\$156
91767	\$315,000	\$230	Banning	\$180,000	\$131
91768	\$295,000	\$225	Beaumont	\$250,000	\$125
San Dimas	\$540,000	\$300	Canyon Lake	\$325,000	\$167
			Corona		
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY	\$230,000	\$153	92879	\$365,000	\$209
Adelanto	\$145,000	\$89	92880	\$461,000	\$171
Apple Valley			92881	\$450,000	\$201
92307	\$178,000	\$99	92882	\$410,000	\$217
92308	\$155,000	\$99	92883	\$399,000	\$185
Big Bear Lake	\$295,000	\$213	Hemet		
Bloomington	\$230,000	\$170	92543	\$134,000	\$106
Chino	\$405,000	\$235	92544	\$181,000	\$111
Chino Hills	\$570,000	\$287	92545	\$200,000	\$110
Colton	\$200,000	\$155	Idyllwild	\$214,000	\$184
Fontana			Lake Elsinore		
92335	\$240,000	\$179	92530	\$250,000	\$146
92336	\$365,000	\$176	92532	\$301,000	\$120
92337	\$283,000	\$182	Menifee		
Grand Terrace	\$280,000	\$174	92584	\$293,000	\$139
Hesperia			Mira Loma	\$395,000	\$187
92344	\$225,000	\$103	Moreno Valley		
92345	\$165,000	\$105	92551	\$227,000	\$136
Highland	\$260,000	\$152	92553	\$215,000	\$148
Lake Arrowhead	\$311,000	\$168	92555	\$277,000	\$122
Loma Linda	\$346,000	\$179	92557	\$250,000	\$149
Montclair	\$331,000	\$235	Murrieta		
Ontario			92562	\$345,000	\$160
91761	\$355,000	\$216	92563	\$344,000	\$141
91762	\$320,000	\$229	Norco	\$450,000	\$221
91764	\$290,000	\$228	Perris		
Rancho Cucamonga			92570	\$238,000	\$128
91701	\$435,000	\$245	92571	\$225,000	\$121
91730	\$372,000	\$242	Riverside		
91737	\$509,000	\$248	92501	\$235,000	\$176
91739	\$545,000	\$215	92503	\$290,000	\$189
Redlands			92504	\$260,000	\$192
92373	\$385,000	\$219	92505	\$285,000	\$188
92374	\$285,000	\$184	92506	\$340,000	\$206
Rialto			92507	\$270,000	\$181
92376	\$232,000	\$163	92508	\$385,000	\$164
92377	\$300,000	\$170	92509	\$262,000	\$181
San Bernardino			San Jacinto		
92404	\$188,000	\$136	92582	\$225,000	\$95
92407	\$237,000	\$151	92583	\$182,000	\$112
92410	\$146,000	\$131	Temecula		
Upland			92591	\$363,000	\$177
91784	\$575,000	\$239	92592	\$383,000	\$172
91786	\$379,000	\$251	Wildomar	\$308,000	\$133
Victorville			Winchester	\$327,000	\$131
92392	\$176,000	\$93			
92394	\$168,000	\$93			

Sources: Dataquick Information Services, the Los Angeles Times.

SCHOOLS

California's public school students take part annually in statewide standardized tests, and schools are assigned an Academic Performance Index (API) based on test results. Scores range from 200 to 1000 and the state has set 800 as the API target for all schools to meet. The following API numbers show results from tests given in spring 2013, the most recent figures available. For more information about individual districts and schools, see the California Department of Education's website at cde.ca.gov.

Institution	Enrollment	API	Institution	Enrollment	API	Institution	Enrollment	API
CALIFORNIA	6,236,672		Bloomington High	2,123	699	Victor Valley High	2,141	706
LOS ANGELES COUNTY	1,552,704		Colton High	1,941	675	Yucaipa-Calimesa Joint Unified	9,762	793
Bonita Unified	9,968	873	Grand Terrace High	2,230	689	Yucaipa High	2,698	783
Bonita High	2,026	864	Fontana Unified	39,982	757	RIVERSIDE COUNTY	426,227	
San Dimas High	1,268	839	A.B. Miller High	2,473	742	Alvord Unified	19,480	772
Claremont Unified	6,987	858	Fontana High	2,475	701	La Sierra High	2,504	757
Claremont High	2,370	839	Henry J. Kaiser High	2,424	735	Norte Vista High	2,185	714
Pomona Unified	26,264	728	Jurupa Hills High	2,128	746	Banning Unified	4,480	729
Diamond Ranch High	1,833	814	Summit High	2,463	782	Banning High	1,116	658
Ganesh High	1,207	670	Hesperia Unified	23,528	759	Beaumont Unified	9,073	805
Garey High	1,799	664	Hesperia High	1,989	724	Beaumont High	2,608	758
Pomona High	1,365	684	Oak Hills High	2,429	762	Corona-Norco Unified	53,782	824
Walnut Valley Unified	14,575	909	Sultana High	2,066	771	Centennial High	3,312	803
Diamond Bar High	2,988	877	Redlands Unified	21,233	832	Corona High	2,988	756
Walnut High	2,780	892	Citrus Valley High	2,277	794	Eleanor Roosevelt High	3,667	819
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY	411,583		Redlands East Valley High	2,180	810	Norco High	2,315	804
Apple Valley Unified	14,490	777	Redlands High	2,340	818	Santiago High	3,609	810
Apple Valley High	2,217	768	Rialto Unified	26,468	751	Hemet Unified	21,507	755
Granite Hills High	1,619	746	Eisenhower High	2,377	726	Hemet High	2,382	758
Bear Valley Unified	2,541	793	Rialto High	2,960	754	Tahquitz High	1,607	694
Big Bear High	798	778	Wilmer Amina Carter High	2,411	733	West Valley High	1,751	731
Chaffey Joint Union	24,747	777	Rim of the World Unified	3,905	784	Jurupa Unified	19,471	758
Alta Loma High	2,638	791	Rim of the World High	1,231	758	Jurupa Valley High	1,651	701
Chaffey High	3,596	738	San Bernardino City Unified	53,785	729	Patriot High	2,158	746
Colony High	2,202	736	Arroyo Valley High	2,603	687	Rubidoux High	1,716	710
Etiwanda High	3,296	811	Cajon High	2,782	740	Lake Elsinore Unified	22,316	801
Los Osos High	3,150	845	Indian Springs High	1,509	635	Elsinore High	2,210	758
Montclair High	3,113	746	Pacific High	1,588	693	Lakeside High	1,942	766
Ontario High	2,616	745	San Bernardino High	1,790	666	Temescal Canyon High	2,139	781
Rancho Cucamonga High	3,436	830	San Geronimo High	2,079	708	Moreno Valley Unified	34,468	745
Chino Valley Unified	30,206	820	Upland Unified	11,665	833	Canyon Springs High	2,424	723
Chino High	2,416	700	Upland High	3,541	797	Moreno Valley High	2,356	686
Chino Hills High	3,063	821	Victor Valley Union High	14,200	711	Valley View High	2,604	748
Don Antonio Lugo	1,915	714	Excelsior Charter	1,766	771	Vista del Lago High	2,236	689
Ruben S. Ayala High	2,516	838	Silverado High	2,654	670	Murrieta Valley Unified	23,032	852
Colton Joint Unified	23,362	733	University Preparatory	1,092	895	Murrieta Valley High	2,365	836
						Vista Murrieta High	3,445	844
						Perris Union High	10,435	747
						Heritage High	2,628	766
						Paloma Valley High	2,735	797
						Perris High	2,431	690
						Riverside Unified	42,587	798
						Arlington High	2,066	732
						John W. North High	2,300	743
						Martin Luther King Jr. High	3,325	828
						Polytechnic High	2,789	765
						Ramona High	2,216	753
						San Jacinto Unified	10,301	758
						San Jacinto High	2,392	733
						Temecula Valley Unified	30,065	866
						Chaparral High	3,064	824
						Great Oak High	3,660	861
						Temecula Valley High	2,699	823
						Val Verde Unified	19,796	803
						Citrus Hill High	2,271	758
						Rancho Verde High	3,242	787

Source: California Department of Education



POPULATION

According to the California Department of Finance, California's population increased slightly from 2013 to July 2014, the most recent time period for which records are available. The state added 356,000 residents in 2013, an increase of 0.9 percent over 2012, to bring California's population to about 38.5 million. Riverside and San Bernardino are among the state's nine largest counties. Others are Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Santa Clara, Alameda, Sacramento, and Contra Costa. These counties have 70 percent of California's residents. Riverside and San Bernardino counties have about 4.2 million residents combined, with Riverside County moving ahead of the state average in terms of growth at 1.3 percent. Unlike the dense coastal areas, the Inland Empire still has room to grow, and homes here tend to offer more square footage for the dollar, as compared to neighboring counties, which real estate agents say is one reason some families are moving in.

City/Town	Population	% Change	City/Town	Population	% Change
LOS ANGELES COUNTY			2,279,967		
Upland	75,147	0.7			
Victorville	120,590	0.5			
Yucaipa	52,654	0.6			
Yucca Valley	21,053	0.5			
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY			2,279,967		
Banning	30,325	0.5			
Beaumont	40,876	2.7			
Canyon Lake	10,826	0.5			
Corona	159,132	1.4			
Eastvale	59,185	3.4			
Hemet	81,537	0.8			
Jurupa Valley	97,774	0.5			
Lake Elsinore	56,718	2.3			
Menifee	83,716	1.7			
Moreno Valley	199,258	0.5			
Murrieta	106,425	0.5			
Norco	26,582	-0.2			
Perris	72,103	1.6			
Riverside	314,034	0.6			
San Jacinto	45,563	0.7			
Temecula	106,289	1.3			
Wildomar	33,718	1.6			

Source: California Department of Finance



PHOTO: JIM DORSEY

PERRIE MUNDY In the real estate business for more than 40 years, Perrie Mundy, of the Perrie Mundy Group in Redlands, says buyers should get pre-qualified before they start house-hunting so they'll know what they can afford.



PHOTO: JIM DORSEY

BRENT LEE, of Riverside's Windermere Tower Realty, believes the housing market is in a recovery mode and has had inquiries from a high-end luxury home builder who is interested in the region.



PHOTO: MIA SANTANA

NANCY HUGHES, of the Nancy Hughes Group Rancon Real Estate in Temecula, says lenders have loosened their grip on loans but still expect buyers to show proper financial documentation.