

Sun Belt is growth hotspot

Figures suggest almost 1 in 6 Americans moving out of state went to Texas

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DALLAS - Four Texas metropolitan areas were among the biggest population gainers as Americans continued their trend of moving to the Sun Belt in 2006 and 2007, according to Census Bureau estimates to be released Thursday.

Dallas-Fort Worth added more than 162,000 residents between July 2006 and July 2007, more than any other metro area. Three other Texas areas — Houston, Austin and San Antonio — also cracked the top 10.

Atlanta saw the second-largest population jump with just over 151,000 new residents. Phoenix was third with more than 132,000, and was followed by Houston, Riverside, Calif., Charlotte, N.C., Chicago, Austin, Las Vegas and San Antonio.

Of the 50 fastest-growing metro areas, 27 were in the South and 20 were in the West. Two were in the Midwest, one — Fayetteville, Ark. — straddles the South and Midwest and none were in the Northeast.

Detroit dips

Detroit lost more than three times as many people as any other metro area — its population declined more than 27,300. Other areas losing more than 5,000 people were Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Columbus, Ga., Youngstown, Ohio, and Buffalo, N.Y.

Experts credit much of the growth in the South to relatively strong local economies and housing prices that are among the most affordable in the United States.

"People are running away from unaffordable housing, from the economic slowdown," said Karl Eschbach, a state demographer in Texas. "I would expect Texas to stay at the top of a slowing game."

According to figures compiled by Eschbach, 16 percent of Americans who moved to other states between July 2006 and July 2007 came to Texas, which led the nation for the second straight year in that category.

Home prices continue to be a big factor. A report earlier this month by Global Insight found that housing prices in the Dallas area were undervalued by as much as 30 percent.

Inexpensive homes

Ann Sekesan, a pharmacy technician, moved her family from Pennsylvania to suburban Fort Worth last June after seeing spacious homes in Texas for under \$200,000 on a television show.

"After we saw that on TV, my husband and I looked at each other and said, 'Have you ever been to Texas?'" Sekesan said. "It's amazing the size of a home you can get down here. It's just incredible."

Among other Census Bureau findings:

- On a percentage basis, the Palm Coast, Fla., area was the fastest-growing in the nation. Population there jumped by 7.2 percent to more than 536,000. The next areas experiencing the biggest surge in growth were St. George, Utah; Raleigh, N.C.; Gainesville, Ga.; and Austin.
- The New Orleans area, recovering from Hurricane Katrina, grew by 4 percent or nearly 40,000 people, putting it 16th in terms of raw numbers but eighth for percentage growth. During the same survey last year, the population of New Orleans dropped by nearly 290,000 people.

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