

Naples Daily News

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27 percent of Florida growth in 3 counties

By RON WORD, Associated Press

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Growth spurts in Broward, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties in South Florida accounted for 27 percent of Florida's growth in the past four years, according to figures released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

"Florida is a fast growing state," said John Cordrey, senior vice president of research at The Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County's economic development arm. He attributes much of the growth to baby boomers looking for a place to retire.

"You see a tremendous construction boom going on in these three counties," he said. "It's a phenomenon that you think would slow down, but there isn't any evidence at this point that it slowing."

Broward County experienced the largest numerical growth in Florida for the years 2000-2003, adding 108,329 new residents, according to Census figures. Its estimated July 3, 2003, population was 1,731,347, a 6.7 percent increase in those four years.

Miami-Dade County was second, adding 87,805 new residents in the same period, followed by Palm Beach County's 85,058. The Census Bureau estimated Miami-Dade County had 2,341,167 residents on July 1, 2003, an increase of 6.7 percent over 2000. Palm Beach County's population was put at 1,216,282 in 2003, a 7.5 percent increase over 2000.

For the same four-year period, the state added 1,036,690 residents, according to Census figures through July 1, 2003, increasing 6.5 percent since 2000.

Two Florida coastal cities were among the top 10 fastest growing cities in the nation. Port St. Lucie in southeastern Florida was No. 8, Cape Coral in southwestern Florida was tenth.

George Wilson, professor of sociology at the University of Miami, said people are drawn to South Florida by the weather and economic opportunities.

"Good paying jobs are relocating to suburban populations, and that's attracting a lot of people," Wilson said.

Waves of immigrants are also swelling the South Florida population, Wilson noted.

In the figures released Thursday, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea registered a population growth of 130 percent over the four years, the largest in the state.

City officials have a good explanation — their boundaries expanded by annexation. The city has a permanent population of about 7,000 people, but swells to about 20,000 during the summer, with part-time residents and tourists.



Rachel La Corte in Miami contributed to this report.



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U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>

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