

St. Lucie passes quarter-million population; Port St. Lucie 9th largest city in state, 2010 Census shows

By Jim Turner

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — Spurred by rampant growth in Port St. Lucie, the county has officially surpassed the quarter-million mark with a much more diverse makeup than a decade ago.

Meanwhile, the Treasure Coast's largest city, Port St. Lucie, has become the ninth-largest incorporated place in Florida, population figures released Thursday from the U.S. Census show.

"It's not a shock, we clearly have anticipated growth," said Daniel Holbrook, city planning and zoning director. "We're a large city population-wise, we're a much larger city area-wise."

Overall, the number of people living in the county jumped 44 percent from 2000 to 2010, increasing from 192,695 residents to 277,789, according to the U.S. Census, which.

It moved up from the 22nd to the 20th most populous county in the state.

Port St. Lucie, with 85.4 percent growth, leapt over Pembroke Pines, Cape Coral, Hollywood, Gainesville, Coral Springs and Clearwater to climb the list. With 164,603 residents in 2010 — up from 88,769 in 2000 — Port St. Lucie stood less than 1,000 residents behind Fort Lauderdale among Florida's most populated incorporated places list, according to the Census numbers.

"The city was created and still is a very large city with sufficient room for growth," Holbrook said. "As long as you have that opportunity, it gives people the opportunity to move here without being crowded."

Fort Pierce reached 41,590 residents, experiencing a 10.8 percent growth during the decade, due in large part to an aggressive annexation program that spanned the decade.

"If someone was in the county and they wanted city water and if it was available, they would be asked to sign an annexation agreement," said City spokeswoman Ann Satterlee.

The agreement would kick in once the property abutted the city limits.

Across the Treasure Coast, the population stood at 562,134, up from 432,373 a decade earlier.

Martin County's population rose 14.5 percent, from 126,731 to 146,318. Indian River County grew 22 percent, jumping from 112,947 residents to 138,028.

A big part of the county's growth has been in the Hispanic population. The Census Bureau also released ethnicity numbers for the state on Thursday.

Those in St. Lucie County claiming Hispanic roots jumped 192.35 between 2000 and 2010, going from 15,733 to 45,995, 8.16 percent of the population to 16.56 percent.

Bobby Rodriguez, chief executive officer of the Latin Chamber of Commerce of the Treasure Coast, said the area, which historically attracts northern retirees, also has been drawing those from Mexico and Central America.

"They look at the Treasure Coast as being very affordable," Rodriguez said. "They believe that everything in the next couple of years will be a boom again on the Treasure Coast."

At the same time, the black population grew from 29,714 in 2000, to 53,036 in 2010.

Black residents now account for 19 percent of the county's population, up from 15.4 percent a decade ago.

The U.S. Census Bureau in December released numbers showing Florida to have 18.8 million people, compared to 15.9 million in the 2000 count — a 17.6 percent increase that indicated the state would pick up two additional seats in Congress in 2012.

Gregory Vaday, economic development coordinator for the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, said the numbers just released give a good glimpse of what to the region can expect.

But, he added, the more important numbers for the future of the Treasure Coast, primarily those regarding income levels and median house prices, will come out later this year.

"This early-level information is not going to give us the whole snapshot," Vaday said. "What are the large trends in terms of the large population, economy? Will we see a more robust picture emerging or the same? All that matters, because we need to understand what those trends look like so we can inform our leadership if we need to make a course correction and the only way to do that is to know where you are coming from."

The additional totals will help drive future service plans, from road construction and transit connections to schools and medical facilities, Vaday said.

County Business & Concurrency Manager Michael Brillhart said the growth should help the county land more companies seeking to relocate.

"When certain groups are interest in doing relocation, they start looking at counties based upon population, looking at the labor pool," Brillhart said. "That's one of the key things that employers look for it."

Ten years earlier, there were 88,769 in Port St. Lucie, then a community dominated by call and distribution centers. Since then, leaders have annexed 15 square miles and grew the city's business profile by seeking high-tech, white-collar jobs through biotech research organization Torrey Pines

Institute for Molecular Studies and VGTI Florida and the Hollywood animation studio Digital Domain Holdings.

The city experienced a dramatic turnaround in people flocking to it when foreclosures skyrocketed as the decade ended. But that recent dip hasn't been enough to overcome the earlier gains, particularly those in 2005 and 2006 when Port St. Lucie was America's third fastest-growing city. Back then — before the housing market tanked and builders started laying off workers — most of the Treasure Coast was growing.

Changing congressional districts

Without a line being drawn, more than 100,000 voters in each of the Congressional districts now represented by Reps. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge, and Tom Rooney, R-Tequesta, will be under new representation in 2012.

Population growth within the two Treasure Coast districts has surpassed what is expected to be the ideal district population when the district lines are redrawn before the 2012 election.

In 2000, each congressional district in Florida had 639,295 residents. The ideal per district population number for Florida in 2012, even with two additional districts being added, is 696,354.

According to U.S. Census numbers released Thursday, Posey's district, which includes Indian River County, has grown 16.8 percent, to 813,570 residents. Rooney's district, which crosses the state and includes large parts of Martin and St. Lucie counties, experienced 14.6 percent growth in the past 10 years, putting its population at 797,711.

Meanwhile, the district held by Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Miramar, lost 12,238 residents, a 1.8 percent drop. As of 2010, the district had 684,107 residents.

Hastings' district, includes western areas of Martin and St. Lucie counties, along with part of Fort Pierce.

The U.S. Census numbers released Thursday will be used — under guidelines voters approved through two state constitutional amendments in November — to redraw state legislative and U.S. Congressional lines in Florida.

State legislators will also have to include two new congressional districts into the redrawn lines, upping Florida's delegation from 25 representatives to 27 starting with the 2012 general election.

Just how the lines are redrawn for the congressional and state legislative seats will require months of state House and Senate committee hearings, months of public meetings across the state, further legislative review in 2012, and finally a state Supreme Court review sometime around July 2012, in time for candidates to qualify for state legislative and congressional seats.

FLORIDA REAPPORTIONMENT TIMELINE

Summer 2011: Public hearings, at least 20, throughout Florida on congressional and state legislative reapportionment.

January 2012: Legislative session opened, start moved up from March, to give state lawmakers time to finalize reapportionment plan. Congressional redistricting plans must be approved by governor. Legislative reapportionment does not require governor's approval.

July 2012: State Supreme Court reviews reapportionment plan. Area 2000 2010 percent change

St. Lucie County 192,695 277,789 44.2

Port St. Lucie 88,769 164,603 85.4

White City 4,221 3,719 -11.8

Fort Pierce 37,516 41,590 10.8

Hutchinson Island South 4,846 5,201 7.3

River Park 5,175 5,222 .01

Fort Pierce South 5,672 5,062 -10.7

Fort Pierce North 7,386 6,474 -12.3

Indian River Estates 5,793 6,220 7.3

Lakewood Park 10,458 11,323 8.2

St. Lucie Village 604 590 -2.3



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