

Dallas-Fort Worth tops population growth

Eight out of the 10 fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the U.S. are in the South, according to numbers released by the U.S. Census Bureau Thursday.

By Catherine Clifford, CNNMoney.com staff writer
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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- **More people moved to Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, than to any other metropolitan area in the United States last year.**

The population there increased by 162,250 between July 1, 2006, and July 1, 2007, according to a new U.S. Census Bureau report. Atlanta, Phoenix and Houston also saw their ranks swell by more than 100,000 people each.

The census measures metro areas with the biggest population increases, as well as the fastest-growing metro areas.

But the survey actually shows slower growth compared to previous years, according to William Frey, demographer at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C.

"The big story in these numbers is that they are putting the breaks on the fast growth," said Frey. The effects of the slowing economy and the housing crunch began to set in during the first half of 2007, and will be more pronounced in the next census.

"When these numbers come out next year, we will see the continuation of this meltdown," Frey added.

Palm Coast, Fla., was the fastest growing U.S. metropolitan area, expanding at a clip of 7.2%.

St. George, Utah; Raleigh-Cary, N.C.; and Gainesville, Ga., were also among the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States.

Indeed, eight out of the top ten fastest growing metro areas were located in the South, and the South also accounted for more than half of the 50 fastest growing regions.

The Sunbelt is the fastest growing part of the country because in large part thanks to its lower cost of living - from housing and groceries to taxes. The region has been one of the fastest growing for years now, says Frey and, "growth breeds more growth." As more people move to an area, there is increasing demand for goods and services, which creates more jobs.

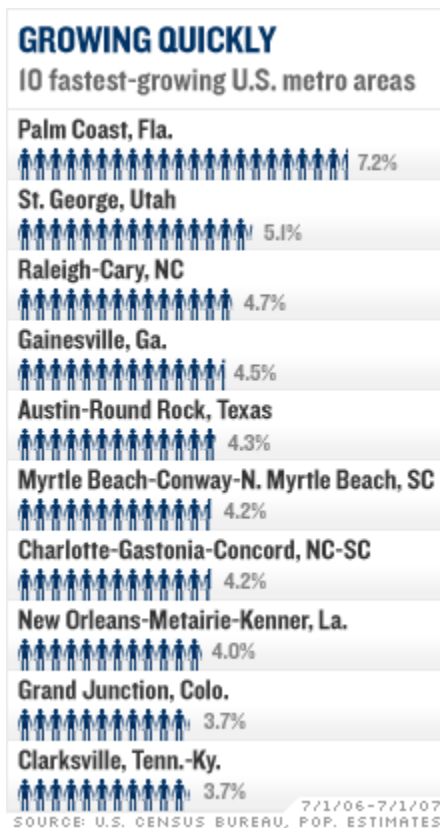
A few cities were among both the fastest growing and the areas with the biggest population jumps. And two of those double-hitters were in North Carolina. Raleigh, N.C., was the third fastest-growing metro area, up 4.7%, and ranked 12th with a population gain of 47,052. Charlotte, N.C., was the 7th fastest-growing metro area, up 4.2%, and ranked 6th with a gain of 66,724.

Raleigh and Charlotte have been growing rapidly for close to 30 years, according to Bill Tillman, state demographer of the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management. Research Triangle Park, a science and technology hub, and the increasing number of national banks based in Charlotte are the area's biggest draws.

New Orleans was the 8th fastest-growing metro area, with a 4% population gain that meant 39,885 people moved back into the city. The area had seen the largest drop in population for the period between July 1, 2005, and July 1, 2006, after Hurricane Katrina.

Frey expects to see growth continue in the Southeast - expanding further into the less developed parts of South Carolina and Tennessee - and into the West, particularly in the interior parts of California, Arizona, and Colorado.

The U.S. Census bureau grouped counties into 363 metropolitan areas across the country. Those metropolitan areas contained 251.9 million people, or 83.5% of the nation's population.



BIGGEST GAINS

10 U.S. metro-areas with biggest population growth

Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, Texas

 162,250

Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, Ga.

 151,063

Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, Ariz.

 132,513

Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, Texas

 120,544

Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, Calif.

 86,660

Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord, NC-SC

 66,724

Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, Ill.-Ind.-Wis.

 66,231

Austin-Round Rock, Texas

 65,880

Las Vegas-Paradise, Nev.

 59,165

San Antonio, Texas

 53,925

7/1/06-7/1/07

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, POP. ESTIMATES

Courtesy of JB Goodwin