

Three area counties lead nation in growth

Forsyth, Paulding and Jackson vault into the nation's top 10 in rankings as residents flock to them.

By MARY LOU PICKEL
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Published on: 03/20/08

Three Georgia counties have drawn significant populations in the past year, ranking among the top 10 in the nation in growth rate.

Forsyth County ranked No. 8 in the nation, increasing its population by 7.2 percent, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released Thursday. It was the fastest-growing Georgia county.

"Once they discovered us, they're all moving here," said Forsyth County Commissioner Linda Ledbetter, a lifelong resident.

"It's the greatest place to be. We're 40 miles from Atlanta and we have Route 400 to get you there. We're six hours from the beach and three hours from the mountains," she said. The county added more than 10,000 people in one year, measured from July 1, 2006, to July 1, 2007.

The two fastest-growing counties in the United States were in Louisiana, due to growth as the New Orleans area recovers from Hurricane Katrina.

St. Bernard Parish increased by a whopping 42.9 percent, adding 6,000 people. Orleans Parish rose by 13.8 percent, or nearly 29,000 people.

Of the top 100 fastest-growing counties, Georgia had 18 on the list, the most for any state in the country. Next was Texas, which had 15.

Georgia's main growth spurt came in counties ringing the outer metro Atlanta area and the Savannah area.

Paulding County was No. 9 in the nation in population growth rate and Jackson County No. 10. Both had growth rates of 6.7 percent.

Jackson County broke into the top 10 list for the first time since at least 2000, according to the Census Bureau.

Jackson is outside metro Atlanta and closer to Athens, but it grew because of increased business activity and its growing status as a bedroom community.

"A lot of people have moved out of metro Atlanta," Jackson County Area Chamber of Commerce president Shane Short said. "They're looking for a higher quality of life. Less hustle and bustle. Less traffic."

Jackson County still has a rural atmosphere. Cows graze outside the County Courthouse in Jefferson.

"It's growing fast. I'm not sure how long we'll be able to hold onto that rural status," Short said.

I-85 runs through Jackson County, making it an ideal location for distribution centers, Short said. The land is less expensive and better suited for large operations. Haverty's Furniture, Progressive Lighting and Sears have all opened distribution centers there, Short said.

"That's just scratching the surface," he added.

While Jackson County broke the top 10 this year, Forsyth County has consistently been a pace setter for growth, placing sixth in the nation when looking at the time span of 2000 to 2007. Forsyth has grown by 62 percent in that time period, the census data show.

Paulding County grew by 56.7 percent in those years, ranking seventh nationally. Henry and Newton counties also made the top 10 list, ranking ninth and 10th nationally for 2000 through 2007. They experienced growth rates of about 55 percent.

This news was brought to you by Adding Value LLC, a company whose mission is to enhance market value, processes and profitability by increasing the appeal, function and marketability of homes & properties with quality building products and service.

