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Study shows surge in Richmond region's population

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As New Kent County's population continues to grow at a faster rate than other localities in the metro Richmond area, Petersburg is the only jurisdiction in the region to have a net loss of residents during the past decade.

Meanwhile, Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield and Henrico continue to be among the largest localities in the state.

The pace of growth statewide slowed around 2005 but turned around in mid-2007 and has increased slightly since, according to estimates from the Demographics and Workforce Group of the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

Overall, the Richmond region's population grew 12.3 percent from April 2000 through June 2009, from 1,096,957 to 1,231,675, the latest data available.

That's about the same rate as the Charlottesville and Harrisonburg regions, but it's not nearly as fast as Northern Virginia at 20.5 percent and the Winchester region at 22.9 percent.

State and local officials use the numbers from the Cooper Center, along with the U.S. census, to allocate funding, plan budgets and make growth projections.

"With the current budget situation, it's probably a good thing migration is picking up again," said Cooper Center demographer Mike Spar.

New Kent, among the top 10 fastest-growing localities in the state, has seen 32.6 percent growth, going from 13,462 residents in 2000 to 17,857 in 2009.

"It is a wonderful place to live," New Kent interim County Administrator William H. Whitley said. The county's proximity to two large metropolitan areas -- Richmond and Hampton Roads-- also has made it more inviting to new residents, he said.

"People like a rural area with the amenities of the metropolitan areas," he said.

New Kent, which saw rates of growth of more than 5 percent annually in the mid-2000s, leveled off to a rate of 2.2 percent last year. The county's number of residents, however, still is relatively small compared with its neighbors to the west.

Petersburg has seen its population decrease by 9.6 percent since 2000, though it has experienced a surge in development recently. The city of 30,513 people has lost 3,227 residents since 2000. Only in 2005-2006 and 2007-2008 did the city see slim increases in population.

Petersburg, in an area that is expected to see significant growth with an expanding military community at nearby Fort Lee, continues to struggle to attract residents as it deals with a stressed school system and high crime statistics.

Chesterfield's population rose by 47,691 from 2000 to 2009. Henrico's population grew by 34,190 in the same period.

Until mid-decade, more people left Richmond than moved in, with an average annual population decline of 0.6 percent. Starting in fiscal 2005-2006, the population started growing again. But since the beginning of the decade, Richmond has gained only 312 residents, or 0.2 percent growth.

In Chesterfield, the state's fourth-most-populous locality (the top three were Fairfax County, Virginia Beach and Prince William County), growth was a healthy 18.3 percent since 2000, compared with 12.3 percent for the Richmond metropolitan area and 11.4 percent statewide.

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