

Growth Explodes in Inner, Outer D.C. Suburbs

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People flocked to the Washington area in the last decade, lured by both a robust job market and an increasingly vibrant region.

Loudoun and Prince William counties continued the phenomenal growth they saw in the 1990s; Loudoun was the fifth-fastest growing county in the country from 2000 to 2009, according to data released Tuesday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The availability of affordable housing and the growth of the Hispanic population contributed to the growth in these outer suburbs, said Qian Cai, director of the Demographics and Workforce Group at the University of Virginia's Cooper Center.

While all of the major cities and counties in the region saw growth, the rate of growth in the inner areas -- the District, Arlington County and Alexandria -- picked up in the 2000s. The District's population fell 14.5 percent between 1990 and 1999 before increasing 4.8 percent from 2000 to 2009.

Hot spot

Area	Estimated 2009 population	Increase from 2000
Washington area	5,476,241	14.2%
Alexandria	150,006	16.9%
Arlington County	217,483	14.8%
District	599,657:	4.8%
Fairfax County	1,037,605	7.0%
Montgomery County	971,600	11.3%
Prince George's County	834,560	4.1%
Prince William County	379,166	34.8%
Loudoun County	301,171	77.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

A big factor for the influx is the area's robust job market, led by the federal government, whose jobs are less susceptible to the recession, Cai said.

"First and foremost, it's about economics," said Marie Price, professor of geography and international affairs at George Washington University.

Another attraction to the area is more cultural, said Alan Kraut, a professor of immigration history at American University.

"A lot of the young, single people who grew up in ... bedroom communities are moving into cities -- this one, and others," he said. People are gravitating to where the culture and action are, he said, citing Dupont Circle as one neighborhood in the capital that houses many young people.

The District's population of 18- to 24-year-olds grew from an estimated 72,637 on April 1, 2000, to 75,569 on July 1, 2008, and the 25-44 demographic grew from 189,439 to 193,557. Meanwhile, D.C. residents in the 45-64 demographic grew from just over 125,000 to 140,000.

"As people grow older, they sometimes want to sell their homes and move closer in," Kraut said. As for Alexandria and Arlington, workers could be tired of longer commutes and moving in to places along Metrorail corridors such as Clarendon in Arlington and King Street in Alexandria, Price said.

Fairfax, Montgomery and Prince George's counties were still the three most-populated counties in the region. Growth in the areas, however, was basically the same as in the 1990s.

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