



06/28/2007

NEPA population fleeing cities

BY NICHOLE DOBO, STAFF WRITER

When Susan Berkery moved to Thornhurst in 1999, it was to get away from New Jersey.

“This is like becoming the suburbs,” she said of the rural 23.2-square-mile township. “People who live here drive to New York and New Jersey to work.”

With an estimated population of 900 in 2006, Thornhurst Township is Lackawanna County’s fastest growing municipality, based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates released today.

The township has grown more than 12 percent since 2000, which is reflective of rural areas on the rise while urban centers continue to decline, according to estimates from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. Scranton’s population fell by 4.7 percent over the past six years, the data show.

The fastest-growing municipalities in seven counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania are all in Pike and Monroe counties, which saw increases ranging from 24 to 32 percent. No municipalities in these counties declined in the last six years, according to Census estimates.

“It’s not surprising to see some of that,” said William H. Frey, of the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution. “People like the fact that they can live in a newer, spruced up place.”

Scranton Mayor Chris Doherty said he believes the Census estimates are off target. The city is gaining residents, he contends.

“I think you will see an increase,” Mr. Doherty said of the city’s next official Census, when people are individually counted. “I am out — I know the city. I have been doing this for nine years, and I’ve seen the change.”

The mayor points to large increases in school enrollment by new students in city schools, and the rising Hispanic population on the South Side as evidence of growth.

Continued immigration could be a boon to aging industrial cities like Scranton, according to a 2007 Brookings Institution study. Urban areas have always been “major gateways for newcomers, and many cities in the 1990s would not have grown at all — or would have shrunk even more — but for these groups,” according to the study.

In all, Luzerne County is losing the most people in the region, with a 2 percent decline in the last six years, according to the Census estimates.

The fastest-declining areas in the region are in Luzerne, where six municipalities have lost more than 5.6 percent of their population, according to the estimates.

Like other counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania, rural townships in Luzerne have seen increases, with Butler Township, near Hazleton, seeing a nearly 24 percent jump.

In Thornhurst — where residents must drive 20 minutes for a gallon of milk — the allure of rural life includes cheaper property and escape from the bustle of urban centers, resident Kim Grab said.

“There are definitely more people here than there used to be,” she said. “They are getting away from the city and getting used to the lifestyle of the country.”

Contact the writer: ndobo@timeshamrock.com

(Figures are percent change from 2000 to 2006)

Lackawanna County

(overall decrease of 1.7 percent)

Fastest growing

1. Thornhurst Twp., +12.8 percent
2. South Abington Twp., +10.3 percent
3. Greenfield Twp., +8.4 percent
4. Covington Twp., +7 percent
5. Roaring Brook Twp., +6.5 percent

Fastest declining

1. Carbondale, -4.9 percent
2. Scranton, -4.7 percent
3. N. Abington Twp., -4.2 percent
4. Dickson City, -4.1 percent
- Taylor, -4.1 percent
5. Vandling, -3.9 percent

Luzerne County

(overall decrease of 2 percent)

Fastest growing

1. Butler Twp., +23.5 percent
2. Rice Twp., +12.9 percent
3. Sugarloaf Twp., +7.7 percent
4. Fairview Twp., +7.1 percent
5. Jenkins Twp., +6.9 percent

Fastest declining

1. Forty Fort, -5.9 percent
2. Plymouth, -5.8 percent
- Shickshinny, -5.8 percent
3. Freeland, -5.6 percent
- Jeddo, -5.6 percent
- Nanticoke, -5.6 percent
4. Hazleton, -5.5 percent
- Pittston, -5.5 percent
- Wyoming, -5.5 percent
5. Ashley, -5.4 percent
- Warrior Run, -5.4 percent

Susquehanna County

(overall -0.8 percent)

Fastest growing

1. Herrick Twp., +6.7 percent
2. Thompson Twp., +4.5 percent
3. Clifford Twp., +4.2 percent
4. Gibson Twp., +3.5 percent
5. Silver Lake Twp., +2.2

Fastest declining

1. Hop Bottom, -5.4 percent
 2. Montrose, -5 percent
 3. New Milford, -4.9 percent
 4. Oakland, -4.7 percent
- Susquehanna Depot, -4.7 percent
- Thompson, -4.7 percent
5. Hallstead, -4.7 percent

Monroe County

(overall +19.5 percent)

Fastest growing

1. Price Twp., +28.5 percent
2. Tunkhannock Twp., +26.8 percent
3. Middle Smithfield Twp., +26.6 percent
4. Stroud Twp., +26.2 percent
5. Jackson Twp., +24.5 percent

(No declining municipalities)

Pike County

(overall +25.7 percent)

Fastest growing

1. Dingman Twp., +32.7 percent
2. Lehman Twp., +31.9 percent
3. Delaware Twp., +30.4 percent
4. Milford Twp., +27.7 percent
5. Lackawaxen Twp., +26.8 percent

(No declining municipalities)

Wyoming County

(overall +0.04 percent)

Fastest growing

1. Windham Twp., +5.3 percent
2. Clinton Twp., +4.6 percent
3. Meshoppen Twp., +3.5 percent
4. Northmoreland Twp., +2.4 percent
5. Overfield Twp., +1.5 percent

Fastest declining

1. Nicholson, -5.3 percent
2. Meshoppen, -5.2 percent
3. Laceyville, -5.1 percent
- Tunkhannock, -5.1 percent
4. Noxen Twp., -3.2 percent
5. Braintrim Twp., -2 percent

©The Times-Tribune 2007