



## **Census report: Housing Unit Growth in St. Johns County Among Highest in Nation**

May 19, 2016

BY STUART KORFHAGE

To no surprise of its residents, St. Johns County was among the nation's fast-growing counties in the latest report from the U.S. Census Bureau. In a document released Thursday, St. Johns County was No. 36 on the list of fastest growing counties with 5,000 or more housing units: July 1, 2014 to July 1, 2015.

The list is measured by percent growth, not total number of units. The county's number of housing units grew by 2.7 percent from 96,888 to 99,469 during the 12 months.

With growth tracked over a larger period of time, St. Johns County also rated as one of the country's fastest-growing. The county was listed as No. 36 again on the list of fastest growing counties with 5,000 or more housing units: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2015. The county added 9,639 housing units, an increase of 10.7 percent.

In that span of about five years, the county's population has also grown from an estimated 190,039 to 226,640. A report in March had St. Johns County ranked No. 15 on the list of fastest-growing counties in the country — by percentage of population growth.

There are few signs of housing unit or population growth slowing in the coming years.

Several large and many smaller residential developments have started building houses here in the last 12-18 months. And established communities like Nocatee and Palencia are adding new neighborhoods.

So far in 2016, the county has issued 1,276 building permits for new detached single-family homes.

According to the Associated Press, in the years since Florida's population growth dropped to its lowest level in decades, the state's expansion has rebounded the most in inland communities in South Florida, the suburbs of Orlando and the Fort Myers area, according to the Census Bureau.

The Census report showed that the Florida cities, towns, villages and places with populations greater than 20,000 people grew the fastest from 2010 to 2015 in Parkland, Cooper City and Doral in South Florida; St. Cloud, Ocoee and Winter Garden in suburban Orlando; and Fort Myers and Bonita Springs.

The growth in the South Florida communities was helped by good schools and land being cheaper inland than on the beach side. Metro Orlando has been among the state's leaders in job growth, and the Fort Myers area has rebounded from the housing crisis with a return of migrating retirees.

In the midst of the housing crisis and Great Recession, Florida's population growth dropped to its lowest level since the 1940s. Florida grew by about only 75,000 people between 2008 and 2009, and without increases from births and an influx of foreigners, Florida's population would have declined, according to Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida.

Parkland, St. Cloud and Cooper City — which all have populations under 50,000 residents — each grew by almost a quarter in the past five years. Doral and Ocoee each grew by more than a fifth, and Fort Myers and Bonita Springs each grew by under a fifth.

Last year, Jacksonville was Florida's largest city with a population of almost 855,000 residents. It was followed in population size by the cities of Miami, Tampa, Orlando and St. Petersburg. The state's smallest Census-recognized place was the city of Lake Buena Vista, the municipality controlled by Walt Disney World that has a population of 11 residents.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.