



Census data: St. Johns County recovered better than Florida overall from 2010 to 2015

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As Floridians trudged through the economic recovery in the first half of the decade, new data recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau shows St. Johns County residents have emerged better than the state in general.

During the recovery (2010-2015), jobs were lost in construction, real estate, government and manufacturing. But jobs were gained in education, health care, tourism and professional positions.

During the same time, Florida residents got older and more diverse.

However, St. Johns County didn't follow all of those trends.

Florida lost 340,000 manufacturing and almost 150,000 construction jobs. Manufacturing makes up only around 5 percent of Florida's labor force, and construction work has bounced back, but not necessarily construction workers since many moved out of state following the housing bust.

The loss of jobs in those sectors was offset by healthy gains in health care, hospitality, professional and retail workers.

The county lost jobs in construction, going from 6,495 jobs in 2010 to 5,175 in 2015. But the county gained jobs in manufacturing, improving from 4,936 in 2010 to 6,258 in 2015.

In St. Johns County, the biggest field for employment was educational services, and health care and social assistance accounting for about 20 percent of the employment.

St. Johns County has consistently ranked among the lowest in terms of unemployment rates in recent years. Part of that is attributed to the high level of education here.

In 2015, 93.9 percent of adult county residents were high school graduates compared to a rate of 86.9 percent for the state. Also, 42.1 percent of county residents had a bachelor's degree or higher. The state rate was 27.3 percent.

Florida has added 323,000 new workers to the labor force since 2010.

But the percentage of residents of working age who weren't in the labor force has grown from 38.7 percent to 40.8 percent, an indication that some workers have given up on looking jobs.

Florida's rate is one of the nation's highest, given its large number of retirees and residents over age 65.

With that employment situation, incomes were stagnant around the state. The median household income in Florida went from \$47,661 in 2010 to \$47,507 in 2015. But St. Johns County's median income improved from \$62,663 in 2010 to \$66,194 in 2015.

Florida's share of wealthy residents increased in the past five years. The percentage of households earning more than \$200,000 a year jumped from 3.6 percent to 4.1 percent. At the same time, the percentage of families with income below the poverty line increased from 9.9 percent to 12 percent.

As a state, Florida has gotten older in the past five years. The median age went from 40.3 in 2010 to 41.4 in 2015.

No county aged more than Sumter County, home of the retirement haven The Villages. The median age went from 61.4 to 65.3, and the percentage of residents over age 65 jumped from 40 percent to more than 50 percent.

Only five counties in Florida got younger — and they were all located in the Panhandle. Two of the counties — Escambia and Okaloosa — have major military bases.

St. Johns saw its median age go from 41.8 in 2010 to 42.7 in 2015.

Florida also became more diverse in the past five years.

The percentage of non-Hispanic whites dropped from 78.4 percent in 2010 to 76.3 percent in 2015.

The increase in diversity was driven by gains in the Hispanic population, which grew by 665,000 residents. Florida's population of around 20 million people is now slightly less than a quarter Hispanic.

In pure numbers, Cubans led the way with a gain of more than 209,000 residents. But Puerto Ricans weren't far behind, increasing by 185,000 residents. Florida now has 1.3 million residents of Cuban descent, living primarily in South Florida; almost 1 million residents of Puerto Rican descent, concentrated in central Florida; almost 670,000 residents of Mexican descent, living primarily in agriculture areas of south-central Florida; and 1.6 million residents of various other Hispanic backgrounds.

St. Johns County has remained markedly non-diverse. The population was about 89 percent white in 2010 and virtually unchanged in 2015. The biggest minority group was black or African American alone and remained steady at 5.4 percent during the five-year period.

Associated Press reporter Mike Schneider contributed to this report.