



Census shows St. Johns County better off than most

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Recently released information from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that it's getting harder to keep up with the basic costs of living.

And St. Johns County residents are probably handling the challenges better than many in other places.

The Bureau's 2012-2016 American Community Survey five-year estimates data report was released Thursday and features more than 40 social, economic, housing and demographic topics, including homeowner rates and costs, health insurance and educational attainment.

The picture it paints of this county is one of continued prosperity, especially compared with its peers.

For instance, the median household income in St. Johns County for the period of the study (2012-2016) was \$69,523 — in 2016 dollars.

By comparison, in 2016, the median household income for all counties ranged between \$22,045 and \$134,609, with a median county-level value of \$47,589.

The report said that of the 3,142 counties across the nation, 167 counties (5.3 percent) experienced a decline in poverty rates, while 566 counties (18.0 percent) showed a rate increase. In 2010, St. Johns County had a poverty rate of 9.8 percent — lowest in the state — but saw the rate drop to 7.7 percent during the study period. That was about half the state poverty rate of 14.7 percent in 2016.

Some of the other data profiles reflected the intense growth of St. Johns County since 2000.

The study showed that about 42 percent of residents have been in their current homes since 2010 or more recently. And another 37 percent moved into their current homes between 2000 and 2009.

Although the county contains the country's "oldest" city — based on continued settlement of Europeans and their descendants — about 40 percent of the homes occupied as of 2016 were built in 2000 or more recently.

The Census study indicated that median rent is rising, although it's not clear that the information has completely caught up with the current market. It says median gross rent in 2012-16 rose to \$1,150 from \$1,124 in 2007-11.

What's interesting to note, though, is that the percentage of renters paying \$1,000-1,499 dropped from about 45 percent in 2007-11 to about 35 percent in 2012-16. Over the same period, the number of renters paying \$1,500-1,999 per month more than doubled to almost 21 percent.

While the county's population has increased from about 120,000 in 2000 to about 235,000 in 2016, it's starting to take people longer to commute to work.

In 2016, the average travel time for county residents to work was 27 minutes each way. In 2010, it was 25.8 minutes.

The pretty much leaves St. Johns County in the middle of the spectrum considering it's part of the Jacksonville metro area. Walla Walla, Washington, was the metropolitan area with the shortest average commute time at 15.4 minutes. The longest was East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, metropolitan area (38.6 minutes), which was even longer than New York-Newark-Jersey City metropolitan area at 35.9 minutes.

There are certainly a lot more vehicles on the road here. In 2010, there were about 83,000 workers 16 and older in St. Johns County, while six years later there were almost 110,000.