



Census: St. Johns County is nation's 14th fastest-growing county

By Stuart Korfhage
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St. Johns County's estimated population growth rate of 28 percent since 2010 ranked it as the 14th fastest-growing county in America, according to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau on Wednesday.

The county's rate of growth trailed the 49-percent rate of Williams County of North Dakota as the top-ranked county in the country. St. Johns County went from about 190,000 residents in 2010 to about 244,000 in 2017.

In Florida, both Sumter County (34 percent) and Osceola County (31 percent) grew at more robust rates. Osceola, which is in Central Florida near Orlando, had particularly impressive growth since it's much larger than St. Johns County. It gained more than 83,000 residents to reach 352,000 by 2017, while smaller Sumter County gained about 32,000 residents to reach a population of 125,000.

The overall population of Florida grew about 2 million from 2010 to nearly 21 million by 2017.

For just the period from July 2016 to July 2017, the Census estimated that St. Johns County added 8,766 residents for a growth rate of 3.7 percent. That ranked the county No. 18 on the list of fastest-growing counties.

Unless there is a sudden crash in the housing market or the economy at large, St. Johns County is poised for sustained growth at least into the next decade and likely beyond.

One of the county's largest new master-planned communities announced plans to start selling homes next year. SilverLeaf, between County Road 210 and State Road 16, is slated to include 10,700 homes over more than 8,000 acres (including conservation land).

Without that development even open yet, the county building department recorded its highest number of residential permits in April at 522. That broke the previous record of 502 in May 2005. This year is on pace to be the busiest year for home building on record.

The nation's housing stock grew by more than 1 million last year, reaching over 137 million units, according to Census reports. The growth rate of 0.8 percent from 2016 to 2017 was slower than the 1.4 percent a decade ago between 2006 and 2007.

The population boom here in St. Johns County is something that's being felt across the region. The Census Bureau reported that eight of the 15 cities or towns with the largest population gains were located in the South in 2017, with three of the top five in Texas.

"San Antonio, Texas, tops the list with the largest population gain with an increase of over 24,200 people — an average of 66 people per day between 2016 and 2017," said Amel Toukabri, a demographer in the Population Division of the Census Bureau, in a release. "That's a growth rate of 1.6 percent. This growth was enough to push San Antonio's population above the 1.5 million mark."

Some of the other cities with the largest population gains were Phoenix (24,000); Dallas (18,900); Fort Worth, Texas (18,700); Los Angeles (18,600); Seattle (17,500); and Charlotte, North Carolina (15,600).

Jacksonville was No. 13 on the list, gaining 11,169 residents between 2016 and 2017 for a total population of 892,062.