

New census info released on smaller cities

By Matt O'Brien

Contra Costa Times

Posted: 12/08/2008 09:58:00 PM PST

Updated: 12/09/2008 09:14:46 AM PST

Decades ago, there were mostly homogeneous suburbs and rural communities at the outskirts of the urban Bay Area. Today, the East Bay's mid-size towns have become as diverse, and sometimes more diverse, than the big cities they surround.

Until this week, the demographic changes happening in places such as San Lorenzo and Hercules have been hard to track. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a massive effort once a decade to collect statistical data about every household in every American town. The last national census was in 2000, and the next launches in 2010.

But in the years between, rapid changes can occur. Latinos now represent more than 50 percent of San Pablo's population, and 64.5 of the city's residents

speak a language other than English at home, according to population estimates released this week.

In Pleasant Hill, about 6 percent of residents define themselves as of two or more races — well above the nationwide average of 2 percent, and almost twice what Pleasant Hill residents reported eight years ago. In San Ramon, white residents made up about 72 percent of the population in 2000. Now, they represent just less than 59 percent of the increasingly diverse suburb.

Those changes and many more were revealed this week when the Census Bureau, for the first time since releasing the results of the 2000 census, provided statistical updates for more than 3,000 American "mid-size" places — cities and towns home to between 20,000 and 65,000 people.

The agency has long provided such estimates for bigger cities, collecting questionnaires from about 250,000 households monthly across the country and using the information to provide annual updates. Smaller places were left out of the updates because there were too few people surveyed to make accurate estimates, said census spokeswoman Shelly Lowe.

This year, however, the census compiled results of surveys conducted from 2005 through 2007, increasing the

sample size. In the East Bay, that means 18 mid-size cities, representing about 27 percent of the total population of the region, are now able to be examined in greater detail.

The communities range from the commercial hub of Walnut Creek to Ashland, a small but densely populated unincorporated area south of San Leandro. And while the statistics demonstrate marked differences in household incomes, house prices, employment characteristics and commuting preferences, all the mid-size towns appear to share an increasing racial and ethnic diversity.

Asian residents made up the largest group in the city of Hercules, and Latinos in Ashland, Bay Point, Newark, Pittsburg and San Pablo. While the African-American population continued to drop in big cities such as San Francisco and Oakland, the proportion of African-Americans went up throughout the mid-size East Bay — in Ashland, Brentwood, Castro Valley, Hercules, San Lorenzo, Oakley and Pleasant Hill.

Brock Arner, San Pablo city manager, said he was not surprised the Latino population has officially surpassed 50 percent in the town he began working for shortly after the conclusion of the 2000 census. He said the community has kept up with its changing demographics, publishing government documents in both Spanish and English. At City Hall, he said, "we speak nine different languages."

Reach Matt O'Brien at 925-977-8463 or mattobrien@bayareanewsgroup.com.

East Bay census facts

Oakley renters pay dearly to live in the "Heart of the Delta," forking over a higher rate of income on rent than anywhere else in the country except for Monroe, N.Y. About 78 percent of Oakley renters spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent and utilities. About 64 percent of San Pablo residents do the same.

Residents of El Cerrito, which has two BART stations, and Newark, which has none, have markedly different ways of getting to work. More than 20 percent of El Cerrito residents commute by public transit, the highest rate in the Bay Area outside of San Francisco, while only 2.3 percent of Newark residents do the same. Walnut Creek grew a tad bit older this decade. Thanks to the Rossmoor senior community, the city maintains one of the top 50 median ages in the country. The median grew to about 48 years old in the latest estimate (from 45 in 2000).

Two unincorporated areas -- Alameda County's Ashland and Contra Costa County's Bay Point -- are the car-pool capitals of the Bay Area. Twenty-three percent of Ashland and Bay Point residents took a car pool (or a truck pool or van pool) to get to work.

Tracy has the fourth-worst commute in the nation. Average travel time to work is 43.8 minutes. Brentwood was fifth in the country at 43.2 minutes, and Antioch was 15th at 40.7 minutes. Worst of all was 46.3 minutes for residents of Linton Hall in northern Virginia.

Source: factfinder.census.gov/