

St. Clair passes Shelby as poor Jeffco pants



JOHN ARCHIBALD

Pell City is the new Pelham, I reckon. Maybe that's enough to make Margaret the new Maylene. The world is a-changin', and it makes St. Clair County the new Shelby.

So you can stop being moody now, Moody. Change your name to . . . Cheerful!

The U.S. Census Bureau today released its yearly estimates of county populations, and for the second year running St. Clair — on the eastern edge of the Birmingham metro area — ranked as Alabama's fastest-growing county.

Raise your fist into the air and party hardy like you're just St. Clair.

That's right. St. Clair boasted 78,054 people last year, up 4 percent from the year before and 8 percent over two years.

For years, population powerhouse Shelby County was the state's fastest-growing county, ballooning from 99,000 people in 1990 to 182,000 last year. Baldwin County, in the Mobile 'burbs, has nipped at its heels.

Of course growth is not always what it's cracked up to be in this age of suburban sprawl and high gas prices. But since we tend to count success by counting folks who want to join us, we take growth as a compliment — if sometimes an annoyance.

So blush, Shelby, Baldwin and St. Clair. From 2000 to 2007, each of those counties grew by more than a fifth of their populations.

But while they are elite among Alabama boom counties, none made the list of the 100 fastest-growing counties in the U.S.

Shelby was close. It grew 26 percent from 2000 to 2007. Burnet County, Texas — No. 100 on the list — grew 28 percent.

Alabama is noticeably absent. Telling, considering the malignant growth nearby.

Of America's 100 fastest-growing counties, 63 are in the South. It boggles the mind, for 18 are in the state of Georgia and 12 in Florida. Mississippi makes the list. So

See ARCHIBALD | Page 2B

CHANGE IN ALABAMA'S LARGEST COUNTIES

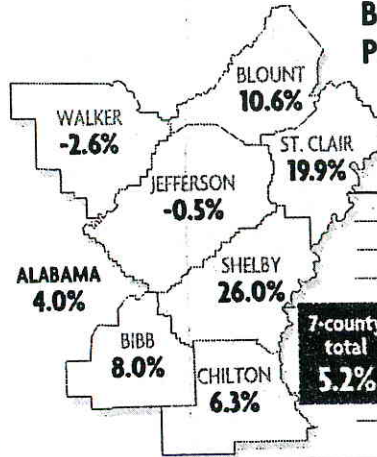
COUNTY	2007 POP.	POP. CHANGE 2000-07
Jefferson	658,779	-0.5%
Mobile	404,406	1.1%
Madison	312,734	12.5%
Montgomery	225,791	1.1%
Shelby	182,113	26.0%
Tuscaloosa	177,906	7.7%
Baldwin	171,769	21.5%
Lee	130,516	13.0%
Morgan	115,050	3.5%
Calhoun	113,103	1.6%



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BIRMINGHAM-HOOVER POPULATION CHANGES

2000-07 population change in the Birmingham-Hoover metro area



COUNTY	2007 POP.
Shelby	182,113
St. Clair	78,054
Blount	56,614
Bibb	21,535
Chilton	42,299
Jefferson	658,779
Walker	68,816
7-county total	1,108,210
Alabama	4,627,851

ALABAMA'S FASTEST-GROWING COUNTIES

2000-07 (SEVEN YEARS OF CHANGE)

RANK	COUNTY	METRO AREA	2007 POP.	7-YEAR CHANGE
1.	Shelby	Birmingham	182,113	26%
2.	Baldwin	Mobile	171,769	22%
3.	St. Clair	Birmingham	78,054	20%
4.	Elmore	Montgomery	77,525	17%
5.	Autauga	Montgomery	49,960	14%
6.	Lee	Montgomery	130,516	13%
7.	Madison	Huntsville	312,734	13%
8.	Limestone	Huntsville	73,898	12%
9.	Blount	Birmingham	56,614	11%
10.	Houston	Dothan	97,171	9%

Source: U.S. Census

2006-07 (ONE YEAR OF CHANGE)

RANK	COUNTY	METRO AREA	2007 POP.	1-YEAR CHANGE
1.	St. Clair	Birmingham	78,054	4.1%
2.	Limestone	Huntsville	73,898	3.0%
3.	Shelby	Birmingham	182,113	2.7%
4.	Elmore	Montgomery	77,525	2.7%
5.	Coffee	Dothan	46,793	2.5%
6.	Madison	Huntsville	312,734	2.1%
7.	Baldwin	Mobile	171,769	2.1%
8.	Houston	Dothan	97,171	2.0%
9.	Lee	Montgomery	130,516	1.9%
10.	Autauga	Montgomery	49,960	1.7%

NEWS STAFF

ARCHIBALD: Jeffco grows ever smaller

From Page 1B

do Tennessee, Louisiana and Arkansas.

News is not so swell for Alabama's biggest county, either. Jefferson County is falling fast down the list of U.S. big boys.

Jefferson was America's

78th largest county in 2000, but last year it fell to No. 90. Seeing that counties such as Denton County, Texas, are breathing down our necks with gaudy 40 percent growth rates, Alabama may soon bow out of the top 100 altogether.

Jefferson County lost but a half percent of its population between 2000 and 2007, an amount equal to only 3,269 people. That's not so bad.

Cuyahoga County, Ohio, home to Cleveland, lost almost 7 percent.

Jeffco looks worse, however, when you see that births in the county far outnumbered deaths, and that almost 7,000 people moved here through "international migration."

So what's the problem?

If you count only folks from the continental U.S. who moved in and out of this place in the last seven years, Jefferson County lost 24,000 more people than it gained.

They moved out. That's more than double the exodus out of any other Alabama county.

We're leaking. Like a Jefferson County sewer.

Hey. Maybe Jefferson County is the new Birmingham.

John Archibald's column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Write him at: iarchibald@bhamnews.com

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