

Joliet surges to be state's 4th largest CENSUS ESTIMATES

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JOLIET -- Joliet has become the fourth largest city in Illinois, passing Naperville, according to the latest population estimates from U.S. Census Bureau.

Census numbers being released today show Joliet with an estimated population of 144,316 as of July 2007.

Joliet also retained a place among the 25 fastest growing cities in the United States.

Mayor Arthur Schultz said it "feels good" to be mayor of what is now the state's fourth largest city, and he expected Joliet to continue growing.

"We have everything that people are looking for, and that's why they're coming here," Schultz said.

The numbers released by the Census Bureau are the government's estimates of populations in the nation's cities and villages as of July 2007. The estimates are produced annually between the actual census counts done once a decade.

Latest numbers

The latest numbers do not reflect the continued decline in the housing market during the past year, although the slump already was under way by 2006.

Joliet added 4,349 people between July 2006 and July 2007, which amounted to a growth rate of 3.1 percent. Joliet was ranked 22nd nationally among the fastest growing cities with populations of more than 100,000. The Joliet growth rate was down from its 2005-06 population increase of more than 6,500. Joliet last year was ranked as the nation's 12th fastest growing city. In Illinois, however, only Chicago added more people than Joliet in the 2006-2007 period.

The estimated population increase of the past year pushed Joliet past Naperville (estimated population of 142,479).

Naperville became the fifth largest city, trading places with Joliet. The top three cities are Chicago (2.84 million), Aurora (170,855) and Rockford (156,596).

'Vibrant region'

Joliet again was one of only a few cities outside of the Sunbelt that ranked among the fastest growing nationwide. Another was just up the road. Elgin ranked 20th with a 3.3 percent growth rate and a population of 104,288.

Seeing both Joliet and Elgin among the top 25 is "a good sign that we have a vibrant region with a diversity of places where people want to live," said Tom Garritano, communications director for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Growth in older cities, including Joliet, Elgin and even Chicago, which added 8,072 people, could reflect "trends where people are being drawn back to the urban centers," Garritano said. Joliet officials see the city's continued growth as a good sign, especially with new projects like the Bridge Street Towne Center in the works.

The Bridge Street project is a large outdoor retail, hotel and office center planned for the interchange of Interstates 55 and 80.

Don Fisher, planning director for the city, said that the growth in Joliet is a selling point when attracting the attention of retailers.

The number of residential building permits in Joliet have fallen this year to about 20 a month, compared to more than 100 a month in recent years.

But Fisher noted the city's long term plans forecast another 70,000 people being added to the city as land is developed on the far west and south ends of the city.

"We've slowed like everyone else," Fisher said. But, he added, "When the rebound does occur, we'll be in an excellent position."

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