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N.C. population surges into nation's top 10

South Carolina rises to 24th

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Continuing waves of newcomers from the Northeast and other regions boosted both Carolinas in the ranks of the nation's most populous states in new U.S. Census Bureau data being released today.

North Carolina passed New Jersey to become the nation's 10th most populated state. And South Carolina, which broke into the ranks of the nation's top 10 fastest growers, passed Louisiana to become No. 24.

North Carolina gained more than 184,000 residents, while South Carolina's ranks swelled by more than 74,000 between 2005 and 2006.

"That's a continuation of a more than decade-long trend of the Northeast being a net exporter of population to the South," said Jim Johnson, Kenan professor of management at UNC Chapel Hill. "We have arrived in the global economy."

Why They're Moving

1. Retirement: In the 1990s, many retirees who moved to the Carolinas started in the Northeast, moved to Florida and then came halfway back -- to the Carolinas, earning the nickname "halfbacks." While that's still a factor in recent growth, many of the newer retirees never made it to the Sunshine State. "There was a time when many of those people would have gone straight to Florida, but now North Carolina and South Carolina have become intervening opportunities," said Jim Johnson, Kenan professor of management at UNC Chapel Hill.

2. Growth breeds growth: Recent arrivals are coming here to join friends or relatives who moved here in earlier waves. "We've become more cosmopolitan -- in part because of the earlier migration," Johnson said.

3. Economy: Research Triangle Park near Raleigh-Durham and the financial sector in Charlotte drive job growth. New companies continue to start up in the Carolinas because of their location halfway along the Eastern Seaboard.

Population growth strains roads, schools and other infrastructure, but it also fuels further job creation, Johnson noted.

"We're far better off being a magnet of population as opposed to losing it," he said.

Newcomer Voices

Nearly 226,000 people moved out of New York in the past year, according to the recent Census Bureau estimates, and more than 72,000 left New Jersey.

"I'd had enough. I decided I needed to go to another place. Charlotte was a great place to come. The weather is wonderful. I got tired of shoveling snow. ... I have tons of friends who've moved here from New Jersey and New York."

MORRISE CRAWFORD

Crawford, 65, was born in Huntersville and moved to New York after high school in the 1950s. She worked in New York City's garment center for 26 years, commuting from New Jersey, and then worked at Bloomingdale's until retiring in 2004. Crawford, a Ballantyne resident, joined a brother, cousins and sister who live here, she said.

"It's less expensive here. The people here are friendly. I'm happy that I'm here."

ROSEMARY HURTADO

Hurtado, 42, and her husband and two children moved from Bergen County, N.J., to a home near Huntersville in July. The economy is what drew them, she said. Her husband, a carpenter, saw better opportunities in the construction industry here. She got a job as a customer service representative for US Airways.

Where They're Moving From

The 2005 American Community Survey asked people who'd moved during the previous year where they came from. The number of newcomers is greater than population growth, because the net growth figure also accounts for those who move away.

	NORTH CAROLINA	SOUTH CAROLINA
Newcomers from out of state in 2005 (total)	264,000	141,000
From Northeast	67,000	27,000
From Midwest	30,000	17,000
From South	139,000	85,000
From West	29,000	12,000

**Regional numbers are greater than newcomer total due to rounding*

For Newcomers

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