

## Aging Baby Boomers Flee North to Southeast

### Community Resources Challenged to Keep Up

Suppose you could step off a boat in a flowing river and walk upstream - you'll see what is heading downstream, right? Suppose you could do this with time- walking

upstream alongside the "river of time" to see what your organization will be dealing with next year...and beyond. This was a fascinating concept explored in a great 1980s novel - "Time and Again" - and one we'll employ as we prepare this "upstream look" for NCRC members.

As Americans continue to move from north to south, the six-state Southeast Region's population growth is fast outstripping that of many other states. Except for potential or real community curbs on growth, there's no natural barrier to stop this internal immigration flow in the

years ahead. Sunshine, lower taxes, lower home prices and other factors are powerful magnets.

There is no clear "composite" picture of the average American fleeing the snow and crowded urban areas of the northern states - newcomers vary in age, family makeup, educational level, poverty rate, household income, racial and ethnic identity. And, immigration trends varies state by state, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta ([www.frbatlanta.org](http://www.frbatlanta.org)).

Most of the Southeast newcomers are refugees from the Northeast Corridor (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts), Midwest Heartland (Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania), and even the Far West (California).

The Southeast Region experienced a combined growth of almost 20% over the 1900-2000 decade, reaching 42 million total (the US grew by 13% to almost 300 million). Florida remains the real magnet state, especially for seniors, with three million new residents in the 10 years. Georgia gained 1.7 million new residents, most attracted by the strong regional economy, says the Atlanta Fed research staff.

The region's Hispanic population has grown larger and more diverse, with an increase in all six Southeast states. *People power?* Hispanics now number 17% of Florida's total population. If they combine their political muscle, they can have more clout in each state and throughout the region. Like the rest of America, the Southeast states are clearly growing *older* demographically - men and women in the 30-39 age group declined while the 40-59 year group increased. Many newcomers moving in are older vs. younger.

The good news is that after a century of lagging behind other regions, the Southeast's income and education levels have been steadily going up. One state - Georgia - now exceeds the national level for median household income (at \$43,357). Bad news: The other five states continue to lag, with Mississippi, while improving, ranked at the bottom in terms of national household income statistics.

So, asks the Atlanta Fed, is this "*Paradise Found... or Lost?*" for newcomers, and especially seniors and soon-to-be Gray Warriors? Rapid growth can create vexing problems for planners, community developers, community service agencies, affordable housing advocates, and government agencies.

Seniors need lots of services in retirement, a challenge except for the well-to-do retirees. As Medicare's financial woes increase - as most experts agree they will - the burden could shift quickly to already overstrained state and county budgets (Medicaid) for low-income households. Will the money be there? What if it isn't? What worthwhile community projects will have to be under funded or cancelled to pay for a swelling Medicaid budget?

Job creation - and finding a job! - could be challenging. As more companies "offshore" and outsource, full-time employees are being laid off. Jobs disappear. Tomorrow's retirement will look different than today's, experts say, with many more part-time and flex-time workers working well into their 70s. Will they be more attractive to employers than a full-time young person from a minority or low-income home? There are 76 million Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) approaching retirement...almost four million each year for 18 years!

What will be the impact of this tidal wave of aging populations on our social systems, healthcare, infrastructure, state and municipal finances, the job market, housing, and community services? Watch the Baby Boomer trend carefully. Remember that number - roughly four million per year, 11,000 people per day, 450 per hour - hitting a magic age number (be it 62,65,72,80 and beyond) and changing events and trends for years to come. NCRC member organizations will be dealing with public and private resources seriously challenged to keep up, especially in the growing Southeast Region. •

### Looking Upstream

By Hank Boerner  
NCRC introduces a new column with this issue - Hank Boerner's "Looking Upstream," in which he explores important emerging trends of importance to NCRC member organizations.

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