

News

## Meaning of word 'family' is changing in Macomb

Saturday, August 27, 2011

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*Census shows majority of households in Macomb are no longer husband and wife with children*

A devout Catholic, Sue Waltman grew up in St. Clair Shores, attended parochial school as a young girl, and lived the old-fashioned, family-oriented lifestyle of countless Macomb County residents.

But in 1995 she and her husband divorced, in 1996 she began living with her mother, and the two of them embarked on a sometimes-tumultuous, three-generation relationship that included her daughter, now 20 years old.

Waltman was a little ahead of the curve.

When she was younger, she remembers that some people, particularly the elderly, would react to a single parent by saying, "Oh, you don't have a husband?" In 2011, her married friends encounter a different response.

"Now, people say, 'Oh, you have a husband?'" said Waltman, 51, an accountant.

The Waltman household — with a grandparent, a single parent, and a child beyond school age — represents a fairly typical Macomb County family in 2011.

According to the newest U.S. Census figures, a majority of Macomb County households no longer consist of the traditional nuclear family — husband, wife and children. Many are led by a single parent. Some consist of unmarried couples. And some include a live-in elderly parent who plays the full-time role of grandparent.

The most-detailed figures yet show that a husband-wife family represents just 49.7 percent of Macomb's 331,000 households. Households with children under 18 years old now comprise just 31.7 percent of the county.

And the number of households with a grandchild and grandparent rose 44 percent over the last decade to nearly 14,000.

That's part of a nationwide trend in which relatively young adults struggle to gain a foothold in the stagnant economy and rely upon their elders to help them get by. The census figures show that grandparents — many of them baby boomers who are still working and earning a healthy income — represent one in four U.S. households.

What's more, unemployment among workers ages 25 to 34 last year was double that of Americans aged 55 to 64.

In Macomb County, the number of households with three generations now exceeds 11,000.

The new figures showcase many more details than the numbers released by the Census Bureau report in the spring that showed Macomb's population rising by 6.7 percent, to 840,798, one of the largest increases of any Michigan county.

At the Waltman home in St. Clair Shores, daughter/granddaughter Dayna Lewandowski's time spent at home has diminished over the past two years as she resides part of the year in an Oakland University dormitory and also spends time at her father's home.

But from the time she was 6 until she graduated from high school, Dayna was part of a three-generation mix on a daily basis, with her grandmother often acting as babysitter and a driver providing transportation to and from school. Sue Waltman admits the arrangement was tense at times because "you have different generations, different ideas, different views on how to do things and how to raise a child."

In addition, her 73-year-old mother, Helen Waltman, and her granddaughter did not always see eye-to-eye. But the family pulled together during tough times.

"Yes, we have differences, but we are a family. We are our support group. We lean on each other," said Sue Waltman.

Kurt Metzger, a longtime demographics specialist, said Macomb County's transition toward many more nontraditional families, an increase of more than 30 percent from 2000-10, was propelled by a major influx of black residents from Detroit. Macomb's black population jumped 241 percent over the past decade, a migration of 50,000 people.

In a county that was labeled "nearly all white" just a few decades ago, Metzger notes that the number of black homeowners increased by 175 percent over the past 10 years, and the scope of black renters rocketed by 276 percent.

The relatively small number of blacks who moved into Macomb County in the 1990s comprised fairly typical families, Metzger said. But since then, the wave of new residents consists mostly of single-parent families. In 2009, 78 percent of births in the city of Detroit involved single-parent households.

Those are the families that are moving directly north, from the east side of Detroit to south Warren and Eastpointe and Roseville.

"Unfortunately, the stereotype fits," said Metzger, director of a nonprofit research group, Data Driven Detroit. "That's one of the biggest changes in Macomb County. Because of the (cheap) housing stock, many black single-parent families are moving in."

Jackie Kelly-Smith, a 12-year Warren resident, said she believes the county is also shunning its past reputation as a community that is inhospitable to blacks.

"Being an African-American woman from Warren, I get asked for advice all the time (from minorities)," said Kelly-Smith, a retired General Motors factory worker. "I ... tell people that I've never had a bad experience. Macomb County is a beautiful area to raise a family."

Macomb County's lure also attracted large influxes of Hispanics, Asians and Chaldeans over the past decade. While the new figures released by the Census Bureau don't make numerous distinctions, they show that Macomb's Hispanic population jumped nearly 54 percent and the number of Asians rose 49 percent.

Mexicans and Puerto Ricans dominate the growing number of Latino families.

Most of the incoming Asians are Indian, Filipino, Pakistani or Vietnamese. But in some communities, the changing demographics are far different than in Macomb County overall.

For example, in Warren the number of Bangladeshis skyrocketed by 2,033 percent, to 1,024. Many of those migrated from Hamtramck. The population of Hmong, a tight-knit ethnic group from the mountainous regions of Cambodia, jumped by 57 percent, to 1,181. Most of those moved north from the Six Mile Road and Gratiot area.

In addition, a 2009 Census Bureau survey extrapolated figures that estimate other Macomb populations this way: 11,000 Albanians and nearly 15,000 Chaldeans/Assyrians. Macomb County is home to the largest concentration of Albanian-Americans in the nation.

Yet, all of these numbers indicate a 21st Century Macomb County that is not leading the way in a new demographic and cultural path but is catching up to the diversity in much of the rest of southeast Michigan.

Macomb remains 84 percent white, a proportion that is far above the comparable makeup of Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw counties.

Here are some other highlights from the newest batch of Macomb County census figures:

The long-term trend of an aging population continued over the last decade. The largest proportional increase, based on age groups, was those 85 years-plus – a 51 percent jump. The number of households with one or more people 60 years old or more rose 24 percent and households with someone 75 years-plus increased 18 percent.

Reflecting a sour economy that has forced many families to “double up” and congregate under the same roof, the number of owner-occupied homes with seven or more persons rose 18 percent. Among renters, the increase was a whopping 169 percent.

Some myths about Macomb’s changing demographic landscape were exposed by the census. Warren, particularly the south end, is viewed as a community with numerous foreclosures, vacant homes and rental properties. However, the statistics show that Michigan’s third-largest city’s vacant homes represents about 8 percent of the total housing stock, not significantly different from the Macomb County total. And rental properties amount to about 26 percent of all households — again, not substantially different from the countywide figures.

In Sterling Heights, the assumption that Macomb’s second-largest city has experienced a big influx of Asians is contradicted by the census numbers. Sterling Heights registered a 43 percent increase in Asians — 8,800 people in 2010 — but they still represent just 7 percent of the population.

Households that included a grandchild shot up 44 percent.

In contrast to neighboring southeast Oakland County, which features four of the top five Michigan communities with the highest concentration of same-sex couples, gay couples’ households in Macomb represent only about 0.2 percent of the total.

At Data Driven Detroit, Metzger focuses on Macomb’s demographic evolution more than ever before.

“For me, I find Macomb County a very interesting place,” he said. “It’s changing quickly, and in so many ways.”

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