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Census Bureau data covering 2000 to 2007 show Inland counties growing rapidly, with Riverside County adding residents at twice the clip of San Bernardino County

By: Mark Muckenfuss
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Data released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau show the Inland Empire continuing to grow at a rapid clip from 2000-2007, although that growth has dropped significantly in the past year.

The data also show Riverside County consistently growing at about twice the rate of San Bernardino County. That disparity accounts for Riverside surpassing San Bernardino in total county population in 2006.

During the eight-year period, Riverside County's growth rate was 33.0 percent, as its total estimated population went from 1,559,431 to 2,073,571. San Bernardino County's growth rate was 16.8 percent, with a population climb from 1,718,840 to 2,007,800.

The year-to-year growth rate peaked for both counties between 2002 and 2004. Riverside's 2002-2003 growth rate hit 4.9 percent. San

Bernardino peaked the following year at 2.9 percent. Those rates were down significantly during the period from 2006 to 2007, when Riverside County's population grew 3.3 percent while San Bernardino had just 1 percent growth.

Both counties continue to have minority ethnic groups actually represent a majority of the population, although exact percentages could not be gleaned from the data.

Calls to county representatives for comment on the newly released data were not returned.

Much has been made of the graying of the population in recent years, as people live longer, but the Inland counties are not seeing that trend. While the 85-and-older age group was the fastest-growing group in Riverside County from 2000 to 2007, at 67.5 percent, the group represents just 1.7 percent of the current

population. In fact, the percentage of the total population represented by those over 65 actually decreased in both counties, dropping 19 percent in Riverside County and 8.6 percent in San Bernardino County.

The fastest-growing age group was different for each county.

In Riverside County, the 18-24 age group grew 51.8 percent over the eight-year period. This college-age group represented 9.2 percent of the county's total population in 2000. In 2007, it represented 10.5 percent.

Outside of the 85 and older group, the fastest growing block in San Bernardino County was primarily composed of baby boomers. The county saw a 31.2 percent growth in those 45 to 64 years old.

The only age group that saw a decline in growth was in San Bernardino County. Children aged 5 to 13 went up 2.2 percent from 2001 to 2003 but then dropped 3.6 percent from 2003-2007. The overall drop for the entire period was 1.4 percent.

Reach Mark Muckenfuss at
951-368-9595 or
mmuckenfuss@PE.com