

LOCAL

Polk County is the fastest-growing county in Florida, 7th in the nation



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LAKELAND — The growth spurring major development across Polk County isn't slowing down anytime soon.

Polk County is the fastest-growing county in Florida and the seventh fastest-growing in the nation, according to data released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Between July 1, 2020 and July 1, 2021, Polk County's population grew by 24,287 people — to 753,520.

The only other Florida county to make the nation's top 10 fastest growing counties list was Lee County in Southwest Florida, which grew its population by 23,297 people.

South of Parkway: Nearly 400 new apartment units proposed near Lakeside Preserve

Southwest Lakeland: Lakeland officials to consider proposal for 252 apartments along Pipkin Road

Road building: Polk to pay \$40 million to widen 1.1 mile of road. Here's why the cost is so high

The fastest growing county in the U.S. was Maricopa County in Arizona, which grew by 58,246 people to balloon its overall population to nearly 4.5 million people. Half of the top 10 counties were in Texas, which include Collin, Fort Bend, Williamson, Denton and Montgomery counties. Collin and Denton counties include portions of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area.

But that's just by numeric growth. The top 10 metro areas by percentage growth include three Florida metro areas in addition to Lakeland-Winter Haven, which ranked seventh with 3.3% growth over that year. Punta Gorda ranked fourth at 3.7%, The Villages ranked fifth at 3.6% and Cape Coral-Fort Meyers ranked ninth at 3% growth.

For 2019-2020, the Lakeland-Winter Haven metro area tied for the second-fastest growing metro area in the country, but it only grew by 2.7%. The data for those numbers was gathered for metro areas with 500,000 people or more.

By that measure, the nation this year would be led by the Myrtle Beach-Conway-North Myrtle Beach metro area, which grew by 3.7%. And Lakeland would be tied for second with Boise, Idaho.

By percentage, the fastest growing metro area in the U.S. was St. George, Utah, which grew by 5.1% to a total of 191,226 people.

Where does Florida rank according to U.S. Census data?

Only one Florida county made the top 10 list for most populous counties: Miami-Dade County, which had nearly 2.7 million people as of last July and ranked seventh in the nation. Los Angeles County ranked first with 9.8 million people, which is 4.6 million more people than the next county on the list — Cook County, Illinois, with nearly 5.2 million people.

Three more California counties made the list: San Diego, Orange and Riverside counties.

Miami-Dade also ranked 10th for counties that saw the highest numeric population declines over the past year, losing 38,990 people. Los Angeles County made the top of that list, too, losing 184,465 people and was joined by San Francisco, Santa Clara and Alameda counties. Four New York counties were included: New York, Kings, Queens and Bronx counties, reflecting population declines in major U.S. cities.

"Counties with net international migration lost (more people moving out of than into the country) were most frequently found in California (41.4%), Oregon (27.8%) and Mississippi (23.2%)," the U.S. Census Bureau said in a press release.

The greatest domestic migration losses were in Los Angeles County and New York County, which lost 179,757 and 113,642 residents, respectively. But 65.6% of U.S. counties experienced positive domestic migration overall.

According to the bureau, more than 73% of U.S. counties experienced natural decrease in 2021, which is when there are more deaths than births in a population over a given time period. That number is up from 55.5% in 2020 and 45.5% in 2019. COVID-19 was one of the main contributing factors.

The Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metro area saw some of the highest rates of natural decrease in 2021, losing 9,291 people. But the area also saw some of the highest net domestic migration gains, adding 42,089 people through migration.

Florida saw a natural decrease of 45,241, topping the nation. Close to 72,000 Florida residents have died of COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic.

But Florida still saw massive growth through increases in net migration. Florida saw a net migration of more than 259,000 people, the largest growth of any U.S. state.

The Orlando-Lakeland-Deltona combined statistical area ranked seventh in the nation for largest net migration increases between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. The state and country were led by the Cape Coral-Fort Meyers-Naples area. Two other Florida statistical areas made the top 15 list: the North Port-Sarasota area and the Jacksonville-St. Marys-Palatka area.

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