



Towns urge residents to help capture new funds by filling out census

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Firefighter/paramedic Carl Schultz checks a ladder at Naperville Fire Station No. 10. Government funding based on Naperville's census count helps pay firefighters' salaries during the recession, officials said.

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Buzz up!

Dollars desperately needed to pay employees and fix roads. A gold mine of information. A tool that determines if a town warrants more elected representatives.

These things and more are what filling out the census questionnaire means to local municipalities.

In Huntley, revenues derived from the nationwide count taken every 10 years are "a big part of being able to survive the economic downturn," Village Manager Dave Johnson said.

The 10 questions that take 10 minutes, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, should arrive in mailboxes across the country within the next few days. The surveys ask for information such as names, number of people per household and age.

Census data is used to decide how to allocate \$400 billion in federal funding and the amount per capita each municipality receives as its share of state income tax, motor fuel tax and use tax (that is, sales tax from purchases outside of Illinois).

One of many fast-growing towns in McHenry County, Huntley held a special census in 2008 to identify new residents.

Despite the recent housing slowdown, Huntley had a population boom for much of the last decade due in part to the Sun City retirement community. From 5,730 people in 2000, the village grew to nearly 23,230 by 2008.

Village officials had hoped to reach 25,000 to achieve home-rule status. But the consolation prize of the special census was more than \$375,000 in additional state funding.

Unlike McHenry County, whose population is expected to skyrocket by 76 percent by

Check your mail

Here are some important census dates.

- Letters informing households the census form is coming arrive Monday through Wednesday.
- Census forms are mailed out between March 15 and 17.
- Replacement questionnaires go out from April 1 to April 3.
- Census Day is April 1.
- Households who haven't responded by the end of April will get a visit from a census worker.

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2030, much of Cook County is built out and will experience a modest 11 percent boost in 20 years, according to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

But that doesn't mean Palatine isn't striving to get every resident counted. Each 1 percent of households left out of the census could mean \$50,000 less in state revenue annually, Assistant Village Manager Sam Trakas said.

The village currently receives \$125 per capita annually in shared state revenue. But the census also generates federal funding.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development uses census data to select low- and moderate-income areas in towns eligible for Community Development Block Grants. Palatine received \$408,622 from CDBGs in 2008, with revenues going to adult education and job training, programs for the homeless, and water main improvements.

DuPage County's Naperville also conducted special censuses in 2003 and 2008 in hopes of squeezing extra revenues from the state. The per capita figure in Naperville is about \$100.

"In a recession, we're looking for revenue any way we can," Assistant to the City Manager Dan DiSanto said.

The city eliminated 43 positions in 2009 and 49 in 2010.

"We had a big budget hole and the census money went to filling the budget hole," DiSanto said. "We would have had to lay off more people if it were not for the census. We're able to keep more boots on the ground."

But officials also are eager to see what the numbers reveal about the city.

"(The demographic data) is fantastic. It helps us know our population better. It means we're able to offer services in a way that's more targeted to our population," DiSanto said.

As an example, he noted the 2010 census will be a good indicator of how many seniors live in Naperville as the Baby Boomers age.

Kane County is another region in transition, with the population projected to rise 78 percent by 2030.

That's why Elgin is focusing on getting as many people as possible to fill out their census form.

"We're focusing on trying to increase the count because funding means so much. It means more per capita," city spokeswoman Sue Olafson said.

The effort includes targeting Hispanic neighborhoods where some residents may not be familiar with the census.

Elgin receives about \$120 per capita, used for needs ranging from public safety to parks, Olafson said.

In addition to revenue, Elgin is expected to gain additional city council members as a result of the census.

Sandwiched between Cook and Kane counties in terms of growth, Lake County is projected to see its population rise by 30 percent by 2030.

Every Wauconda resident matters, said Tracy Fessler, the village's point person for the census. Wauconda's average per capita amount is \$125, and its 2000 population was 9,448. That number is expected to get a boost with the 2010 census.

But one concern of Fessler's is that fears about private information getting in the wrong hands will dampen public participation.

It's unfounded, she said.

"There's jail time and hefty fines if any of that is released. I really do believe it's secure," Fessler said.

Naperville's DiSanto also has dealt with paranoia about census workers showing up at people's doors.

His advice: "If you fill it out and return it by mail, no one will come to your door."