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Get ready to be counted

2010 Census launching

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March 14, 2010

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Something is about to arrive in your mailbox that area officials hope you take seriously.

It's the 10-question 2010 Census form. Most forms are expected to land in mailboxes between Monday and Wednesday. Filling out the form is required by law.

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Residents in Will, Grundy and Kendall counties soon will be getting their U.S. Census forms to fill out.

(Courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau)

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And every state, county and town in America wants as complete a count as possible, because census data is what is used to distribute more than \$400 billion in federal assistance.

In 2008, Will County received \$229 million in federal assistance that is distributed based on census-related statistics, according a report released Tuesday by the Washington D.C.-based Brookings Institute.

Cook County received more than \$10 billion of the state's \$19 billion total. Other Illinois counties included on the list, which featured the 200 most populous counties in the United States, were: DuPage, \$700 million; Kane, \$222 million; Lake, \$295 million; and

McHenry, \$80 million.

"Dollars are really distributed based on population," said John Hallas a senior planner with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. "The higher and more accurate the count, the better."

Some people fear filling out the form will lead to snooping by other federal agencies, said Will County Executive Larry Walsh. But the Census Bureau cannot share the information with any other agency, Walsh said.

"There should be no fear, no fear at all," Walsh stressed. "The census is confidential. Everything you put down in that questionnaire is confidential. Other departments of the government cannot use that data."

Boom years

Population has been a big story for Will County for much of the decade.

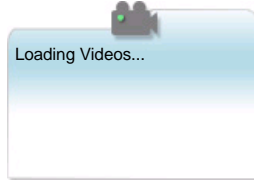
When 2000 Census totals were released in 2001, area officials celebrated the county's unprecedented growth. The figures showed the county grew 40.6 percent to 502,266, an increase of 86,648 over the previous census.

Some of the biggest percent increases came in towns like Plainfield, 186.11 percent; Mokena, 137.97 percent; and New Lenox, 84.6 percent.

Through much of the decade, Will County was the fastest growing county in Illinois and one of the fastest growing in the country. Will County also made the list of 100 most populous counties in the country for the first time. A 2008 estimated population of 681,097 pushed Will County to 87th on the list.

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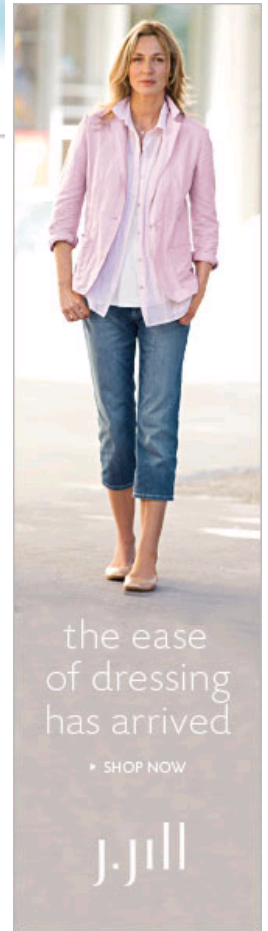
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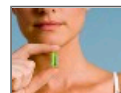
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CMAAP estimates Will County will grow to 1,076,466 by the year 2030, which would make it the second most populous county in Illinois behind Cook.



But Will County's rapid growth has slowed with the recession. Now Will County and its fast-growing neighbor, Kendall County, are known for having the highest foreclosure rates in Illinois. As the housing market collapsed, the rate of Will County's growth slowed.

Census Bureau officials worry the high rate of foreclosures throughout the country will make it more difficult to get an accurate census count.

"Families are doubled up and tripled up and they won't admit it," said Nancy Potok, a deputy under secretary for the U.S. Commerce Department, who spoke at a recent University of Chicago forum on the 2010 Census. "... Getting people to acknowledge that doubling up is very challenging."

Numbers game

CMAAP will be watching the results of the 2010 Census closely, Hallas said. So much is riding on how the numbers shake out.

For instance, Illinois lost one seat in the U.S. House after the 2000 Census and it's expected to lose a seat in after the 2010 Census. While the state is growing, other areas in the southeast and southwest portions of the country have been growing faster, Hallas explained.

Census data also is crucial for planning purposes, not only on a regional level, but also at the municipal level, Hallas said.

For instance, a community experiencing a high rate of growth among Hispanics may have crowded schools because Hispanic families tend to be younger with more children.

"The idea is to make local officials aware of what changes are taking place in their community," Hallas said.

Walsh agreed.

"The population of Will County plays such an important role in so many issues out there," he said.

Will County's phenomenal growth is what led to many of the school building referendums and sewer and water projects that were launched through the decade he said. And an accurate census count will help the county when it comes to redrawing its districts for Congress, the state Legislature and the county board.

"At the end of the day, it's huge for us to make sure that everyone — everyone — gets in and gets counted," Walsh said. "Population is so important."

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