

Seniors are flocking to Bexar

Census estimates indicate area is leading the nation

By Peggy O'Hare
 STAFF WRITER

Clay Hadick, 68, and his wife, Dianna, were ready to leave New Jersey when he retired from the pharmaceutical industry in 2012.

They moved to Texas, settling in Bexar County — specifically, in Alamo Ranch, in a gated community for people age 55 and older.

They enjoy the warm weather, the low cost of living, the lack of a state income tax and the friendly people here. Hadick had lived in Bexar County in the early 1980s, when he was in the Army and stationed at Brooke Army Medical Center.

Since 2010, a rising tide of seniors 65 to 74 years old has been making this home.

That's not unique to Bexar County, considering that baby boomers everywhere are reaching retirement age. But new population estimates released today by the U.S. Census Bureau show the percentage growth in this age range in Bexar County outpaced similar increases recorded in Texas and the nation as a whole.

The percentage growth in the number of seniors 65 to 74

Seniors continues on A9
 years old also eclipsed the population surges of all other age groups here.

Between July 2010 and July 2016, the number of seniors age 65 to 69 living in Bexar County grew by more than 42 percent, or almost 24,000 people, the population estimates show.

During the same time peri-

od, the number of Bexar County residents who are 70 to 74 years old increased by 32 percent, or more than 13,000 people, the census numbers indicate.

"There are a lot of things going for us here, in terms of it being a place for people to move to retire," said Texas state demographer Lloyd Potter, a professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. "One of them is cost of living. Of course, we have a warm climate. So people from the Midwest and Northeast, they're looking to retire in a place that's more temperate, but also where there are things to do and see."

Potter suspects many seniors of that age range in Bexar County are veterans or have some connection to the military.

"I tend to meet a lot of people who have retired here who are former military veterans — who had lived someplace else in the United States for much of their career, then decided they wanted to move here to retire because they were stationed here for some period."

The Hadicks said that was a factor in their decision to move to Bexar County. Dianna Hadick said they wanted close access to a commissary and to be near the military medical facilities here.

In addition, "the cost of homes is not anywhere near as high as it is on the East Coast or the West Coast," Clay Hadick said.

He also doesn't miss the taxes in New Jersey.

"A lot of states like California, Illinois and New York and New Jersey — they're very

high-taxed states," he said. "Those people whom I know (there) would love to either leave or have left or are thinking of leaving."

"We basically cut our taxes in half," Dianna Hadick said. "We reduced our cost of living by 25 percent."

Delbert Van Dusen, 74, a retired physician, also moved to San Antonio as a senior citizen. His wife died in 2008. In 2011, he relocated from Tyler to San Antonio, where he bought a house several blocks away from his daughter's home.

"The weather's not great, but it's not bad," Van Dusen said. "It doesn't freeze much in the winter. That's an advantage. I feel good that the Hill Country is nearby — we are at the edge of it. It's a reasonably interesting place to live."

He believes San Antonio will continue to be an attractive retirement spot.

"The only major factor that could make it slow down is not having any water," he said.

Texas as a whole saw a similar uptick in the number of seniors 65 to 74 years old, although not as dramatic as Bexar County's increase.

Census numbers show Texas recorded a 38 percent increase in seniors 65 to 69 years old between July 2010 and July 2016. The state also experienced a 31.4 percent increase in seniors 70 to 74 years old during that same time frame.

Nationally, the number of seniors 65 to 69 years old jumped by more than 34 percent during that six-year period. And the number of seniors 70 to 74 years old increased by more than 26 percent.



“This is definitely a nationwide trend,” said Peter Borsella, a demographer in the U.S. Census Bureau’s population division. “These baby boomers are turning 65 now. The first ones started turning 65 in 2011. So more and more of them are turning 65 as time goes on.”

“We do expect this trend to continue” across the country, Borsella said. “We are just hitting the front end of it.”

University of Texas Health San Antonio has been aware of Bexar County’s growing senior population for some time and is making investments to expand cancer care and dementia care here, said William Henrich, its president.

The institution’s cancer center will affiliate with health care giant MD Anderson Cancer Center to provide increased cancer services in San Antonio. UT Health San Antonio also plans to open its new Alzheimer’s institute by the end of this year.

“We have hopefully picked

out the two major chronic illnesses where the aging demographic will play a significant role in numbers of people affected,” Henrich said.

WellMed, a group of primary care physicians that cares mostly for senior patients, also has made changes to accommodate the rising numbers of older people, teaming with the medical schools at UT Health San Antonio and the University of the Incarnate Word to ensure it has a pipeline of providers in the years to come, said Dr. Chris Arnold, WellMed’s regional medical director for Central Texas.

The group also expanded its palliative care program in San Antonio and Austin, boosted its ancillary staff in the market and opened six more clinics in the past four years in San Antonio, he said.

“We’ve been seeing the tsunami coming our way,” Arnold said. “Capacity and access to care — that’s been the biggest challenge that we’ve had.”

While seniors are making big waves, Bexar County and Texas each have a fairly young median age, the new census numbers show. In 2016 — the latest number available — Bexar County’s median age was 33.5 years old. In Texas, the median age was 34.5 years old.

Texas continues to show strong population growth. Its estimated population for 2016 was nearly 27.9 million, according to the new census numbers just released. That’s a more than 10 percent increase from the 25.2 million people in the state’s 2010 population estimate.

Bexar County also recorded another significant surge in population last year. The 2016 population estimates just released pegged the county’s total residents at 1,928,680 — a nearly 12 percent increase from the number of people estimated in 2010.

pohare@express-news.net



Ron Cortes / For the San Antonio Express-News

Dianna Hadick (from left), talks with Wendy Snyder and Tim and Carol Skvarenina before the start of a community meeting in Alamo Ranch.

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Retiree Clay Hadick, a new resident