

# Roswell Daily Record

## City population up 6.8%

Posted on 18 March 2011 .

U.S. Census Bureau data released Tuesday for New Mexico reveals that although Chaves County didn't witness a loss of population from 2000, its modest growth falls short of booms witnessed in other areas of the state — especially considering that Roswell is the state's fifth most populated city.

Roswell's 6.8 percent population increase wasn't enough to push the city over the 50,000 mark that many local officials were hoping for, and it also paled in comparison with other city and county growth in the state.

Only Santa Fe, with a 9.2 percent bump from 2000, hovers near the same level of growth as Roswell. Sandoval County's population jumped more than 46 percent and Bernalillo and Doña Ana counties, both hit nearly a 20 percent increase in population.

Chaves County grew by 6.9 percent. Rio Rancho, New Mexico's third most populous city, witnessed a little more than 69 percent growth.

Albuquerque, the most populous, saw a nearly 22 percent increase and Las Cruces, the second largest city in the state, increased by about 31 percent. Even more, the new data show that more than 10 percent of homes in Roswell are vacant. With a total of 19,743 housing units, only 17,654 were occupied in 2010, according to the census figures.

Despite the news that Roswell and Chaves County may not have grown as fast as many city officials and residents alike were hoping for in order to put it over the 50,000 mark, a state demographer says the city is exactly where experts expected it to be in terms of growth.

"Roswell ... and the southeastern corner of the state (is) growing about like it always has historically," said Jack Baker, a senior research scientist with The University of New Mexico's Geospatial and Population Studies. "This looks real typical," he said.

"To say that it's stagnant or anything like that, I don't think that's justifiable. It's growing like it normally has. ... I don't think this is slower than expected." Baker said that Roswell and the southeast region of the state is an area "whose motor, so to speak, is running." He explained that with a steady rate of births and deaths, there is a constant slow but steady growth.

"On top of that, you have, sometimes, just a surprising amount of fluctuation that can occur. That's always related to the energy industry and migration," he said. "So, people come and people go for jobs, because those jobs come and go." Those population rates are harder to track when only using the census for statistics, he said. The census acts as more of a snapshot of one year, each decade.

"If you look at tax return data, for example, and you look at anywhere in the southeastern part of the state, what you will see is that within a decade, it goes up, it goes down," Baker said.

"It seems almost cyclical." On top of Baker's suggestion that population growth in Roswell is right on track, local economic development officials say too many people may have already forgotten that the city had some big obstacles to climb in recent history.

"One of the things that I've always believed that people lose sight of when they start talking about those numbers, is that they forget the amount of jobs that we lost during the 1990s and especially the late 1990s," said Bill Owen, president of the Roswell-Chaves County Economic Development Corp.

Owen referred to companies Nova Bus and Levi Strauss leaving the city, in addition to a number of oil and

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gas exploration and operation companies that left around the same time. With those companies gone, Owen says the city lost between 4,000 and 5,000 jobs.

“Because it was more than 10 years ago, it’s normal that people would forget what we have had to overcome,” he said. “So, if you look at what we have overcome over those years, I think we’re doing extremely well” Owen pointed to local business expansion and the fact that facilities at the Roswell International Air Center are operating at maximum capacity.

“If there’s a way that people could take that into account, I think they could see that our economic growth here has been significantly higher than what a simple counting of the people in 2000 to 2010 (exemplifies),” he said. According to the latest census data, the state’s five most populated cities are: Albuquerque, 545,852; Las Cruces, 97,618; Rio Rancho, 87,521; Santa Fe, 67,947; and Roswell, 48,366.

“The prediction (for southeast New Mexico in the following decades) is slow and steady growth,” Baker said.

“It’s going to moderate, unless something changes and you have some sort of really huge economic development that’s unprecedented, it’s going to continue to roll on the way that it has.”

[mattarco@roswell-record.com](mailto:mattarco@roswell-record.com)