



Aptos Tool Crib owner Richard Losee checks the engine of a U-Haul rental truck. The truck was reserved by local residents who are moving to the Central Valley. Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Many lower-income families are giving up their California dreams, forced to move out of state by the ever-rising price of homes and rent

LEAVING PARADISE



'I'd never be able to buy a house there unless I won the lottery. Just our scrimping and saving wouldn't do it.'

YVETTE CADEAUX, FORMER SANTA CRUZ RESIDENT

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

As big as California is, there's less and less room in the state for poor people.

Low-income Californians are being priced out of housing across the state.

It wasn't easy for Yvette Cadeaux to decide to leave Santa Cruz, but it was even harder for her to adjust to life on the East Coast.

Like a growing number of Santa Cruzans, Cadeaux moved not only out of town but out of state to avoid the county's high cost of living.

"I like to say that I loved Santa Cruz but Santa Cruz didn't love me back," she joked from her new home in Maryland. "It's like an unrequited love story. I'd never be able to buy a house there unless I won the lottery. Just our scrimping and saving wouldn't do it."

During the last two months, local moving van operators have noticed a "mass exodus" of people moving out of the county and out of the state. In the last two months, the U-Haul office in Aptos has rented vans to people moving to Arizona, Washington, Oregon, Maryland and Colorado. Others are renting vans to move to closer places, such as Laguna Niguel and Fresno. In fact, U-Haul office manager Richard Losee said so many vans

are leaving the area and so few returning that the cost of rentals is skyrocketing.

"If you're moving here from Arizona, it'll cost you \$100," he said. "If you're moving to Arizona, it'll cost you \$900. There are definitely not enough vans left around here."

Companies that transport goods say they haven't seen an increase in business because most people leaving the area can't afford their services.

During the 1990s, the only period for which statistics were available, 11,763 people moved out of the county, an average of more than 1,000 people a year. At the same time, the real estate market began to boom about four years ago, bringing the median home sale price to more than \$500,000. Only 16 percent of county residents could afford that price, according to a March report by the California Department of Realtors.



Victoria Hansen, 11, and her 6-year-old niece, Angelina Sinuhe, relax in a bedroom while Sinuhe's infant brother, Tyrone Hatcher, sleeps. Hansen's mother moved into her oldest daughter's Vallejo home while she tried to find an affordable place to live. The Associated Press

Moving: Housing prices force lower-income families to leave the Golden State

Continued from Page E1

At the same time, the average cost of a rental unit rose to \$1,396. That means that a renter would have to earn \$26.18 an hour to spend the standard one-third of his income on rent.

For the county's poorest residents, housing is increasingly out of reach. Though the housing market has slowed somewhat, about half of all people with Section 8 federal housing subsidies haven't found a place to live in the last six months. The waiting list is still five years long.

"It's all still anecdotal, but I've had a number of clients who've told me that they're leaving because they just can't afford it anymore," said Claire Schwartz, attorney for the California Rural Legal Assistance, formerly called Legal Aid of the Central Coast. "It's getting worse for people at the lowest end of the socioeconomic ladder. We have a lot more cases now and mostly clients are telling me they're moving wherever they have family or friends who've told them it costs less to live there."

It's not so different in other parts of the state.

In San Jose, where a room in a house costs up to \$700 a month, elderly Vietnamese move in with their children.

In San Francisco, the nation's most expensive city, thousands of blacks already are gone and others are following. Many are moving to Central Valley towns like Stockton and Tracy.

In San Diego and Santa Ana, Legal Aid lawyers call 2001 the worst year yet for housing displacement.

Poor Californians and aid workers report rising evictions and landlords refusing to accept federal Section 8 vouchers to subsidize poor renters. Homelessness is more visible than two years ago, they say, and waiting lists for public housing, already years long, are growing longer.

"My cases are getting sadder and sadder," said Bernadette Probus, housing attorney with the Legal Aid Society of San Diego.

After decades of middle-class flight to suburbia, the working poor are joining them as inner-city neighborhoods become popular and pricier.

"Many years ago, people were moving out to the suburbs and lower-income people had their choice of places to go," said Lily Toney, spokeswoman for the Oakland Housing Authority. "Now the reverse is happening ... The choices are fewer and fewer for low-income people."

Some go to the affordable but job-poor Central Valley, where agencies offer to pay moving bills and a month's



The Associated Press

Charol Hansen, right, has moved in with her youngest daughter in Vallejo as she searches for a place to live.

rent to induce people to leave the state entirely. Already 800 adults with families have accepted that deal.

In Vallejo, northeast of San Francisco, Charol Hansen advertises herself to landlords as "a single mother, just trying to raise my kids in a stable environment." She has six children, ranging in age from 9 to 15.

"I ask for Section 8 and they say, 'No,' and they say they'll call back, and they don't call back," she said. "It's very, very hard."

Hansen earns about \$2,000 a month before taxes as an aide for a rehabilitation center. A four-bedroom house will cost \$1,650 to \$2,200 a month, she says. Hansen has lived now for a year with her daughter's family as rents keep rising.

"Nobody's called me yet," she said.

"I'm praying they will call me. It's all a matter of time."

Betty Spagner of Vallejo says her working daughter drifts from place to place with two children, stopping in at her tiny one-bedroom cottage to give them baths. Spagner says her daughter has tried, unsuccessfully, for a year to get a landlord to accept her Section 8 voucher.

In Vallejo, Alisa McCraw, who works at Glen Ellen Winery in Sonoma, finally found a landlord to take her Section 8 voucher in June. It ended a 10-month search and long stretches on living room couches.

"I finally found one," she said. "It's wonderful. It's peaceful."

Housing experts say a 5 percent vacancy rate indicates a balanced market. But in much of California, vacan-

cies are only 2 or 3 percent, which gives landlords an easy choice of richer people over poorer, subsidized tenants.

"What we hear from shelters and food banks is they are seeing more working families," said Dara Schur, an attorney with the Western Center on Law and Poverty in Oakland. "They're living with relatives, living in their cars and they're certainly doubling and tripling up. People are living in spaces not designed for housing because it's better than the streets."

In Orange County, south of Los Angeles, the situation is much the same.

"When people get a 30-day notice, they can't find a place to live," said Legal Aid Society's Crystal Sims.

"They wind up being evicted ... and then have an even harder time renting."

With two-bedroom apartments renting for more than \$1,000 a month, some Orange County residents are renting bedrooms from other families, Sims says.

Back in Vallejo, where her daughter continues a hard-luck search for a decent place to live, Betty Spagner has a different outlook.

"I hope my kids get away from here," she said. "I just wish they would get out of California, period."

Staff writer Heather Boerner contributed to this report.

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