

Census: Watsonville tops local growth

Latino gains drive 15.7 percent growth but whites leaving city

Watsonville-Growth 3.9-11

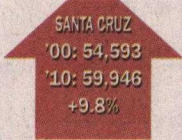
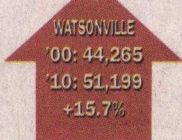
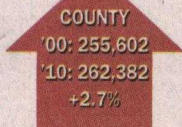
By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — Already its most Latino community, Watsonville now owns the title of the fastest-growing city in Santa Cruz County, according to U.S. Census figures released Tuesday.

The farming mecca grew 15.7 percent from 2000 to 2010, approximately six times the county's overall growth rate. The growth is attributable largely to an expansion of the city's already strong Latino majority, who make up 81 percent of the population.

"We're the fastest growing community in Santa Cruz County," Watsonville Mayor Daniel Dodge said during Tuesday's City Council meeting. "I'm excited to be part of that. We are the future of California."



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With a population of 51,199, Watsonville's growth masks a distinct population trend: Fewer of its residents are white. While census-takers recorded more than 8,500 whites in the city in 2000, that figure declined to 7,038 in 2010.

Nevertheless, it was a repeat performance for Watsonville, which boomed in population between 1990 and 2000, growing 42 percent. If those trends hold, an agrarian city with high unemployment will soon overtake affluent, educated Santa Cruz as the county's biggest population center, probably by the next census count.

Santa Cruz County's overall population stands at 262,382, up from 255,602 a decade ago. The county's growth rate of 2.7 percent ranked 49th out of California's 58 counties, far below California's overall population growth of 10 percent.

That's because growth has stagnated in parts of the county. Capitola lost 115 residents, and Scotts Valley's growth was just 1.7 percent. Their populations were 9,918 and 11,580, respectively.

The city of Santa Cruz, meanwhile, grew 9.8 percent to 59,946, continuing a long trend of steady population growth.

The county also tends to be older than the state as a whole. Just 35.7 percent of residents are younger than 18 years old, compared to 55.6 percent statewide.

The county's ethnic makeup continues to be dominated by whites and Latinos, who combine to make up more than 91 percent of the population, though whites still outnumber Latinos nearly 2-to-1.

Asians are the third-largest group, at 4.1 percent, or a little more than 10,000. Blacks make up less than 1 percent of the population, at just more than 2,000 residents.



LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL

Pedestrians cross a busy intersection in downtown Watsonville on Tuesday. If trends continue, Watsonville will soon take over Santa Cruz as the county's biggest population center.

The figures are the second major release of data after last year's decennial census count, which helps determine everything from political boundaries to the amount of federal assistance flowing into city and county coffers.

Like other communities, Santa Cruz engaged in an exhaustive effort to count as many people as possible, and Watsonville's response rate was a strong 74 percent, topping Santa Cruz and other neighboring cities.

Santa Cruz County also ranked low in the percentage of vacant homes, though they are heavily concentrated in unincorporated areas.

While a brutal economic recession meant every county in the state saw increases since 2000 in the percentage of housing units that are vacant, Santa Cruz's jump was a relatively modest 30.9 percent, to 10,121, or about one in every 10.

Monterey County ranked somewhat lower at 25.1 percent, but Santa Clara and

San Mateo counties saw their percentages double. San Benito County also saw a steep increase of 73.5 percent.

Solano County saw the biggest increase in the state, at a whopping 166 percent.

The numbers released Tuesday also will help reshape politics in the county, with boundaries for local, state and federal offices all to be redrawn through various redistricting efforts.

For example, the coastal areas of the county are in one congressional district, while the North Coast and mountain areas are in another. Santa Cruz County Supervisor Neal Coonerty's district straddles both, as well as two state Senate districts, adding layers of complexity to local issues.

"We'd rather have it combined into one district, particularly for the state Senate situation. Hopefully the new redistricting will straighten that out," Coonerty said.

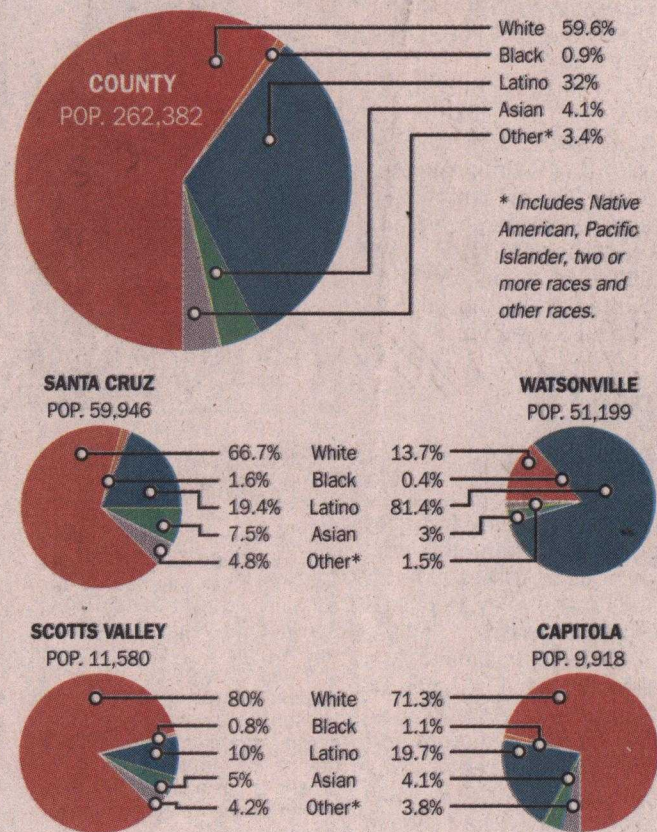
Sentinel staff writer Donna Jones contributed to this report.

BY THE NUMBERS

COUNTY/CITY	2000	2010	CHANGE	PERCENT
Santa Cruz County	255,602	262,382	6,780	2.7%
Capitola	10,033	9,918	-115	-1.1%
Santa Cruz	54,593	59,946	5,353	9.8%
Scotts Valley	11,385	11,580	195	1.7%
Watsonville	44,265	51,199	6,934	15.7%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

POPULATION BY RACE



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