

## Census numbers put Tyler over 100,000

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A recent population milestone could help bring additional businesses to Tyler and draw more people to the area, community leaders said.

According to U.S. Census estimates released in May, Tyler has officially reached a population of more than 100,000. Its 2013 population estimate from the U.S. Census Bureau is 100,223 — a 3.4 percent increase from the city's population in 2010.

Texas State Demographer Lloyd Potter said he believes Tyler's growth has been a fairly healthy, natural increase, part of it due to migration.

Pearland, Lewisville and College Station also exceeded 100,000 in population last year, U.S. Census data shows. Between the 2010 Census and the 2013 estimate, Lewisville grew 6.1 percent, College Station grew 6.6 percent and Pearland grew 9.7 percent.

Although the U.S. Census Bureau just recently acknowledged that Tyler's population has exceeded 100,000, a 2005 estimate from an independent study indicated that Tyler had already reached that milestone, and Tyler was able to move its extraterritorial jurisdiction from three miles to five miles, said Tom Mullins, president and CEO of the Tyler Economic Development Council.

And the Texas State Data Center estimated Tyler reached the 100,000 milestone in 2012, said Dr. Lila Valencia, researcher and Legislative liaison for the Office of the State Demographer, adding that it is not uncommon to have differences in estimates between the data center and the U.S. Census Bureau. The 2010 U.S. Census number — 96,900 — is on Tyler population signs, which are changed every 10 years.

Still, Mullins said, the most widely used and most official number is the U.S. Census estimate, and reaching more than 100,000 is "good news for Tyler."

Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce Chief Operating Officer Henry Bell said the U.S. Census population estimate makes the milestone official and "opens all kinds of other doors."

For instance, there are retailers that won't look at doing business in an area until it has at least 100,000 people, Bell said.

He said the population milestone also could spark interest from other types of businesses wanting to come to Tyler, and some people might not move somewhere unless the population is more than 100,000.

The milestone is even advertised in the newest edition of the Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce magazine. The advertisement boasts Tyler has more than 100,000 residents and a daytime population that reaches 250,000.

"When it's official, it's kind of a neat deal," Bell said.

Mullins echoed Bell, saying that the milestone is important because many companies making investments will have population thresholds in the formula they use to decide where to locate.

So, he said, hitting that 100,000 mark is important for companies, particularly when comparing markets, and could prompt a company to start looking at Tyler instead of going on to the next city.

He said the city also is growing consistently in various economic sectors without depending on any one factor, and that helps bring new growth to the community.

The most obvious example he gave is The Village at Cumberland Park retail development.

Additionally, the population growth — some of which has come from annexation of smaller population centers around Tyler — also provides more job opportunities for young people and employment opportunities for people in the region who want to stay in this area, Mullins said.

Aside from the U.S. Census, the city of Tyler does its own independent population projections, said Heather Nick, planning director for the city.

“We just want to know where we’re at,” she said. “We’re trying to plan for the future from a planning perspective. You want to know, ‘What does my community look like?’”

But she said the U.S. Census data does impact city funding because population affects areas such as transportation and public health.

Ms. Nick said the Census helps Tyler determine transportation needs and assess questions like, “Do we need to build more roads?” and “What kind of public transit needs do we have?”

She noted that the 2010 data showed that Tyler’s median age at that time was 33 and that almost one-third of households in Tyler were single-person households in 2010.

And as the city analyzes population, those are the kinds of things that must be considered because the city is trying to make smart growth decisions, and certain data helps answer questions like, “Is it aging?” and “Do we have the right type of facilities for our population?” Ms. Nick said.

She said planners nationwide have noticed that there are now more older Americans, with a longer life expectancy, than there once were, and in the future, more cultural diversity is expected.

So the question, she said, is, “How do you prepare for that?”

“For us it’s about making informed decisions about growth, making sure we meet the needs of our community, whether for transportation, public health, education, and/or making sure we have adequate housing units and that we also have the commercial aspect of that to support the community,” Ms. Nick said.

Ms. Nick said she believes as people are looking to move to the community, they look at population and other statistics.

Luckily, she said, the city’s seen an increase in residential unit activity — not just with single-family homes but also an increase in multi-family development — in order to support the growing population.

She said the city’s also seeing more commercial services and retail, which helps a growing community.

Additionally, she said, when the federal government is looking at allocating money, population is one thing that's considered.

From a tourism perspective, Tyler reaching a population number of more than 100,000 would have a "trickle-down effect" from those who are considering the city for new business, said Shari Rickman, general manager and vice president for the Tyler Convention and Visitors Bureau. Crossing that threshold, there are likely a lot of potential candidates that look at the city, she said, and Tyler's quality of life and guest experience come into play.

For instance, if the person notices the city has a lot to view and see when it comes to arts and culture and attractions, and that person has a nice hotel stay, then they feel like they aren't in "Small Town, USA" but rather a small town with big city amenities, Ms. Rickman said.

She cited things, such as the planetarium and science center at Tyler Junior College, the American Freedom Museum at The Brook Hill School and recent upgrades that were made at Brookshire's World of Wildlife and Country Store as examples.

"We offer a good answer to whatever people are interested in," whether it's riding a bike or seeing a performance at The University of Texas at Tyler's R. Don Cowan Fine and Performing Arts Center, she said.

She said tourism overall is not driven by any magic population number but rather "What do you have that's of interest to me?"

Still, she said, a population of more than 100,000 sounds different than a number under 100,000.

"It's more of a round number, more raising an eyebrow of, 'Wow, we didn't know they were that big.' ... It gets people's attention," she said.