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Parts of Oklahoma hit population growth spurt

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Counties around the state's two largest cities and a section of south-central Oklahoma are among the fastest-growing areas of the state, according to census population estimates to be released today.

Eighteen Oklahoma counties have had population growth of more than 5 percent from 2000 to 2008, according to an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Those counties include the area near Durant, which has boomed in the past few years as a succession of companies expanded or relocated there.

"There is no recession in Durant, Oklahoma," said Tommy Kramer, executive director of the Durant Industrial Authority.

"We're definitely going against the current."

Among the businesses that have come to the Durant area are a Cardinal Glass factory, a Big Lots distribution center and a call center for PRC LLC, which handles technical service calls for trucking, car rental and testing companies. Two new hotels and five restaurants have opened just this year, Kramer said.

Central Oklahoma also continues to post strong population gains, said Eric Long, manager of research and information services for the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber. The area had six of the top 10 counties in population growth.

"It's not just growth in Oklahoma City or Oklahoma County," Long said. "All of the surrounding counties in our region are growing."

The chamber's own 10-county region in central Oklahoma grew more than 10 percent since 2000, Long said, surpassing the statewide average growth of 5.6 percent.

"Even though their jobs might be in Oklahoma County, many people are moving into the surrounding counties to benefit from the housing situation in the whole region," Long said.

Meanwhile, 54 of the state's 77 counties showed population gains from 2007 to 2008, according to census estimates. Among the areas losing population is a swath of southwest Oklahoma, including Jackson and Comanche counties.

Of the state's three metropolitan areas, only Lawton lost population between 2000 and 2008. It dropped to 111,772 people in 2008, a decline of 2.8 percent from 2000.

The census data also shed light on migration patterns in "micropolitan" areas, which are population centers around cities of between 10,000 and 49,999 people. Of Oklahoma's 17 micropolitan areas, eight of them had higher rates of people moving in than births since 2000.

Of those areas, Stillwater and Durant posted the largest percentage gains in population since 2000. The Stillwater micropolitan area grew 14.8 percent, while Durant grew 9.8 percent, according to census estimates. Altus, Ponca City and Miami, OK, all lost population during the same period.

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