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**Today | This Week**

## 3.1 million more people likely in Arizona by 2020

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Another day, another 425 people, give or take a few. Another year, another 155,000.

Even after 50 years of breakneck growth, Arizona continues to expand at a pace equivalent to adding a Tempe-size city every year.

When, if ever, will it slow down?

Not in the foreseeable future, the latest projections and census data show.

The numbers are daunting, but questions about the quality, not just the quantity, of growth are uppermost in futurists' minds.

"Arizona grew by 40 percent in the past decade, but I haven't seen anyone argue that the state is a 40 percent better place to live," said Luther Probst, executive director of the Sonoran Institute, a conservation organization in Tucson.

Trying to attach a percentage to a quality-of-life concept is "purely subject to personal opinion," countered Len Becker, vice president for economic development at the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce.

Becker sees many improvements in the quality of life that offset the problems of growth. Creation of more than 450,000 jobs in the past decade is chief among them, he said.

Projections show Arizona becoming home to 8.2 million people by 2020. That would make it about the size of today's Georgia, the nation's 10th-largest state.

### Growth issues

Local controls over growth are a must, Probst said, because the state has failed to do the job.

"We've always lacked the tools and incentives to encourage a better form of development," he said, "and it's gotten worse in the past four years."

Voters in the 2000 election turned down two growth-control propositions. One was perceived as too severe, the other, too lenient, leaving the state struggling to find an effective compromise.

"The state needs to decide quite soon if we're going to keep doing what we've been doing," Arizona State University researcher Tom Rex said.

Growth issues remain the hottest of hot buttons in Arizona, but the past decades' schism between pro- and anti-growth factions seems to have narrowed. Both sides concede that high growth is all but inevitable, and therefore must be managed more skillfully.

The need is evident to bank branch manager Theresa Sonny, 30, a Phoenix native who grew up on a 300-acre cotton farm now planted in homes and retail stores.

Sonny has lived in California and Ohio since 1994 but moved home to be with family and friends and to take a new job.

"I have mixed feelings about the growth," she said. "It's easier to get from one side of town to the other, but U.S. 60 has been torn up ever since I left. And I'm not impressed with the Ahwatukee expansion."

Deficiencies in attempts to keep up with growth are increasingly evident.

### **School system**

The state's schools rank among the poorest in the nation for funding, among the highest for dropout rates and barely mediocre in performance.

Substandard public education is the most-cited reason for the state's inability to attract the brainpower and high-paying jobs Arizona needs to compete in the new knowledge-based economy, the Morrison Institute for Public Policy reports.

The state's leading think tank also identifies the Latino school dropout rate, lack of political and business leadership, an antiquated and unfair tax system and a "fuzzy" sense of economic identity as other "shoes waiting to drop."

Arizona's 16 percent poverty rate is in the nation's top tier, and more than one in five children lives in poverty.

### **Freeways, traffic, pollution**

For a while, miles of new freeways speed traffic and reduce pollution in urban areas, but then growth again clogs roadways and fouls the air as badly as before. A task force has identified \$80 billion of transportation needs over 20 years, but only \$60 million in revenue.

In Maricopa County, which accounts for 60 percent of the state's population, growth continues to consume an acre of desert or farmland every hour.

"I think eventually some of these things will come back to haunt us," Rex said. "It took a long time for urban growth to slow down in Los Angeles, but now LA has a net out-migration."

Californians are fleeing to other states at a rate 70,000 a year greater than out-of-staters are moving in. Around one-fourth of Arizona's net migration from other states was from California.

A brand new transplant from the frigid Buffalo, N.Y., area summed up the main attractions of urban Arizona.

"Jobs and weather," said Jordan Matthews, 19, who contributes to still another trend in Arizona: wider diversity. Adopted from the Philippines as a child and raised in the Mormon faith, he and friend Mark Dwaileebe, 21, of Lebanese extraction, said they feel more at home in Mesa with their religion. Both are cable installers.

Wanting to be closer to her boyfriend brought Kristina Troxell, 31, from Pontiac, Mich. She had been warned about some of the downsides of Valley life.

"I've known a lot of people who used to live here and left, and they talked about pollution getting a lot worse, crazy traffic and the desert being taken over by builders," the graphic designer said. "But I've visited here several times, and I just fell in love with it."

### **Native Arizonans**

Appreciation of growth, along with concern, also is found among lifelong Arizonans.

Tempe retirees Richard and Dorothy Hughes, who are in their early 70s, see transportation come full circle. The Phoenix natives rode the Third Street trolley in their youth, and now await the modern light rail system being planned across part of the Valley.

Although they wonder whether water and energy supplies will meet growth needs, and they lament the loss of clean air, open spaces and the laid-back atmosphere of the early days, the Hugheses applaud the community's cultural maturity and express faith in the Valley's future.

"It's been interesting to see us develop from a little backwater town in the '30s to a world-recognized place," Dorothy said.

### **Growing pains**

Growth pains aren't symptoms of a fatal illness, development expert Becker emphasized.

"We're growing up more as a community," he said. The past decade brought such new amenities as sports and entertainment venues, downtown redevelopment, adoption of the light rail plan and, in housing, a wider variety of lifestyle choices, he said.

The absence of stringent development controls also has made housing affordable and kept the cost of living at the national average, Becker said.

Census Bureau estimates of growth in the 15 months after the 2000 census showed Arizona's population increasing by 177,000, to 5.3 million.

More than half (53 percent) of the growth was from other states, 16 percent was from foreign countries and 31 percent was the natural growth of births exceeding deaths.

In percentage terms, Arizona's growth was second only to Nevada's. In quantity, Arizona was about 70,000 ahead in the post-census period.

The state, growing about three times as fast as the nation, has ranked among the top five population gainers annually for 15 years.

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