



## PRESS-REGISTER

### Mobile, Baldwin counties among state's fastest-growing

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Baldwin and Mobile counties were among the 10 fastest-growing counties in Alabama last year, according to data that will be released today by the U.S. Census Bureau.

It's the third year in a row that both of Alabama's coastal counties made the Top 10 list.

Baldwin County placed No. 3 on the list, growing by 2,691 people to a total population of 174,439.

Mobile County was seventh, growing by 2,212 to reach a total population of 406,309.

The fastest-growing county in the state was Madison, with 7,064 more people.

Montgomery was on the other end of the spectrum, losing 1,279 people. Jefferson County, Alabama's largest, grew by an estimated 688 people.

While Mobile and Baldwin counties were among the state's fastest growers, they both added fewer people than they had in the previous two years.

Baldwin County's growth was the smallest annual population increase there this decade.

In Mobile County, the slightly smaller increase was still a welcome sight for officials who saw population decline for the first half of the decade.

"Ten years ago, when I first got elected, Baldwin was a runaway freight train," Mobile County Commission President Mike Dean said. "People were leaving Mobile and going there. Now we've got it stabilized."

Healthy growth in both counties is good for the entire region, said Bob Higgins, vice president of the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance.

When companies want to move, having a good quality of life on both sides of Mobile Bay can be a big lure, he said.

"I can think of nothing better than a strong, vibrant downtown Mobile, with people living there and stuff going on at night," he said. "That helps all of us."

Officials in both counties said they expect the population growth to continue in the future.

Dean said it's all about jobs. New developments in Mobile County, such as the ThyssenKrupp AG steel plant and the University of South Alabama cancer center, will continue to attract people, he said.

"People are going to say, 'That's where the jobs are at in the next 10 years,'" he said. "You're going to see a

migration of people coming here."

Higgins said he believes Baldwin's smaller-than-normal population growth was a short-term blip. While many people in the construction industry have left the county recently, Baldwin's tourism economy and proximity to industrial developments still make it an attractive place to live, he said.

One thing Higgins said companies are concerned about is whether people will be able to afford to move here for the jobs.

Companies are having a tough time hiring people from out of state because the people can't sell their houses in a bad real estate market, he said.

"If they can't sell the house they already have, they have to turn down the job offer," he said. "Otherwise you would have seen more movement."

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