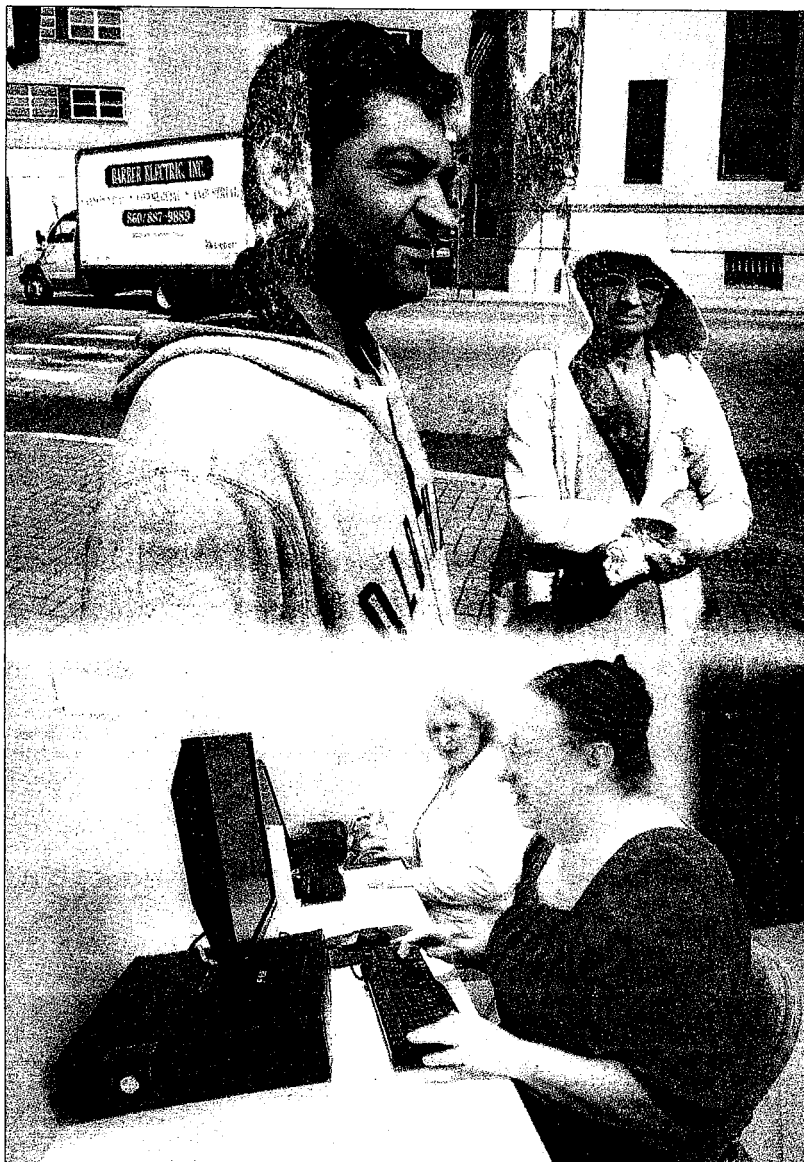


POPULATION TRENDS

Report: Region becoming older, more diverse



AARON FLAUM/ NORWICH BULLETIN

Top, Harish Patel, 35 and his mother, Kokilaben Patel, in downtown Norwich. Bottom, Margie Cohen, 62, and Allene Nelson, 68, both of Norwich, use the computer lab at the Rose City Senior Center. A state report to be released today shows the population in the 2nd Congressional District becoming both older and more diverse.

Fewer workers supporting more retirees spells crisis

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NORWICH — When Margie Cohen, 62, retired from her job as a librarian at York Correctional Institution about six years ago, she spent the first year feeling lost.

But she's back into the swing of things, volunteering at the Rose City Senior Center in Norwich, exercising a couple of times a week and meeting people on eHarmony — “no keepers” yet.

Still, Cohen said her time at the senior center, where she knits bags for walkers, has shown her just how much support the older baby boomers need to enjoy their later years.

“A lot of people here need helping hands, whether it's housing, food ... social support,” she said.

Cohen herself will soon become part of the age group 65 and older that is expected to increase by 12,600 people by 2010, the largest population hike of any age group in the 2nd Congressional District.

The age group 25 to 29, meanwhile, is expected to decline by 1,800 during

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At a glance

About the report

Released today by the Connecticut State Data Center, it projects 2010 population for congressional districts based on Census data from 2007. The report was designed to highlight the one-year period that

remains before the April 1, 2010, Census. Congressional reapportionment and redistricting will follow the 2010 Census.

About the 2nd Congressional District

The 2nd District is composed of

65 Eastern Connecticut towns. The most populous town is Enfield, projected to have a population of 43,700 in 2010. The least populous town is Union with a projected population of 700.

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that same time, according to a Connecticut State Data Center report released to the public today. The data uses 2007 Census numbers. The 2nd Congressional District includes 65 towns in Eastern Connecticut.

The population trend in this region mirrors the one projected for all of Connecticut, where the state is expected to boast the ninth highest percentage of people ages 65 and older in 2010, which is one spot higher than its ranking in the 2000 Census.

Tipping the balance

The baby boomer spike and subsequent impact on government services that states have been warned of for years is finally here, reaching Connecticut earlier than most parts of the country.

The shift means a larger number of non-working individuals will be supported by fewer working individuals. This disproportionate population trend means less income taxes for the state, but increased demand and costs

for health services, a troubling projection considering Connecticut's rapidly growing deficit.

At the same time, Connecticut's per capita income ranking has dropped from second to fourth nationally, which means people are earning less. And by 2030, the state is projected to gain 60,000 workers, but lose 400,000 workers. That will create a crisis of income tax revenues and likely force the state to consider new revenue measures.

"Something has to give," said Orlando Rodriguez, manager of the Connecticut State Data Center at the University of Connecticut.

Seeing the increase

Mike Wolak, director of the Rose City Senior Center, said membership at the center has grown by 200 people since 2006 to more than 1,000. He said a couple of new members are added each week.

Wolak said the center pays a part-time outreach worker to visit members and help them with insurance, housing and other issues. The outreach worker helped 146 peo-

ple in 2006 and 291 people in 2008.

"Support services will have to grow," he said, quickly adding that the economic crisis means funding for such growth likely will not get approval.

But John Beauregard, executive director of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, said the burden employers will face replacing baby boomers with workers who have the necessary skills will be delayed.

"With the recent problems in the financial markets, you are seeing baby boomers putting off retirement and staying in the work force much longer than even they anticipated," he said.

Still, Beauregard said it would benefit employers to create mentoring systems that pair older workers with younger workers. Older workers can pass on their real-world work experience and younger workers can share their technological know-how.

Health workers

As part of her work as career services director for Quinebaug Valley Communi-

ty College in Danielson, Elizabeth Loveday studies population trends. She said career opportunities in the allied health field will increase dramatically along with the graying of the state.

Loveday said the college already offers credit and non-credit programs that educate students in such work as health information technology and pharmacy technology. At the same time, when baby boomers leave the workplace, younger workers with appropriate technical expertise may find greater opportunities for work.

Ray Pineault, senior vice president of casino operations at Mohegan Sun, said three years ago or so, the casino considered the impact of baby boomers on its work force and planned training for in-house workers to succeed those above them.

The economy will likely delay the impact to the next three to five years, he said, but eventually the casino, which now employs 9,900 people, will have to confront the issue.

"It's in our best interest to continue to train people and improve their skill sets," he said.

By the numbers

Projected changes in the 2nd District

In 2003, total population was 681,113. It is projected to be 710,209 in 2010.

The age group of 65 and older is projected to have the largest increase, adding 12,600 people.

The age group of 25 to 29 is projected to decline by 1,800.

The highest median age projection is among whites, rising from 38 in 2000, to 43.6 in 2010.

The lowest median age projection is among Hispanics, remaining unchanged at 27.

Dependency ratio

STATEWIDE PROJECTION

The number of nonworking individuals (ages 0-19 and 65 and older) per 100 workers (ages 20-64) will increase from 68.5 in 2000 to 70.3 in 2010.

The increase in this dependency ratio stems primarily from an increase in white retirees and a decrease in the

population of children.

2ND DISTRICT PROJECTION

There will be approximately 67 nonworkers for every 100 workers in 2010.

National rankings

AGE

Connecticut is projected to have the nation's 9th highest percentage of population 65 and older in 2010. It ranked 10th in 2000.

INCOME

In 2000, Connecticut had the 2nd highest median income in the country. By 2005, Connecticut had dropped to 3rd place. In 2009, Connecticut is projected to rank 4th in median income behind Maryland, New Jersey and Alaska.

Source: Connecticut State Data Center, Projected Population in 2010 for Congressional Districts in Connecticut, released today. Decennial census will be conducted April 1, 2010