Bartow outgrows Floyd

Whitfield's population also tops 100,000 for the first time, according to the 2010 Census.

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Census figures released Thursday show Interstate 75 is the accelerated growth corridor in the region, according to the executive director of the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission.

"We expected that," Bill Steiner said. "When you get down to any type of development, it's location, location, location." Between 2000 and 2010, Floyd County's growth rate of 6.4 percent was lower than every area county except Chattahoochee's 2.1 percent, according to 2010 Census data.

Georgia's population grew at a rate of 18.3 percent, to 9.5 million in 2010 from 8.1 million in 2000. Both Bartow and Whitfield counties now have more people than Floyd, with populations topping 100,000 for the first time. And Gordon and Catoosa counties — also off I-75 — recorded growth rates at 20 percent or more.

Steiner said the county population figures put into perspective the value of a new industrial park on Ga. 53 and Ga. 140 that Floyd voters are funding through the 2009 special purpose, local option sales tax, Ga. 140 connects to I-75 in Bartow County.

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"To me, that's going to be the hot corridor for Floyd County in the next 10 years," he said. "Industries in particular are going to be looking for fast access to the interstate."

The U.S. 411 Connector to I-75 in Cartersville is another defining project for the county, he said.

"There's a need to get that road done, and for some real good land-use planning along that corridor," Steiner said. "If it gets congested with strip malls and things like that, it's going to choke off development in the heart of Rome."

Bartow has 100,157 people, compared to Floyd's 96,317, census data indicated. Whitfield County also exceeds Floyd's population, tallying 102,599.

Ten years ago, the census showed Floyd with 90,565; Whitfield with 83,525; and Bartow with 76,019.

New figures for other nearby counties include Walker, with 68,756 people; Catoosa, with 63,942; Gordon, with 55,186; Polk, with 41,465; and Chattooga, with 26,015.

Georgia Highlands College officials were ahead of the curve when they built a new campus in Bartow County.

Spokeswoman Dana Davis said the college had a small presence in the county, but the University System of Georgia saw a need after a commissioned study pinpointed areas of activity in the region.

"The system doesn't just do things on a whim," she said. "We knew Bartow was the Cartersville/Bartow County community really wanted us there. They did a lot to put the infrastructure in place for us."

Bartow's population surge doesn't mean it will become the school's new base of operations, however — at least while its president, Randy Pierce, remains at the helm.

"I don't know what might happen in the future, but Dr. Pierce has said many times that as long as he is here, we'll be here," Davis said of the Floyd County campus. "This is the founding campus."

Population in the city of Cartersville alone grew 21.3 percent in the past decade, to 19,731 from 16,266. And Adairsville, the Bartow County city at Ga. 140 and I-75, soared 63 percent, to 4,648 from 2,851.

The city of Rome's population grew by 1.8 percent to 36,303 in 2010 from 35,661 in 2000.

Cave Spring grew by 23 percent over the same time period, to 1,200 from 976.

Floyd County Manager Kevin Poe said the county as a whole has seen slow but steady growth for the past 50 years.

"There's good and bad in that," he said.

Counties with explosive growth are "always trying to play catch-up," he said, because the demand for services and infrastructure — such as roads and water lines — outpaces their ability to fund and provide them.

"When the economy bottoms out, they're the ones who get the double-digit decreases in their [tax] digest," Poe said. "I guess slow and steady isn't all that bad, as long as it keeps growing."

If growth around the region continues at the same pace for the next 10 years, Floyd County's population would hit 102,385 in the 2020 census.

Bartow would gain a new lead as the most populous nearby county, with 132,207 people, compared to Whitfield's 125,170. Gordon County, whose population grew by 25 percent between 2000 and 2010, would see a jump to 68,982 peo-