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- [In The News](#)
- [Daily Headlines](#)
- [CRP Activities and Events](#)
- [Image Gallery](#)
- [Charlotte USA Branding](#)
- [Recent Advertising](#)
- [Library of Documents](#)



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## In the News

### 80,000 newcomers to our region in a year

#### The Charlotte Observer

Leigh Dyer

Sunday, September 24, 2006

#### Influx influences all, from demographics to restaurant menus

There's a new number in town: 80,000.

That's how many newcomers from outside the Carolinas move to the Charlotte region in a year, an Observer analysis of new data from the American Community Survey shows. It's more than the population of Asheville.

It dwarfs the commonly cited annual population growth estimate of 50,000 per year for Mecklenburg and surrounding counties, based on census data. That figure, the net growth, subtracts those who move away.

And the 80,000 figure doesn't include those who move within the Carolinas, so the actual number of newcomers each year is much higher.

The data give new perspective on the influences of newcomers who are transforming everything from the roads we drive to the languages we hear and the food we eat.

The 2005 survey by the U.S. Census Bureau offers an opportunity to see who they are and why they moved here.

"It's a big number," said Wachovia economist Mark Vitner, who tracks the region's population trends. "The influx of newcomers validates the things that Charlotte has been doing right. People have a high quality of life in Charlotte."

That's one of the reasons Jim and Teri Consol moved from Endicott, N.Y., to south Charlotte in 2004. They're from the No. 1 state of origin for newcomers outside the Carolinas, according to the survey.

Last December, they opened Zio Italian Restaurant in Charlotte's Eastover neighborhood and introduced dishes including chicken sofia, bracciole and "hot pie" -- another name for pizza.

But eventually they took the chicken dish, served with a roasted garlic cream sauce and vegetables, and bracciole, a rolled steak braised in tomato sauce, off the menu. They weren't selling as well here as they do at their other restaurant, Consol's, back in New York.

"We were told, you'd better serve sweet tea no matter what," Jim Consol said.

The Consols and their 6-year-old daughter love the city's climate, beauty and people, they said. They've met so many people from their hometown that they're forming a club for Endicott transplants.

They're aware they're part of a transforming wave.

"The diversity is nice," Jim Consol said. "You have some of that Southern hospitality mixed with the influences from different areas."

### **Higher education**

Newcomers are more likely to have a higher education than non-newcomers, the survey statistics show. The percentage of newcomers with Ph.D.s is about twice as high as that of non-newcomers. "The best and brightest and most highly motivated folks are the ones most likely to move where the best opportunities are," said Wachovia's Vitner.

Sharon Portwood, 45, moved with her husband and two sons to Charlotte last year from Kansas City, Mo., where she had been an associate professor of psychology at the University of Missouri. She was lured by a newly created job at UNC Charlotte: executive director of the Institute for Social Capital, which works to connect the university with social service agencies in the community.

"I fell in love with it," she said of the city. "There are an amazing number of people who are very prominent nationally in what they do who have moved to Charlotte."

She cited Janet Singerman, who heads Child Care Resources, and Peggy Eagan, who heads the Children & Family Services Center, as national leaders in their fields who work in Charlotte.

She's had to make an adjustment, though: "Coming from Kansas City, things move at a much faster pace in Charlotte."

### **Young and single**

A slightly higher proportion of newcomers are African American than non-movers -- 20 percent versus 18 percent. Movers are more likely to be single than non-movers. They're also likely to be younger -- the median age for newcomers is 29, while the median age of non-movers is 38, the survey found.

Eric Bailey represents all of those trends. Bailey, 29, moved to Charlotte from Denver last October. "I wanted to go to a city that's small, but not sleepy, and it doesn't have the chaotic nature of New York," he said.

His first job was with Denver-based Pulte Mortgage, which opened its first East Coast outpost in Charlotte. In February, he switched to Duke Energy, where he works in information technology. In that respect, he represents another trend -- newcomers are more than twice as likely to work in the IT field than non-movers.

Newcomers are also more likely to work in construction, professional fields and the entertainment/restaurant industries than long-timers.

"A lot of companies are moving (to Charlotte) and I thought, 'Hey, it's a great place to start out,'"  
" Bailey said.

Bailey has been a bit confounded by Southern accents and words with unfamiliar meanings -- such as "cut it off" instead of "power it down" for turning off a computer. He has gotten a kick out of learning the meaning of the expression "bless your heart."

He's also aware of the powerful forces changing Charlotte. "You've got a lot of people from the North moving here to spice things up," he said.

"(Charlotte) has a large, diverse culture. It's a traditional culture, but it's very diverse." --  
*Database editor Ted Mellnik contributed.*

-- Leigh Dyer: 704-358-5058

### **More on Newcomers**

*See the Observer's newcomer column in Arts & Living, page 7E, and learn more in the Living Here guide inside today's Observers in most counties. Read the New Around Town blog and more at [www.charlotte.com/living](http://www.charlotte.com/living) More than the equivalent of Asheville's population has moved to the Charlotte region in a year*

<< [Back to In The News](#)

TOP OF PAGE ↑

[HOME](#) | [REGIONAL INFO](#) | [SITES & BUILDINGS](#) | [FILM](#) | [MEDIA CENTER](#) | [PARTNERS](#) | [ABOUT US](#) | [CLIENT LOGIN](#)

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