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## Charlotte region's population on fast track

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The Charlotte region ranked No. 7 on the list of metro areas that added the most people in 2006, according to statistics released today by the U.S. Census Bureau.

By adding more than 61,500 people to its six-county region between 2005 and 2006, Charlotte broke into the top 10 gainers in year-over-year population numbers. The prior year, Charlotte ranked No. 12.

"That will put us in some rankings that will be good for us," said Tony Crumbley, vice president for research at the Charlotte Chamber. Being on top-10 lists can attract the attention of developers, he added.

"I can assure you that Donald Trump, when he was looking at where to put his new projects, he looked at (top) growth areas."

The Trump Organization is eyeing a block of South Tryon Street for luxury condos, a five-star hotel, an office tower and high-end shops, Trump's son, Donald Jr., recently confirmed.

The Census numbers define the Charlotte metropolitan statistical area as Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Mecklenburg, Union counties and York County, S.C.

Crumbley and other analysts criticize the Census definition of the Charlotte metro area as too limited. They prefer a broader definition that includes 13 counties from Cleveland to Stanly in North Carolina and adding Lancaster and Chester in South Carolina. By that measure, the region's population is 2.19 million. But today's Census release doesn't rank the more broadly defined areas.

The new estimates put the Charlotte metro area's population at more than 1.58 million, ranking No. 36 in the nation by size. That's the same ranking as last year, but Crumbley called Charlotte's failure to move up that list insignificant.

Other Carolinas metro areas -- notably Raleigh, Myrtle Beach and Columbia -- also show strong growth trends in today's numbers. A flood of newcomers drawn by a healthy economy, balmy weather and a relatively low cost of living has been fueling the gains. Among the nation's top 50 fastest-growing metro areas, 25 are in the South, the new Census numbers show.

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### Beach Boom

Myrtle Beach was the fastest growing S.C. metro area from 2000 to 2006. The metro area, which includes Conway and North Myrtle Beach, had a 20.4 percent population increase. That ranks 17th nationwide in percentage growth for the period.

It's largely attributed to an influx of retirees, said Bob Becker, director of the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University.

"Florida is not as attractive as it used to be," Becker said. "Hurricanes have gotten people thinking. So we are seeing a lot of redirection to the Carolinas."