

County's home to 80 percent of metro Jews

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Statistics showing the area's Jewish community thriving — rather than declining, as anticipated — has prompted a warm reaction in southern Oakland County where 80 percent of them live.

"They show that Jews didn't follow the lure of the sun belt," said Rabbi Daniel Schwartz, who said his Temple Sholom in West Bloomfield Township has grown from 30 to 550 families in 17 months.

Like others in south Oakland County, Schwartz was concerned the Jewish population in metropolitan Detroit was on the wane. "When I came here 17 years ago, the Jewish population was about 80,000," he said. "Ten years ago it was down to 70,000."

Schwartz and others say they were heartened by figures released Thursday showing the Jewish community to be a larger than expected 96,000

— with about 76,800 in Oakland County.

The figures were part of a \$250,000 study commissioned by the Jewish Welfare Federation over an 18-month period to determine living patterns among Jews so their needs could more readily be addressed.

The survey, the first of its kind since 1953, shows metropolitan Detroit to be the 10th largest Jewish community in the United States and the second in the Midwest, behind Chicago.

THE SURVEY shows that the communities where Jews are moving include: West Bloomfield, with nearly 7,000 homes; Bloomfield Township, less than 4,000 homes; and Farmington Hills, with about 3,000 homes.

The remainder live in a ring around the main communities including northwest Detroit and Livonia.

It shows that Southfield is the largest Jewish community in the area, while West Bloomfield Township is the most rapidly growing.

The study also shows tremendous stability in traditionally Jewish areas like Oak Park, Huntington Woods and Southfield, said Rabbi A.

'Woodward was like the railroad tracks. But that's changing.'

— Rabbi Arnie Sleutberg
Congregation Shir Tikvah
Troy

Irving Schnipper, of Congregation Beth Abraham-Hillel Moses in West Bloomfield Township.

Jews and others were concerned older communities might decline because of factors like blight, the economy or the construction of expressways, said Schnipper.

But the survey (showing 12,000 Jews in Southfield and 6,700 in Huntington Woods and Oak Park) indicates stability, he said.

Rabbi Arnie Sleutberg of Congregation Shir Tikvah in Troy said the study also showed that about 20 percent of the Jewish community "live outside traditionally Jewish areas."

Woodward Avenue has traditionally been a kind of demarcation line, Sleutberg said, with Jews living on the west side. "Woodward was like

the railroad tracks. But that's changing."

Sleutberg's congregation, for example, has grown from 96 families to 120 in about 18 months. "That includes some families from Rochester,"

Further east, 70 families have formed the Grosse Pointe Jewish Council to share and nurture their heritage in an area that traditionally has been regarded as "a stronghold of discrimination."

BIRMINGHAM HASN'T traditionally been a Jewish stronghold, said Rabbi Daniel Polak of Temple Beth El at 14 Mile and Telegraph. But its Jewish population is definitely on the upswing, he said.

"I think the area is becoming more cosmopolitan and pluralistic,"

said Polak. "and when that happens, you see more Jews."

And the trend will continue, he said. "Within the next several years, I think we can expect to see several hundred Soviet Jews move into the area," Polak said. "That presents a special challenge, and opportunity."

Rabbi Schwartz said he was aware of individual pockets of Jewish growth — like near his own temple at Maple and Orchard Lake roads. "But I didn't know there were that many Jews in the metropolitan area," he said.

Schwartz said he assumed Jews are moving to the West Bloomfield area for the same reasons as non-Jews. "As they become more affluent, they move to better houses in better areas."

Rabbi Elry G. Spectre of Adat Shalom in Farmington Hills said the increase of Jewish families in his area is a reflection of demographic trends in most urban areas.

"People just find the suburban life attractive," he said.

Adat Shalom has about 1,250 families, he said, or about double the number compared with a decade ago.

Schwartz and others say it's a toss-up as to whether Jews moved

into an area — Farmington Hills, Southfield or West Bloomfield — because it has a growing Jewish community and they'd feel comfortable, or if the faith follows the faithful.

"I THINK it's a chicken-or-the-egg situation," he said.

While Temple Sholom is new, Schwartz said, Temple Beth El (where he was the senior rabbi) and Temple Israel were both located in the downtown Detroit area before moving into south Oakland.

"I think we followed the people," he said.

Rabbi Norman Roman of Temple Kol Ami, also in West Bloomfield Township, said Jews moved into the area because a number of Jewish institutions already existed there. "But I can't be sure," he said. "I've only been in the area for about eight years."

Rabbi Schwartz said he believes some religious practices contribute significantly to Jewish migration patterns. "Orthodox Jews don't ride in cars on the Sabbath or during festivals," he said. "So they must live within walking distance of the synagogue or school."

"Conservatives can ride, but they tend to go back to their roots. That makes for stability."

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