

Almost half of Michigan's elderly live in Wayne, Oakland counties

Although the northern, non-metropolitan counties of Michigan have higher proportions of elderly residents, more than half of the state's elderly population is concentrated in the major population centers, according to the latest issue of the Michigan State Economic Record (MSER).

This has been true for decades, said David Verway, author of "Where Were Michigan's Elderly at Mid-Decade?" published in the Michigan State University periodical.

He attributes the higher proportion to a "legacy of sparse local economies coupled with the attraction of good-paying jobs in the metropolitan areas, which caused young adults to depart from northern communities."

Roscommon County, for one, had a 49.6 per cent increase in the number of persons aged 65 or older from 1970 to 1975. During the same period, that county's total population increased by 45.2 per cent.

The increase in the elderly population was far greater than could have been accounted for by the aging of the resident population alone, notes Verway, editor of the MSER and research associate professor in the Graduate School of Business Administration.

"The entire northeast quadrant of the lower peninsula is the fastest growing in terms of percentage increase in elderly population," he points out.

The northeast quadrant includes Cheboygan, Otsego, Crawford, Roscommon and all counties to the east.

"Migration estimates reveal that the percentage rate of migration is highest in this area, and that several other northern counties, including Houghton and Chippewa in the Upper Peninsula, posted high migration rates," says Verway.

This means these counties were significant gainers in terms of their elderly population.

In sheer numbers, however, the major movement of elderly took place in southeast Michigan with Oakland and Macomb counties gaining nearly 7,000 through migration.

"The bulk of these people came from Wayne County," he says, "the state's heaviest loser in both numbers and percentage rate."

Furthermore, every major metropolitan county, except Oakland and Macomb, lost members of the elderly population through migration. Isabella, Lapeer and Marquette counties also lost elderly persons through migration.

Still, as of July 1975, 30 per cent of the state's over-65 residents lived in Wayne County, followed by Oakland County, 9 per cent; Kent, 5 per cent; Macomb, 5 per cent; and Genesee, 4 per cent.

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