Gaining Seniors

The greatest explosion of elderly growth is taking place in the suburbs.

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

For decades, the mention of demographic "hot spots" for seniors conjured images of swelling retirement meccas in Florida and Arizona, along with sun, golf and relaxation. All of this has changed, of course. The new of list of senior growth magnets, based on an analysis of Census 2000, cuts a broad swath across much of the West, and a good part of the South, stretching well beyond the Sunshine state. Some of these new areas have different kinds of amenities, including "wired" communities and university towns where the term "surfing" relates to the World Wide Web. The fastest growing metros for seniors now lie in the small to medium-size range. And the greatest explosion of elderly growth is taking place in the suburbs.

The Lull Before the Storm

Nationally, the 1990s can be considered a slow decade for the growth of the elderly population (ages 65 and above). Because the small Depression cohort entered the elderly ranks during this decade, the senior population grew by just 12 percent, compared with 22 percent in the 1980s. Yet the 1990s represent only a temporary slowdown in elderly growth, which will explode over the next 30 years, as the Baby Boom becomes absorbed into the ranks of the elderly.

Hot States for Seniors

Despite the low national senior growth rate, some states have seen large increases. (See Map 1, page 19.) Nevada's elderly population grew by 76 percent during the 1990s, while senior growth in other Western states—Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, Hawaii, Utah and Colorado—all exceeded 25 percent. In the South, Florida is hardly the only place where the elderly flock, as South Carolina, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia all registered faster senior growth rates during the '90s (19 percent or higher) than did Florida (18.5 percent).

Most of these states are attractive to people of retirement age because of their wide array of amenities, such as warmer climates and lower living costs. Moreover, many states in the South have made concerted efforts to lure seniors who, at least in their immediate post-retirement years, tend to contribute much more to the local economies and tax bases than they cost. Many well-off "yuppie elderly" between the ages of 65 and 74 have considerable disposable incomes, good health and remain in married-couple households.

Hotter Metros

Within these Southern and Western states, selected metropolitan areas experienced exceptionally high rates of senior growth during the '90s. (See Table 1, page 19.) Las Vegas leads the pack with a growth rate of 86 percent. Yet, a group of senior metro "hot spots" have much smaller populations. This list includes Naples, Fla.; Myrtle Beach, S.C.; Las Cruces, N.M. and Flagstaff, Ariz., among other smaller metro areas with top quality amenities that have attracted seniors in droves. Other larger metro areas that have shown sharp rises in the over-65 set include "New South" urban centers like Houston, Dallas and Atlanta, along with counterparts in the "New West" like Phoenix and Denver.

Metro areas with a university environment like Austin, Texas, and Raleigh-Durham, N.C., were also attractive to seniors. In fact, the few Northern metro areas with higher than average senior growth rates include university towns: State College, Pa., Iowa City, Iowa, Bloomington, Ind., and Madison, Wis. The cultural

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amenities available in these places are especially attractive to today's elderly, who have more leisure time, and are better educated than those in previous generations. These areas are likely to increase in popularity as the Boomers ascend to seniorhood.

Big Shares, Small Gains

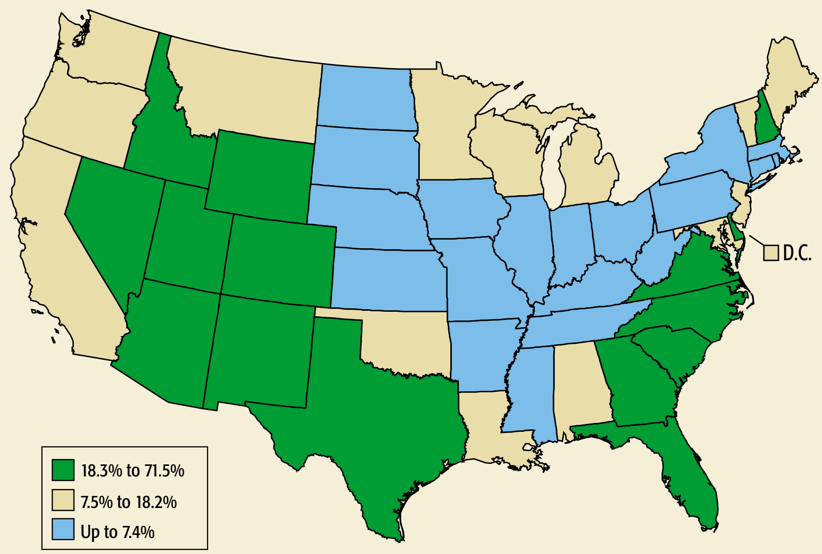
There is a paradox when it comes to the geographic distribution of seniors. States with the highest share of the senior population are not necessarily the ones that are growing the fastest. This is apparent in Map 2 (see page 20), which classifies states by the elderly shares of their total populations, as reported in the 2000 census. A number of states in the Great Plains, part of the Rust Belt and New England lie in the upper tier of states with higher than average elderly market shares. Yet, most of these territories rank in the lowest echelon of senior growth. Pennsylvania, for example, holds the second highest share of seniors of all states—15.6 percent of its total population (compared with 12.4 percent nationally). Yet the Keystone state ranks at No. 45 in senior growth for the 1990s, as its elderly population grew by a mere 4.5 percent.

The reason for this paradox is that states with high senior shares of population typically experienced one decade or more of sustained population losses among their younger population. This leaves seniors, who are far less mobile than people in their 20s and 30s, remaining. In fact, many of the states with large shares of seniors tend to have more seniors in the "needy elderly" age group of 75 and above. For these Northern, economically stagnant states, even the younger, "yuppie elderly" were more likely to leave. So the social and demographic profiles of elderly populations in states with high shares of seniors may not be favorable to marketers of consumer items tailored to the younger segment of the elderly population. Moreover, the public expenditures required for maintaining the health and providing social support for older senior segments in many Frostbelt states will be higher than in states with more youthful elderly.

One exception to this paradox is

Map 1: Elderly Growth

States shaded green experienced the greatest growth in the elderly population–more than 18 percent.



Source: William H. Frey, Milken Institute

TABLE 1: ELDERLY MAGNETS

The over-65 population grew by 86 percent in the Las Vegas metropolitan area. Small metros, such as Naples, Fla. and Anchorage, Alaska also experienced tremendous growth.

MAJOR METROS

RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA*	GROWTH RATE**
1.	Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA	86.2%
2.	Phoenix-Mesa, AZ MSA	38.0%
3.	Austin-San Marcos, TX MSA	37.3%
4.	Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX CMSA	31.8%
5.	Atlanta, GA MSA	30.8%
6.	Orlando, FL MSA	28.8%
7.	Sacramento-Yolo, CA CMSA	27.8%
8.	Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	25.8%
9.	Denver-Boulder-Greeley, CO CMSA	25.8%
10.	Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CMSA	25.1%

SMALL METROS

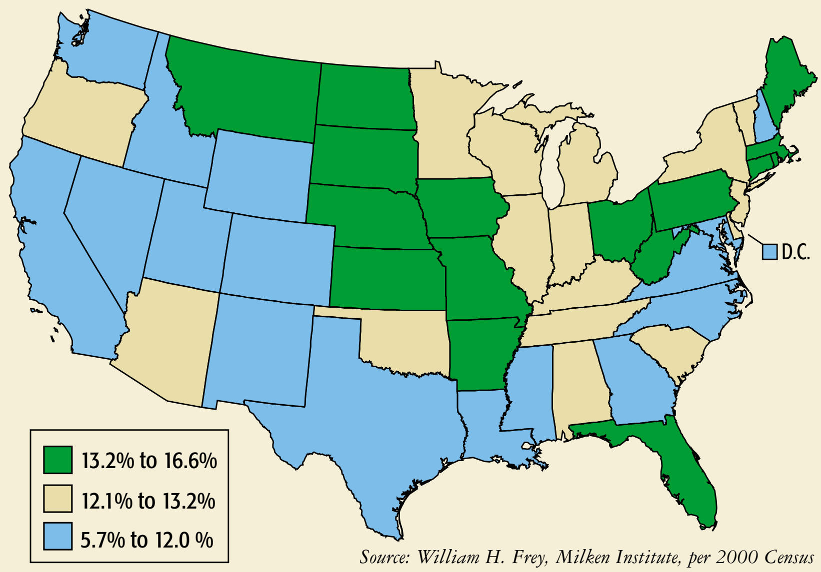
RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA*	GROWTH RATE**
1.	Naples, FL MSA	77.9%
2.	Anchorage, AK MSA	72.5%
3.	Myrtle Beach, SC MSA	61.7%
4.	Las Cruces, NM MSA	55.7%
5.	Fort Walton Beach, FL MSA	55.1%
6.	Ocala, FL MSA	47.0%
7.	Flagstaff, AZ-UT MSA	46.3%
8.	Wilmington, NC MSA	45.7%
9.	McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX MSA	43.8%
10.	Melbourne-Titusville-Palm Bay, FL MSA	42.6%

**Metro areas are CMSAs, MSAs and (in New England) NECMAs, as defined by OMB in June, 2000. Major metros have 2000 total populations exceeding 1 million; small metros have 2000 total populations of less than 1 million.*
***1990-2000 change in the 65+ population as percent of the age 65+ population in 1990.*

Source: William H. Frey analysis of 2000 U.S. Census

Map 2: Elderly Share of Population

States in the Great Plains, part of the Rust Belt and New England have higher than average shares of the elderly population. But they are not necessarily the ones that are growing the fastest in terms of senior population.



Source: William H. Frey, Milken Institute, per 2000 Census

TABLE 2: WHERE THE ELDERLY ARE

Small metros in Florida still have the greatest share of elderly. Nearly 35 percent of the total population in Punta Gorda, Fla. is made up of seniors age 65 and over. Among large metros, the West Palm Beach-Boca Raton area reigns.

MAJOR METROS

RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA*	ELDERLY SHARE**
1.	West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL MSA	23.2%
2.	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA	19.2%
3.	Pittsburgh, PA MSA	17.7%
4.	Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY MSA	15.8%
5.	Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA	14.5%
6.	Cleveland-Akron, OH CMSA	14.3%
7.	Hartford, CT NECMA	14.0%
8.	Philadelphia-Wilmington-Atlantic City, PA-NJ-DE-MD CMSA	13.5%
9.	Rochester, NY MSA	12.9%
10.	St. Louis, MO-IL MSA	12.9%

SMALL METROS

RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA*	ELDERLY SHARE**
1.	Punta Gorda, FL MSA	34.7%
2.	Sarasota-Bradenton, FL MSA	28.5%
3.	Fort Myers-Cape Coral, FL MSA	25.4%
4.	Fort Pierce-Port St. Lucie, FL MSA	24.9%
5.	Ocala, FL MSA	24.5%
6.	Naples, FL MSA	24.5%
7.	Barnstable-Yarmouth, MA NECMA	23.1%
8.	Daytona Beach, FL MSA	22.7%
9.	Melbourne-Titusville-Palm Bay, FL MSA	19.9%
10.	Johnstown, PA MSA	19.1%

**Metro areas are CMSAs, MSAs, and (in New England) NECMAs, as defined by OMB in June, 2000. Major metros have 2000 total populations exceeding 1 million; small metros have 2000 total populations of less than 1 million.*
***1990-2000 change in the 65+ population as percent of the 65+ population in 1990.*

Source: William H. Frey analysis of 2000 U.S. Census

Florida, which registered the highest senior share of any state—17.6 percent. This is a result of decades of attracting the elderly from other parts of the country, so that the Sunshine state continues to grow in both its "yuppie elderly" and "needy elderly" segments. Florida's dominance is also apparent from the list of metropolitan areas with highest senior shares. (See Table 2, bottom left.) Large and small metropolitan areas with the greatest senior shares are located in Florida, with West Palm Beach and Punta Gorda leading their respective packs. Still, the list also contains large and small Frostbelt metros with relatively stagnant elderly population gains like Rochester, N.Y.; St. Louis, Mo.; Johnstown, Pa.; and Barnstable-Yarmouth, Mass. So merely knowing that an area has a large elderly population only tells you part of the story.

Fast-Graying Suburbs

Just as elderly growth was mushrooming in small metropolitan areas, the '90s have also ushered in a new era of elderly growth within the suburbs. Seniors who celebrated their 65th birthday during the 1990s were those who began setting up households in 1950s suburbia. It's no wonder then that many of them have simply "aged in place," as they entered their retirement years. As 1990s senior growth in the suburbs reached 20 percent, in contrast to only 2.4 percent in central cities, some of the fastest growth occurred in peripheral, exurban communities within expanding metro areas like Atlanta, Dallas and Washington, D.C. This "aging in place" growth of the now elderly postwar suburbanites is just the tip of the iceberg. These are the parents of the Baby Boomers who were born in the suburbs, lived most of their lives there, and will undoubtedly retire in the suburbia they helped to shape. This mushrooming senior growth in that part of America which was once associated primarily with child raising will pose interesting dilemmas as the suburban "youth to age" transition occurs. Public debates over school systems versus golf courses, and emerging new safety concerns resulting from "senior gridlock" on the freeways, are among the issues likely to arise.

TABLE 3: RETIREE NESTS

Metropolitan areas such as Anchorage, Phoenix and Wilmington experienced a 50 percent increase in their pre-elderly population (age 55 to 64) between 1990 and 2000, while Las Vegas saw its retiree community rise by 89 percent.

GREATEST PRE-ELDERLY GROWTH

RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA*	GROWTH**
1.	Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA	88.7%
2.	Naples, FL MSA	74.0%
3.	Yuma, AZ MSA	59.9%
4.	Fort Collins-Loveland, CO MSA	56.9%
5.	Santa Fe, NM MSA	54.1%
6.	Austin-San Marcos, TX MSA	54.0%
7.	Wilmington, NC MSA	51.9%
8.	Phoenix-Mesa, AZ MSA	50.3%
9.	Boise City, ID MSA	50.3%
10.	Anchorage, AK MSA	50.1%
11.	Flagstaff, AZ-UT MSA	49.9%
12	Myrtle Beach, SC MSA	49.5%
13.	Atlanta, GA MSA	48.2%
14.	Reno, NV MSA	43.0%
15.	Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA	41.3%

The Barnstable-Yarmouth metropolitan in Massachusetts has one of the highest shares of the pre-elderly population in the country–after Florida.

GREATEST PRE-ELDERLY SHARES

RANK	METROPOLITAN AREA*	SHARES***
1.	Punta Gorda, FL MSA	14.5%
2.	Naples, FL MSA	12.7%
3.	Fort Myers-Cape Coral, FL MSA	12.4%
4.	Sarasota-Bradenton, FL MSA	12.0%
5.	Ocala, FL MSA	11.8%
6.	Barnstable-Yarmouth, MA NECMA	11.5%
7.	Daytona Beach, FL MSA	11.3%
8.	Myrtle Beach, SC MSA	11.3%
9.	Johnson City-Kingsport-Bristol, TN-VA MSA	11.2%
10.	Wilmington, SC, MSA	11.2%
11.	Fort Pierce-Port St. Lucie, FL MSA	11.2%
12.	Melbourne-Titusville-Palm Bay, FL MSA	11.0%
13.	Parkersburg-Marietta, WV-OH MSA	10.7%
14.	Steubenville-Weirton, OH-WV MSA	10.7%
15.	Danville, VA MSA	10.6%

**Metro areas are CMSAs, MSAs, and (in New England) NECMAs, as defined by OMB in June, 2000.*
***1990-2000 change in the 55-64 population as percent of the 55-64 population in 1990.*
****55-64 population as percent of the total population in 2000.*

Source: William H. Frey analysis of 2000 U.S. Census

Beyond the Lull

While the '90s was a relatively slow growth decade for seniors, new trend lines for fast-growing regions and communities were set in motion. Broad segments of the Sun Belt, suburbia and smaller places are now on the cutting edge of growth profiles for upcoming elderly waves. In fact, several of the same metros with greatest senior growth and shares in the '90s are becoming staging areas for today's "pre-elderly" population of those ages 55 to 64. (See Table 3, above.) As many seniors simply "age in place," we can look ahead to a continuation of these trends which, of course, will be accelerated dramatically after the year 2011, when the first Baby Boomer blows out 65 candles on a birthday cake. ■

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