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## Fairfax's wealthy are moving on up — and out

By Luke Rosiak

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Fairfax County has a deficit problem. It has lost hundreds of millions of dollars in resident income yearly — \$3.1 billion over five years, more than all but five other counties in the U.S. The loss isn't a result of the outsourcing of jobs, and the money isn't owed to China. Instead, the county hemorrhaged wealthy residents to other jurisdictions.

More families left Fairfax for elsewhere than fled Detroit's Wayne County. In recent years, 210,000 families making an average of \$70,000 departed, taking with them \$15 billion in tax revenue. They were replaced with 193,000 families making about \$60,000 each.

An analysis by The Washington Times of migration data showed that the capital area's population grew during the recession, not because of an influx of families moving from other American cities attracted to its relative economic stability, but in spite of a net loss of 26,000 families, many of them large, to outside the region between 2005 and 2008.

In 2009, a striking change occurred, with a net increase of 15,000 tax filers moving to the region, largely singles and small families settling inside the Capital Beltway.

The area's steady population despite net exchange losses with other U.S. counties indicates the extent to which growth has relied on foreign immigrants, in addition to natural growth. The figures also give an otherwise-unseen measure of the attractiveness of localities regionally and across the country.

And they show how, as residents' concept of the American dream has changed, some local jurisdictions quietly saw an outflow of wealth and people rivaled by few in the nation.

The Fairfax losses occurred mostly during the building boom of five years ago, with most residents moving within the region to neighboring Loudoun and Prince William counties. Others, counted as leaving the D.C. metropolitan region, moved further out to Charles County, Md.; Stafford, Va., or more rural parts hours south, where spacious housing for large families was affordable.

Now, a reversal is taking place, with outlying counties becoming refuges for large families and immigrants as much as the great suburban frontier.

For the first time in recent memory, the District attracted more wealth than it shed as residents have revitalized the urban core. And according to the 2010 American Community Survey, more people moved to Fairfax last year than to any other local jurisdiction.

"The traditional notion that there are inner cities which are disadvantaged and are surrounded by an wealthy inner ring of suburbs is changing," said John Iceland, a sociologist at Pennsylvania State University.

In numbers of families, the 17,000 who moved out of Fairfax, yet were not replaced by families moving in, ranked the 18th-largest loss in the nation. Prince George's ranked 17th.

The Internal Revenue Service tracks the mobility of Americans by comparing their tax returns with those from the previous year. The tallies give a detailed measure of the migration patterns by income and family size. They do not include new immigrants or some elderly and poor.

Montgomery County saw its first net increase in families in years in 2009, the newly released data reveals, and its families are no longer moving en masse to Frederick, which lost migrants in 2009. Since that year, growth in the outer suburbs has increasingly come from large families and poor immigrants, while the average family size in Montgomery has declined, census figures show.

Just as expansion to outlying areas came at the expense of the inner core, the reversal raises questions about how the face of the exurbs will change.

### **'Moving on up'**

Residents leave a place for myriad reasons, but have one thing in common: The average family packing a moving truck was poorer than his neighbors. Its move meant a place where money would go further or opportunities would be greater.

The family arrived in its new home with the same dubious distinction. The average family moving from one Washington suburb to another arrived on the lower echelon of its income scale.

The data depicts a quest for a better life that has taken a winding path since the Jeffersons, an upwardly mobile TV-sitcom family, went "moving on up" from Queens to a "deluxe apartment in the sky" in Manhattan.

Nationally, one of the largest recent shifts saw Manhattanites heading to Kings and Queens counties, where brownstones have been renovated and condos erected on cracked-blacktop lots. In the District, the phenomenon has been echoed in the resurgence of historic corridors such as U Street Northwest.

The changes come as people priced out or crowded out of the traditionally built-up areas have gotten creative instead of moving further out.

"I don't think it was ever their preference so much as that's what they could get," Mynor Herrera, a Realtor at Keller Williams, said of those who moved to the far suburbs.

Lower home prices have reinvigorated areas inside the Beltway, he said, and many families who moved to exurbs have been returning to the core. Some are willing to take a loss to return closer to the city.

"We hit the bottom ... and reached a tipping point where the places that were always sought after became more sought after," he said. "It opened up a lot of people to a marketplace that was not available to them a few years ago."

Exurbs, meanwhile, have increasingly become the destination for recent immigrants. Without major ethnic enclaves in the city, they live near work, including construction jobs along the Dulles corridor.

### **Black suburb on the wane**

Prince George's became the country's wealthiest majority-black county beginning when then-D.C. Mayor Marion Barry's civil service bureaucracy gave rise to a class of well-off black households that promptly relocated to raise their children in the suburbs.

That is no longer the dynamic. Growing numbers of singles and couples who can afford to, largely the children of that generation, are moving closer to the office and nightlife core of the city. The county has seen a sharp drop in 30-somethings.

Despite the region's stability during the recession, 2,775 more families left Prince George's in 2009 than moved in — a hollowing out more dramatic than all but eight counties nationwide. Many of those families were well-off.

"The African Americans who left the District are not going to PG in droves anymore," said Lisa Ann Sturtevant, a demographer at George Mason University. "It's got 15 Metro stations, a great location — if you looked at it on a map and weren't from here, you'd think it was perfect. The problems have been crime, schools and a bad reputation that has kept employers from locating there."

Prince George's Hispanic immigrant population has swelled, and its black families are pushing further from the city, with more than 3,600 families moving to the quieter outposts of Anne Arundel and Charles counties in 2009.

Montgomery County, the figures show, was no longer the destination for wealthy families that it once was. The average family moving to Montgomery made \$56,000, while the family leaving made \$66,000. Montgomery had a net loss of 11,000 families to other jurisdictions over the most recent five-year period, with an earnings deficit of \$2 billion.

### **Resurgent District**

For the first time, wages earned by professionals moving to the District in 2009 outweighed those lost by families leaving it. The famously transient city expanded its tax base by attracting increasing numbers of young, single workers despite the fact that those workers earned less than the growing families they replaced.

While Washingtonians were still more likely to move from downtown to its suburbs than the reverse, the city was a powerful magnet attracting migrants from New York, Chicago, Los Angeles — which saw the greatest exodus nationally — and rural Virginia.

But Arlington was most transient, with one-fifth of its population turning over every year. Singles and couples arrive making \$59,000 and depart not long after making \$72,000.

In some cases, apparent losses were a testament to the region's ability to serve as a steppingstone to prosperity, a stop on the road between scarce jobs and low wages and a waterfront piece of the pie.

In 2009, 174 Montgomery County residents earning a combined \$80 million retired to the sunny shores of Palm Beach, Fla. The 198 Floridians it traded to the Maryland suburb earned a collective \$8 million.

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