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# Boom beyond the 'burbs

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FEATURE WRITER

Don't let those condo towers going up across Toronto fool you – the wave of immigrants driving population growth in Canada is flowing through the Big Smoke to settle in the surrounding suburbs and cities, according to the 2006 Census.

Growth is pushing newcomers even farther out than ever, to formerly sleepy little towns like Milton, which grew 71.4 per cent in five years, making it the fastest-growing municipality in Canada. Barrie grew 24 per cent over the same period. Not even Calgary, in the grips of an oil boom, grew more.

Statistics Canada counted 31,612,897 Canadians in May 2006, an increase of 5.4 per cent since 2001. Two cities joined the exclusive club of metropolitan areas with more than one million people: Calgary and Edmonton. Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Ottawa-Gatineau are also members. The six cities are home to 45 per cent of Canada's population.

Toronto's population growth flagged, at just under 1 per cent, although it remains by far the largest city in the country, with 2.5 million people. Second is Montreal with 1.6 million.

"The perception was that because of all the condominiums going up we would be having a larger population growth than .9 per cent, but the fact we are on the positive side of the ledger is encouraging," said Toronto deputy mayor Joe Pantalone.

"When you look beyond that statistic, what you see is really that we have a mature community with stable neighbourhoods which are really not being affected by population growth, which is good, which is what the official plan calls for."

Montreal and Vancouver also grew slowly, compared to the burgeoning communities around them. Overall the growth rate of municipalities surrounding Canadian CMAs was double the national average.

Cities and towns along the major arteries of big cities in Canada are filling up and a new outer ring of development is being created, says Pamela White, director of demography division, Statistics Canada.

"We are seeing this emergence of very strong growth in peripheral municipalities. This is really typical of urban spread," said White.

The trend is forcing urban planners and politicians to think not simply in terms of one city and its suburbs, but in terms of a vastly more complicated network of cities and suburbs and towns that need to work together to manage new population growth.

Pantalone says the increases in population in the outlying areas prove the region needs a comprehensive transportation plan.

In fact, one-quarter of Canadians – 8.1 million people – now live in what has come to be called the Greater Golden Horseshoe region along the western edge of Lake Ontario. It includes Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph, Peterborough, Barrie, Orillia, and the regions of Halton, Peel, York, Durham, Waterloo and Niagara.

Last year, the province announced plans to manage growth in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, which is expected to swell by another 4 million people in the next 25 years.

Canada had a faster rate of growth than any other member of the G-8 group of industrialized nations, according to the census. The U.S. was second at 5 per cent. New immigrants accounted for 1.2 million of the 1.6 million increase in Canada. According to projections, net immigration may become the only source of population growth in Canada by about 2030.

In the U.S., which enjoys one of the highest fertility rates in the developed world, 60 per cent of the population increase was due to births outpacing deaths. Canadian women have an average of 1.5 children; in the U.S. that figure is closer to two.

Growth in Canada's big cities is taking place mostly along major highways and transportation routes, says White, of StatsCan.

In Quebec, the Laurentian Autoroute, the main artery for people travelling to ski resorts in winter and cottage country in summer, is now choked with commuters during the week. In B.C., the SkyTrain has fuelled population growth in municipalities like Surrey.

Here in the Golden Horseshoe, populations are booming in communities along the 400-series highways and Yonge St.

Strong growth brings with it good and bad news for residents like Donna Danielli, a Halton district school board trustee with a business in Milton.



CARLOS OSORIO / TORONTO STAR  
Builders at work March 13, 2007 on the Niagara Escarpment overlooking Milton, Canada's fastest growing city.

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The increase in population has been great for traffic in her appliance store.

But growth took place so quickly that schools had to scramble to make sure there were desks for every student in September.

In Barrie, the Royal Victoria Hospital is seeking funding for an expansion.

About 5,000 people have been moving to the city each year for the past 10 years, says Jim Taylor, director of planning for the city.

"Barrie has all but run out of land," says Taylor.

Doug Norris, chief demographer for Environics Analytics, says there is no cause for concern in the fact that Toronto's growth was .9 per cent.

"It would be very difficult for Toronto, the way it's developed, the way it's built up, to have growth of 5 or 10 per cent these days," he said.

Pantalone said increases in the population living outside the city is good news.

"When you talk about Toronto, you have to remember the city of Toronto is the heart of the organism that is the GTA. The success of areas around the city of Toronto is Toronto's success as well."

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