

Indiana needs immigrants to grow

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Northeast Indiana is on the "Road to One Million," a program of quality of place projects designed to boost the region's population to that lofty total. It isn't likely to get there without immigrants.

Indiana has depended on immigrants to drive population growth since 2000, according to the preliminary results of a Ball State University study. In all 12 of

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County	Total population		Foreign-born population		Educational attainment			Poverty rates					
	2015	1990	Absolute change 1990-2015	Percent change 1990-2015	2015	1990	Absolute change 1990-2015	Percent change 1990-2015	BA+ Foreign-born, BA+	Native-born, BA+	Total pop	Foreign-born	Native-born
Adams County	34,642	31,095	3,547	11.41	273	222	51	22.97	15	42.2	16.3	9.0	
Allen County	363,453	300,836	62,617	20.81	23,167	5,882	17,285	293.86	27	24.1	15.8	26.1	
DeKalb County	42,449	35,324	7,125	20.17	563	261	302	115.71	17	13.5	14.6	13.0	
Elkhart County	200,685	156,198	44,487	28.48	16,611	3,314	13,297	401.24	18.1	11.5	16.1	22.0	
Huntington County	36,863	35,427	1,436	4.05	564	288	276	95.83	18	10.7	12	23.6	
Kosciusko County	77,983	65,294	12,689	19.43	3,130	798	2,332	292.23	20.7	20.6	11.4	15.1	
LaGrange County	38,084	29,477	8,607	29.20	761	247	514	208.10	9.8	14.0	13	15.2	
Noble County	47,546	37,877	9,669	25.53	1,986	339	1,647	485.84	14.3	2.6	12.2	10.4	
Stauben County	34,267	27,446	6,821	24.85	638	254	384	151.18	20	20.9	10.8	14.3	
Wabash County	32,358	35,069	-2,711	-7.73	366	284	82	28.87	18.8	25.9	14.4	16.8	
Wells County	27,796	25,948	1,848	7.12	408	80	328	410.00	17.6	20.2	12.2	13.9	
Whitley County	33,330	27,651	5,679	20.54	291	135	156	115.56	18.4	29.3	8	8.4	
State wide	969,456	807,642	161,814	20.04	316,368*	12,104	36,654	302.83	24.1**	30.3**	15.4	23.7	15.1

Source: BSI research, Census Bureau data

IMMIGRANTS: Stemming the tide of native-born residents who leave the area is crucial

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the northeast Indiana counties covered by Greater Fort Wayne Business Weekly, the rate of increase in the population of immigrants from 1990 to 2015 far exceeded the rate of the increase in the population as a whole, the study by assistant professor and researcher Emily Wornell found.

The numbers, culled from the decennial census and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, also dispel the idea that immigrants to Indiana are untrained. Statewide, the percentage of immigrants with bachelor's degrees or more education was higher, at about 30 percent, than the total population, which was about 24 percent, she said.

While about a quarter of the immigrants who came to Indiana stayed in the Indianapolis area, a large number also settled in rural communities around the state. Wornell, who is doing the study in conjunction with faculty members at Notre Dame, said she is particularly interested in what brings immigrants to rural areas.

Tapping potential

Wornell found that two counties in Indiana - Clinton and Cass - would have experienced total population declines over the 25-year period were it not for immigrants. Fourteen other counties that did see overall declines - including Wabash - would have experienced even greater drops if not for immigration.

"Immigrants in these counties may represent the greatest potential for population increase over the next couple decades, because rural communities have been seeing population declines," she said.

"The demographic characteristics of these communities are changing, so I think a lot of communities have a choice in front of them. They can embrace that change or they can resist that change. If they resist the change, it's going to have the potential to make for a more difficult future

for them and for the immigrants living in those communities, but it's not necessarily going to make immigration to those communities stop."

What's more, projects like the Road to One Million, funded with assistance from the state's Regional Cities Initiative, are less likely to succeed if they aren't planned with input from the immigrant population.

"If we are considering community assets to increase the population, are we considering the population that we're going to have? Are we going to have immigrants involved in that discussion? Are there certain kinds of assets that they're looking for that would be beneficial to them, that would keep their children in these communities, that maybe a group of people who are not immigrants would think of?" she asked.

Need for nurses

Parkview Health has been working for the past year with Avant Healthcare Professionals, which specializes in bringing experienced nurses from other countries to the United States to work. It was a move made in an effort to be proactive in the face of a growing nursing shortage across the country and to satisfy the greater need that has come with Parkview's growth, said Judy Boerger, chief nursing executive at Parkview.

The 35 international nurses now working in the system represent a small piece of the cohort of 3,500, but work in just about all of Parkview's facilities, Boerger said.

Avant handles recruiting and testing to make sure nurses pass state boards and specialty exams, have the linguistic skills to work in the U.S. and trains them in electronic medical records systems and technology they may not have used in their home countries. The company turns away more applicants than it accepts, and works with nurses for as long as two years before they are ready, Boerger said.

The company also helps the nurses find housing for themselves and family members they may bring along, get their driver's licenses and access the other necessities of American life.

Making themselves at home

Once the nurses are on the job, there are additional programs, such as a nursing residency, that help them get acclimated. But a lot of the interaction that truly makes them feel at home happens on a unit level, Boerger said.

"I think they have felt very welcomed by our coworkers. It's that personal, one-on-one bonding, getting to know that person as an individual," she said.

Nurses brought in thus far have come from England, Jamaica, the Bahamas, the Philippines, Kenya and Nigeria, among other countries.

"We've been very pleased, and I think as a result, it is my view that whenever we can be inclusive, that we grow, and that diversity makes Parkview stronger," Boerger said.

Going forward

A few years ago, the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, which spearheaded the Road to One Million effort, hosted a series of "Our Story" community workshops to assess and develop attributes it could use to sell the region to outsiders. One of the themes that emerged was that, while communities were considered welcoming, it was much harder once there for people to really get plugged into the

local networks.

That was true for people new to town - where ever they came from, whatever race or ethnicity they represented or whether or not they were part of the LGBT community, said consultant Courtney Tritch, who worked for the partnership at the time.

Now a candidate for the third district Democratic Congressional nomination, Tritch speaks often on the impact that inclusivity and diversity have on the economy.

"Just from an economic growth perspective, if we're going to get to 1 million people, we need to capitalize on our strengths. There are positions our employers can't fill. We need to be focused on how to support our employers," she said.

That means stemming the tide of native-born residents who leave the area, as well as "welcoming international immigrants to the shores of liberty and economic opportunity right here in Fort Wayne and northeast Indiana," Regional Partnership CEO John Sampson wrote in a recent blog post.

Generations to come

Wornell is particularly interested in exploring the potential economic impact the second generation of immigrants might have on the communities in which they locate.

"Do the children stay there? Do they leave for the city? Do they leave Indiana in general, and if they are leaving, what can be done to retain that second generation in those rural communities in particular? They're really a strong driver for economic growth," she said.

The parameters of the research project are still being defined, and the work is expected to take a couple of years. The project is funded by Conexus Indiana, a private sector-led initiative that is focused on the advanced manufacturing and logistics sectors. Together, those industries employ two of every five Indiana residents.