



## The Fastest Growing U.S. City

Americans over 55 are flocking to The Villages, a sprawling retiree utopia that just keeps growing.

By Patrick Clark, Bloomberg Business | March 2015

The latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau are in, and the fastest-growing city in the U.S. is not an oil boomtown or a magnet for new immigrants, but a senior living community outside Orlando, Fla., with a reputation for attracting active retirees.

The Villages, a sprawling senior community of 114,000 residents, increased 5.4 percent in the year ended July 2014, making it the country's fastest-growing metro for the second straight year. That's triple the growth rate for the state of Florida and far faster than Myrtle Beach, S.C., the second fastest-growing U.S. city, which expanded 3.2 percent.

The explanation is partly semantic. The Census considers The Villages a metropolitan area, based on the area's core density. Some smaller areas, known as micros, grew at faster

rates than the Villages, with Williston, N.D., topping the list at 8.7 percent. The Villages is lumped in with such cities as Houston and Dallas, which saw the largest increases in absolute terms but grew more slowly on a percentage basis.

Still, it's worth spending a moment marveling at the growth of The Villages, which is all the more impressive considering the demographic trends working against it.

First is attrition. The 2010 Census found that 96 percent of residents were 55 or older. A quirk in the way the Census has defined The Villages means that number might overstate the elderly population in the metropolitan area, but it's a fair bet that there are more deaths than births on an annual basis.

Then there are trends in senior living, which include competition from a boom in new senior living construction and research indicating that aging baby boomers would rather grow old in their homes than move to senior developments.

So how has The Villages kept up such fast growth?

A Bloomberg story on the community last year described a veritable senior-living utopia, with low crime, no kids, and lots of golf. (There are more golf carts in the Villages than there are taxis in New York City, according to that story.) There have also been racier tales. The New York Post highlighted the local dating scene and a supposed black market for Viagra—a salacious tale that probably wasn't terrible publicity. To appeal to the widest range of seniors, it helps to offer something for everyone.