

Kelowna just keeps on growing

The Interior town is the fifth-fastest growing metropolitan area in Canada. Abbotsford's Number 9

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Steve Threndyle and his family picked the right time to move to Kelowna.

When they got there five years ago, you could -- and they did -- buy a big, elegant house in a leafy neighbourhood half a block from Okanagan Lake.

They paid a little over \$200,000, Threndyle said Tuesday.

"It's worth \$500,000 now, and it could be worth \$600,000 by the end of summer. It just keeps going up and up."

The boom is being fuelled not only by migrants from Vancouver, but also from Calgary, which has long had a powerful relationship with the Okanagan, its lakes and its mild climate.

Some are retiring or semi-retiring in Kelowna, some are raising kids in a smaller, gentler place, some are living in paradise while working in places like Fort McMurray, mining Alberta's oil-sands.

The upshot is that Kelowna is the fifth-fastest growing metropolitan area in Canada, with a population of 126,384, up 8.3 per cent since the last census. The only other B.C. city to make the top 10 is Abbotsford, in ninth place.

Demographics expert Andrew Ramlo of Vancouver's Urban Futures Institute said he can't be certain who's moving to Kelowna. Demographic breakdowns of the new census won't be out until June.

But it's likely both retirees and younger people looking for job opportunities are moving there as it becomes the province's third largest metropolitan region, after the Lower Mainland and the Victoria area, Ramlo said.

And it's not just Kelowna and its immediate surroundings. Threndyle said the whole Okanagan Valley from Osoyoos to Salmon Arm is going through frantic growth. Ramlo added that Kelowna is becoming a gateway to the rest of B.C. from the Lower Mainland.

There's even a crowded commuter flight from Kelowna to Seattle every

Monday morning from the recently expanded Kelowna airport, Threndyle said. A small high-tech industry is starting to flower in Kelowna, and some people are starting to call it -- what else? -- Silicon Vineyard.

But not everything's rosy. There are not a lot of high-paying industrial jobs in Kelowna since the Western Star truck manufacturing plant moved to Portland a few years ago and Telus laid off a lot of people.

There's an atmosphere of overheated development, especially in the smaller nearby centres like West Bank.

"There are former tent and trailer parks on the water that have now converted to multimillion-dollar condo projects and that sort of thing," Threndyle said. "You can drive up and down the valley from Osoyoos all the way to Salmon Arm and there are billboards everywhere for new condo developments."

Traffic is bad, and services are not keeping up with growth. There's a piece of downtown Kelowna near the lake that is dominated by panhandlers and drug dealing, and some businesses are moving out to the malls. In some parts of the valley there appears to be little development control, and big-box stores are popping up along the scenic highways.

There's even some urban angst that things will get worse: the local paper carried a headline Tuesday warning that Kelowna may be overrun by Vancouver's homeless when they are pushed out for the 2010 Winter Games.

But for the Threndyles, life is good. Steve, 50, does media relations work for the region's ski hills, his wife Sheila has a good job, the whole family skis or snowboards or both and it's "an incredibly idyllic environment for the kids. It couldn't be better."

Something similar is happening on Vancouver Island, though on a smaller scale. Nanaimo, Courtenay-Comox, Parksville, Ladysmith and other towns on the east coast of the island not only draw retirees from the Lower Mainland, but increasingly, people who are still connected to the cities by work, but don't want to live there any more. Most of them showed growth in the seven-to-12-per-cent range from 2001 to 2006.

Ramlo said the region is becoming a gateway to the northern part of the Island. The climate is mild, there is room to grow, and the transportation to bigger centres -- Nanaimo's ferries, the Island Highway, the Courtenay-Comox airport -- makes it easy to do weekly commutes.

Abbotsford is a different kettle of fish. It's in the Fraser Valley outside Greater Vancouver, but functionally it's part of Greater Vancouver, comparable in some ways to Surrey.

"A lot of family-style housing is being added in those outlying suburbs," Ramlo said, "and it's certainly not being added in the city of Vancouver, unless you consider family housing to be a 500-square-foot condo."

"We anticipate that a lot of that growth in Abbotsford and other outlying municipalities is being driven by families moving to those areas."

That's not to say everyone who moves to Abbotsford commutes to Vancouver. For one thing, the old valley-to-ocean commute is almost a thing of the past.

There's a big reverse commute now from Vancouver to other parts of the region, and a huge amount of movement between suburbs.

"The pattern of growth is becoming much more dispersed within the region and there's a lot more inter-municipal commuting now than there ever has been before," Ramlo said.

As well, Abbotsford's growth means it is creating its own job opportunities, and that means some people will both live and work there, while others will be commuting from places like Surrey, the Langleys and other communities to Abbotsford.

Abbotsford's population grew by 7.9 per cent from census to census, from 147,370 to 159,020.

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URBAN AREAS

Canada's urban areas, listed by speed of growth since 2001

Brantford 124,607 30.60%

Sherbrooke 186,952 17.70%

Barrie 177,061 16.10%

Peterborough 116,570 12.10%

Calgary 1,079,310 11.90%

Oshawa 330,594 10.40%

Edmonton 1,034,945 9.40%

Kelowna 162,276 9.00%

Toronto 5,113,149 8.40%

Kitchener 451,235 8.20%

Guelph 127,009 7.60%

Abbotsford 159,020 7.30%

Moncton 126,424 6.90%

Vancouver 2,116,581 6.10%

Ottawa/Gatineau 1,130,761 5.90%

Montreal 3,635,571 5.80%

Victoria 330,088 5.50%

London 457,720 5.50%

Windsor 323,342 4.80%

Quebec 715,515 4.60%

St. John's 181,113 4.50%

Hamilton 692,911 4.40%

Halifax 372,858 3.70%

Kingston 152,358 3.60%

Saskatoon 233,923 3.40%

St. Catharines - Niagara 390,317 3.40%

Winnipeg 694,668 3.40%

Trois-Rivieres 141,529 2.80%

Greater Sudbury 158,258 1.70%

Regina 194,971 1.10%

Thunder Bay 122,907 0.70%

Saint John 122,389 -0.20%

Saguenay 151,643 -2.20%

Source: Statistics Canada, CanWest News Service

HISTORY OF THE CENSUS

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a census as "an official enumeration of a population of a country or district, with various statistics relating to them." The word comes from the Latin and refers to the registration of Roman citizens and their property. The first census in the United States was taken in 1790 and every 10 years since.

France's first census was 1791. Britain did not hold its first census until 1801.

MILESTONES IN THE CANADIAN CENSUS

1665. The first census in Canada was in 1665 and supervised by Jean Talon, Intendant of New France. The population comprised 3,215 settlers, with most people living in what is now Quebec City. That census revealed there were too many bachelors in the colony. Single women from France were encouraged to emigrate.

1871. The first national census in Canada. That first count covered Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec.

1881. Census takers are required to take an oath of secrecy. British Columbia, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island were added to the census.

1896. The first census of agriculture in the West.

1906. A special census of the Prairies was added to the regular census of agriculture to gather data for Alberta and Saskatchewan, which were created in 1905.

1941. The first census was held using sampling methods. Instead of canvassing all houses, more detailed data was gathered from every 10th household. This method of data collection reduced costs while still providing reliable data.

1951. Newfoundland and Labrador were added to the census.

1956. This year marked the last separate census of agriculture.

1971. Self-enumeration began. This allowed people to fill out their own forms instead of answering questions posed by the enumerator. Also, this year, the law changed, requiring a full census of agriculture and population every five years instead of every 10. The numerous questionnaires were reduced to the "short form" and "long form."

1996. This census became available in 51 languages -- 12 of which were aboriginal.

2002. 20,000 people identified their religion as "Jedi," the mythical faith from the Star Wars movies, in the 2001 census.

2003. After years of consultation, the raw data from the 1906 census of the Prairies was released to the general public. There had been concerns about

privacy.

2006. 18.5 per cent of households filled out their census online, the first time this option was available.

Census trivia

- The 2006 census cost \$276 million.
- The data from all censuses is on 14 computer servers.

Compiled by Kirsten Smith, CanWest News Service

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