

# One in 10 isn't here anymore

## Statistics from census show Page County's cities are shrinking

Part 1 of a Three-Part Series

**CLARINDA** – According to the latest population estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau, the cities in southwest Iowa are quickly losing their populations.

In Page County, the loss of population in the incorporated areas – since the 2000 Census – has been slightly more than 10 percent. The losses stem from a number of reasons, but the most common argument – deaths exceeding births – only holds true for a couple Page County communities, especially the two biggest: Clarinda and Shenandoah.

Clarinda saw a net “natural loss” of 176, while Shenandoah’s was 219. Meanwhile, Clarinda’s net population loss was slightly less than 7 percent. In Shenandoah, the net population loss has been nearly 13 percent since 2000.

Shenandoah Chamber and Industry Association Director Gregg Connell said the biggest reason for the drop in Shenandoah’s population is the more mobile lifestyle of today’s world.

“It’s a different world than what it was,” he said. “When we had 6,000 people, most of them were nursery employees, and they lived in the town they worked in. What happens today is if you brought in a company tomorrow that employed 300 people, there wouldn’t be a huge amount of population increase in your community because people drive.”

Clarinda City Manager Gary McClarnon said “brain drain,” the loss of high school graduates who go on to college and rarely – if ever – return to their home communities is another ominous sign of the times.

“It’s really a combination of things that results in our population loss. Obviously, you

have older people dying faster than new births are keeping up,” he said. “But, if you look at our recent graduates, very few of them are going to return. They’re not staying here, and it hurts you.”

Blanchard, Hepburn and Shambaugh each saw a net natural loss of 1, and the remaining incorporated communities of Page County saw net natural gains. Essex had the largest gain with births outnumbering deaths by 12 since 2000.

However, every Page County community saw a net population loss. Combined, the total loss of population in the incorporated parts of the county exceeded 10 percent. And, losing one in 10 people doesn’t just mean there will be fewer friendly faces to greet.

It is having dire consequences for all of the communities.

“Obviously, when there’s a drop in population, cities are going to lose revenue because there are fewer people paying taxes. But, it goes so much farther than that,” McClarnon said. “In Iowa, it also affects how much road use tax money we get; that’s based on population. And, it also means you have fewer people doing business locally, so you lose local-option sales tax revenue, too.”

It’s not an uncommon situation for the larger communities of southwest Iowa. Despite rapid growth in the Omaha area, the Iowa side of the Missouri River has been a mixed bag of loss and negligible growth, even the largest cities.

Atlantic, Glenwood, Harlan and Red Oak all experienced significant losses since 2000. Meanwhile, Council Bluffs has seen only a modest gain since the last official census.

Population losses, particularly in the smallest communi-

ties, have a significant impact on local schools, as well. Gregg Cruickshank, who serves as superintendent for both the Sidney and South Page school districts, said the population loss impacts those districts’ abilities to provide quality education.

“Every state handles the funding of education differently. In Iowa, funding from the state is almost 100 percent tied to the number of kids you have,” he said. “If you lose population, you lose kids; you lose money. If you want your district to be viable educationally, the student population has to be solid.”

The South Page district has had to resort to a number of sharing agreements to maintain the educational viability Cruickshank describes. Beginning in the fall, the district’s students will receive Spanish instruction over the Iowa Communications Network from a teacher in the Baxter school district, some 175 miles away.

The district will also share a vocational agriculture teacher with Bedford, and high school band with Shenandoah, next school year. Last year, in addition to sharing Cruickshank’s services with Sidney, the district began providing Advanced Placement calculus and introductory business instruction with Walnut students via the ICN.

The district also shares some of its athletics with neighboring and nearby districts. Wrestlers compete as part of the Clarinda team, while baseball and softball players began playing on the Essex teams this summer.

“We always need to be looking to where we can provide excellent opportunities for our kids,” Cruickshank said. “We need to be creative and resourceful in sharing with

Daily Nonpareil  
Council  
Bluffs, IA  
Circ. 16229  
From Page:  
15  
7/11/2010  
45599



County:

Pottawattamie

45599-07-11\_15001





partners 10 to 20 miles away, a couple hundred miles away, or – in the future – even in other states.”

The answer to the population losses, some local officials say, is greater emphasis on local economic development. Other officials believe the answer lies in a more region-

alized approach to economic development. Still others say economic development alone will not work, emphasizing a need to develop new and improve existing amenities to help draw new residents in.

*Coming Up: In our second installment, we will look at ways local officials are bring-*

*ing jobs and improving amenities in the area. In our third installment, we will look at ways small but growing communities elsewhere in Iowa are bucking the population-loss trend.*

*– World-Herald News Service*

Daily Nonpareil  
Council  
Bluffs, IA  
Circ. 16229  
From Page:  
15  
7/11/2010  
45599