

City participation beats U.S. average

Tom Green County has higher rate than in 2000

By Matthew Waller

Originally published 05:26 p.m., April 29, 2010

Updated 09:46 p.m., April 29, 2010

SAN ANGELO, Texas — The results are in for census mail-in participation, and San Angelo has come out ahead of the national average.

As of Thursday, the U.S. Census Bureau website shows that San Angelo had a 73 percent participation rate, ahead of the national average of 72 percent, and well ahead of Texas' participation rate, which was 69 percent.

"I'm real proud of the community," Ken Stewart, the head of San Angelo's Complete Count Committee civic group and a sociology professor at Angelo State University.

Tom Green County is one percentage point ahead of where it was in 2000, at 73 percent, although San Angelo's rate didn't change from what it was 10 years ago.

Stewart said those rates are nothing to sneer at when participation in the census has dropped for three decades.

Census Bureau Director Robert Groves commended the census efforts and participation.

"This is a significant achievement; the nation has stepped up to the challenge of participating in this once-a-decade civic event," Groves said. "We knew the job would be more difficult in 2010 than in 2000, yet the nation responded tremendously."

The census is mandated in the U.S. Constitution to occur every 10 years, and the information it provides is used to determine representation and the distribution of \$400 billion of federal funds.

Stewart said that 1970 was the first year people received a census in the mail to send back. Before then, a census taker would come to the door and fill out the form for you, Stewart said.

Now census takers, or enumerators, will go only to homes which did not return their census form or to ask for clarification if the occupant didn't list a phone number.

"We're ramping up for our second phase," said Jenna Arnold, spokeswoman for the bureau out of the Dallas office. "We'll have about 600,000 people knocking on doors this weekend throughout the country."

Arnold said that the enumerators will cost about \$57 per household. Stewart said there are about 40,000 households in San Angelo, leaving about 10,800 households for enumerators to go to.

Arnold said the government would save about \$1.5 billion if everyone had turned in their census form.

“We’re extremely happy that we were able to match the same rate that we had 10 years ago,” Arnold said.

Arnold said census workers should have a census badge on them with their name and the U.S. Department of Commerce logo.

She said the enumerators will not ask for information such as Social Security numbers, and they will not ask to go inside the home.

People who find someone suspicious who they fear is posing as an enumerator can call 800-563-6499.

Stewart said the areas surrounding San Angelo are in the 40 percent and 50 percent response range.

“People in the rural counties need to be encouraged to be responsive to the census workers when they come around,” Stewart noted.

Stewart said the Complete Count Committee had completed its purpose, and now the U.S. Census Bureau’s enumerators would take over.

He said there might not have been as much face-to-face contact than there could’ve been, but the outcome was still satisfactory.

“One of the things we learned as a community is that when people in the community understand what’s going on, we have a stronger civic spirit than is sometimes assumed,” Stewart said. “I really congratulate the citizens in stepping up to the plate.”

