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San Angelo, ASU team up on Census committee

Paul A. Anthony

Putting aside any hard feelings from months of wrangling over street closures, San Angelo and Angelo State University are partnering to push for an accurate count in the 2010 Census.

The Complete Count Committee, chaired by Angelo State University sociology professor Kenneth Stewart, will work in the coming year to promote the Census with a goal of improving the city's response rate by at least 5 percent, Stewart said.

"We're trying to link both the university and the students to more on-the-ground projects with the community," Stewart said.

Stewart, who presented an update on the group's progress to the City Council at its meeting Tuesday, said the group is "kind of in an organizing process" but it plans a marketing push to make San Angelo residents more aware of the necessity of returning information cards sent by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The group also will help recruit Census workers and find local office space for the agency when it comes to follow up on unreturned response cards, Stewart said. ASU students, he said, already are working on those projects.

City leaders have been suspicious that San Angelo's 2000 Census count and subsequent estimates were badly flawed, rectified only partially and recently by higher estimates released this year.

Low- and moderate-income citizens tend to be underreported in the Census' 10-year counts, a trend that does San Angelo no favors, said Development Services Director Shawn Lewis.

"What I have learned is that (low-income) people are generally fearful of the government knowing information that they consider to be private," said Lewis, who served on a count committee for the 2000 Census in Abilene. "What they need to keep in mind is that the information is completely confidential, and that the reporting form is shorter and contains fewer personal questions."

According to Census data, about 33 percent of San Angelo residents ultimately counted by the Census did not return a card, and that number was higher in the city's poorest neighborhoods.

An increase in residents could provide many benefits to the area - including state and federal grants that use Census data in determining allocations and attracting national businesses that look at the numbers to investigate new markets for expansion.

Likewise, the **Census** itself begins providing additional analysis and information to cities that pass 100,000 people.

"That 100,000 mark is a key threshold," Stewart said.

In 2000, San Angelo's population was counted at 88,439.

The **Census** estimated that as of July 2007, that had grown to 90,483.

"I think we'll continue to see increases in population," Lewis said, citing the growing numbers of water connections and building permits coming through City Hall, "based on the figures we've been looking at over the past several years."

Counting members

Members of the Complete Count Committee

- Kenneth Stewart, Angelo State University, chairman.
- Cathy Ballard, Concho Valley Workforce Development Board.
- Mike Brown, Tom Green County.
- Floyd Crider, Galilee Community Development Corp.
- Tom Early, San Angelo Health Foundation.
- William Fuller, ASU.
- Scott Goen, Region XV Education Service Center.
- Johnny Griffin, CVWDB.
- Paul Howard, Small Business Development Center.
- Casey Jones, ASU.
- Shawn Lewis, City of San Angelo.
- Marcos Mata, Concho Valley Council of Governments.
- Phil Neighbors, San Angelo Chamber of Commerce.
- Bob Salas, City of San Angelo.
- Staci Wetz, Shannon Medical Center.