

Decade was hard across metro area

- [Article](#)
- [Comments \(28\)](#)

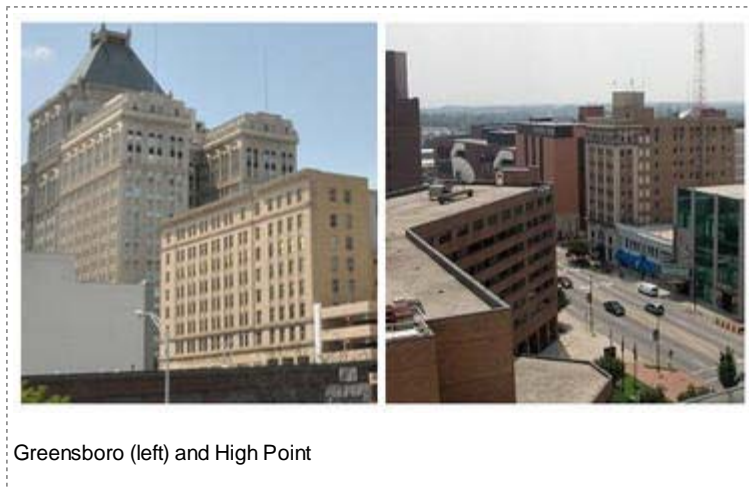
Sunday, August 22, 2010
(Updated 3:05 am)

By [DONALD W. PATTERSON](#)
Staff Writer

A recent Brookings Institution report bills itself as “a preview” of what the nation will learn from the 2010 Census, a sort of demographic snapshot of the nation’s 100 largest metro areas between 2000 and 2008.

For the Greensboro-High Point area, it’s not a pretty picture.

The report, called State of Metropolitan America, tracks how the decade of the 2000s went from bad to worse locally, starting with a recession that wiped out thousands of manufacturing jobs and winding down with the worst economic decline since the Great Depression.



Locally, the report says, the slumps produced:

- a 45.4 percent increase in the number of people living in poverty;
- a 13.9 percent drop in median household incomes;
- and a 5.2 percent decline in wages for middle-income workers.

The numbers surprised even those who work with the needy.

“How are we going to fix that?” asked Craig Thomas, executive director of Mary’s House in Greensboro, which helps people pay past-due utility bills and rent, among other things. “It’s like a never-ending cycle. We seem to pull some people out of poverty ... but at the head of the river more people keep pouring in.”

But the numbers tell only part of the story. The picture becomes even bleaker when the rankings for the Greensboro-High Point area, which includes Guilford, Rockingham and Randolph counties, are considered.

For example, the region’s drop in median household income was among the largest of the nation’s 100 top metros. The area’s median household income — \$45,251 — ranked 90th among the same group. And the pay per hour for middle-wage workers totaled \$15.67, the 93rd lowest.

What’s more, upper- and lower-wage earners saw their pay decline, making the region one of only 18 in the country that saw across-the-board declines.

“Everybody is worse off,” said Alec Friedhoff, a research analyst at Brookings, a Washington think tank, “but those on the low end are sliding faster.”

That includes people like Carolyn Burns, a Greensboro resident, and her 2-year-old daughter. They survive on Burns’ \$7.40-an-hour job at a fast-food restaurant.

“I’m worried about just making it,” said Burns, 33. “Sometimes, I have to choose. Do I want paper towels or do I

want toilet paper?"

Burns says she doesn't see the economic picture improving.

"I think things are in neutral," she said. "I don't see a lot of people going (back) to work."

From 2000 to 2008, the report says, pay for the area's low-income workers declined 9.1 percent to \$8.08 an hour. Upper-income workers saw their pay drop 5.4 percent to \$32.05.

For African Americans, wages fell 11.3 percent. For women, pay dropped 4.8 percent, the 98th steepest slide among the top 100 metros.

Overall, the report classifies nearly 40 percent of the households in the three counties as low income, adding that nearly 97,000 people, or about 14 percent, now live in poverty.

That includes one in five children, African Americans and foreign-born residents.

"It is alarming to me," said Steve Key, executive director of Open Door Ministries of High Point. "I don't think I would have expected that."

Some local leaders blame the area's poor showing, at least in part, on a redrawing of the nation's metro areas early in the decade.

At that time, Guilford found itself separated from Forsyth County and joined with Rockingham and Randolph, two counties that have seen their unemployment rates soar past 15 percent and 12 percent respectively during the recession.

"Right now, we are half an apple," said Keith Debbage, a professor of urban geography at UNCG. "No offense to our friends to the north and south, but we are stuck with Rockingham and Randolph."

Even so, the decade did produce some positive turns.

For one, the area saw its population grow by 9.3 percent. While that can't keep pace with booming regions such as the ones surrounding Raleigh (35.4 percent) and Charlotte (27 percent), the Greensboro-High Point area grew at a more manageable pace, or 1.1 percent a year.

By comparison, the state grew at 1.4 percent a year and the nation at 0.9 percent.

"We are not growing as rapidly as the state, but more rapidly than the nation," said Don Jud, professor emeritus at UNCG's Bryan School of Business and Economics. "I think that's a rate that would not be uncomfortable to most people."

The report also shows the area became more diverse and more educated.

The area's white population grew by only 1.6 percent over the eight-year period. Yet other groups saw significant increases, including blacks (18.7 percent), Asians (59.1 percent) and Hispanics (80.9 percent).

Still, only 7.3 percent of local residents were foreign-born in 2008.

College enrollment also increased. In 2000, 36.2 percent of people ages 18 to 24 attended college or graduate school. By 2008, that number had increased to 43.9 percent.

Most experts attribute the increase to the difficulty young people had finding jobs.

Ken English, a 41-year-old Pleasant Garden resident, says he's thinking about going back to school. He sure can't find work. He's been without a job for the past two years and has a 5-year-old son to support.

He says he's applied for more than 1,000 jobs in that time.

"I don't have any optimism," he said. "I'd like to be optimistic and say things are going to get better, but they're not."

Contact Donald W. Patterson at 373-7027 or don.patterson @news-record.com

Comments

[View & Submit Comments](#)

Confirmed *myNR* members may comment on this article. Memberships are free, and it only takes a few minutes to create your profile. Click "Submit Comment" to sign in or register for a new account. **New members must validate their email addresses in order to comment.**

[House Rules](#)

User comments can add a valuable and constructive dimension to community dialogue. We encourage respectful debate. But commenting is a privilege that will be revoked for violations of our [Terms of Use](#). In addition, please follow these "House Rules" when commenting on news articles, letters or editorials.

- **Be relevant.** Discuss the story or letter opened for comments. Stay on topic.
- **Be respectful.** It's fine to disagree but not to be disagreeable. Avoid abusive or offensive language. Threats, hate speech and libelous statements will be deleted. Name-calling, threats and insults are not welcome.
- **Be substantive.** Facts add weight and credibility to your views.
- **Be honest.** Don't make up facts or pretend to be someone else.
- **Be discreet.** Don't publish telephone numbers, addresses or other personal information about yourself or others.
- **Respect copyrights.** Don't publish material that belongs to someone else.
- **Inappropriate comments will be deleted.** Users who repeatedly violate these rules will be banned from commenting on this website.
- **Commenters are solely responsible for what they post** and can be held responsible for violations of the law. Please report comments that violate these rules by clicking on the "Report Abuse" link.

I understand these rules.

Inappropriate content? Please [report abuse](#).

[Submit Comment](#)

200 E. Market Street, Greensboro, NC 27401 (336) 373-7000 (800) 553-6880
155 Northpoint Ave., Suite 101, High Point, NC 27262 (336) 883-4422
203 E. Harris Place, Eden, NC 27288 (336) 627-1781

[Copyright © 2010 News & Record](#)