Homebuilders swarm Oconee, census figures show

County among top 10 in state in housing growth

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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SENECA — The weak economy over the past few years apparently has done little to slow the pace of new rooftops dotting Oconee County's landscape.

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau estimate, Oconee County has more than 39,000 housing units in its inventory or an increase of almost 21 percent from the 32,383 available in 2000.

Oconee's 20.8 percent rate of growth in housing units is the ninth fastest among South Carolina's 46 counties.

Census data shows that even when the economy went into a tailspin from 2007 through 2009, the number of housing units grew by more than 2,000, while construction activity in many other counties remained flat.

By comparison, over the same two-year period from 2007-2009, neighboring Pickens County saw its housing stock go up by 726 units.

As of July 1, 2009, the date of the final Census estimate before the official 2010 Census numbers come out, Pickens County's housing inventory stood at 52,093 units, or 13.2 percent more than its housing stock of 46,000 in 2000.

The Census uses building permits, estimates of non-permitted construction, mobile home shipments and estimates of housing unit loss (from hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.) to calculate its annual estimates.

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Horry County's 43.6 percent housing unit growth rate tops South Carolina and also ranks 45th among all the counties in the nation.

Beaufort ranked second in the state with a housing stock surge of 39.6, which tops out at No. 66 nationwide.

York was the only other county in South Carolina to crack the top-100 housing unit producer in the nation. York's 37.7 spike in housing units ranked it third in the state and No. 78 nationwide.

Greenville (18 percent), Spartanburg (15.4 percent) and Anderson (14.8 percent) trailed Oconee in housing-unit growth.

HOUSING UNITS PER COUNTY

County	July 1, 2009	April 1, 2000	% change
Horry	175,433	122,085	+43.6
Beaufort	84,530	60,509	+39.6
York	90,945	66,061	+37.7
Dorchester	48,509	37,237	+30.2
Berkeley	68,791	54,717	+25.7
Jasper	9,860	7,928	+24.4
Charleston	175,059	141,031	+24.1
Richland	158,843	129,793	+22.4
Oconee	**39,114**	32,383	+20.8
Lancaster	29,860	24,962	+19.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Bryan Wengerd, left, and Fred Overholt, both with Bryan's Brick and Block, lay a foundation in the Friendship area of Seneca on Thursday. Oconee ranks ninth in South Carolina in housing units, census figures show.