SC growing faster than the nation

Population growth happening sooner than many experts had expected

By Jamie Self
The State

South Carolina has the 11th fastest-growing population of any state, growing faster than the nation as a whole and exceeding state forecasters' expectations.

South Carolina had 4,774,839 residents on July 1, according to new U.S. Census data. That's an increase of 51,422, or 1.1 percent, from July 1, 2012.

That increase suggests that South Carolina is on track to surpass a projection by the South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics that the state population will reach 4.8 million in 2015, said Mike MacFarlane, state demographer.

South Carolina added 138,478 residents since 2010 — roughly the same population inside the Columbia city limits.

The economic downturn from five years ago has made it difficult to project the state's growth, but led to predictions that growth would slow down, MacFarlane said.

"We thought that the growth rate would be slow and build up through the decade, but it's occurring much quicker than that," MacFarlane said. "It's surprising."

The cause for South Carolina's recent boost in population is unclear without more specific data tracking births, deaths and migration locally, MacFarlane said.

South Carolina's growth rate in the early 2000s was around 1 percent, according to annual Census estimates starting July 1 of each year. That rate jumped to more than 1.4 percent in the year starting July 1, 2003, and then hit 2 percent in the year starting July 1, 2005, declining to 1.3 percent in 2008-09 and lower in following years.

According to the U.S. Census, the state's growth rate in the year starting July 1, 2012, topped the nation's population growth rate of .7 percent.

During that period, nine states and the District of Columbia grew faster than South Carolina.

North Dakota, the fastest-growing state, is the only state whose population increased by more than 3 percent, followed by the District of Columbia, where the population increased by 2 percent.

Only two states, Maine and West Virginia, saw their populations decrease slightly in the same period, losing a combined 2,575 residents.

South Carolina remained the nation's 24th largest in population.

By New Year's Day, the United States' population will reach 317.3 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, up 2.2 million from the year prior.

Across the United States, a birth will occur every eight seconds and someone will die every 12 seconds in January, according to Census projections.

The world population is expected to reach 7.1 billion on New Year's Day, up 77.6 million, or 1.1 percent, from the previous year.