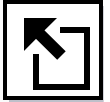


NEWS

New census numbers show Berks County is older and has fewer residents of working age



BEN HASTY – READING EAGLE, Tony Veloz, the South of Penn coordinator for Barrio Alegria, an arts organization, on South Seventh Street in Reading Tuesday afternoon. Part of Barrio Alegria's mission is to help members of the growing Latino community become invested in their home.



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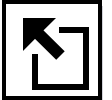
Anyone who has lived in Berks County in the last decade might not be surprised by the latest population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau: The area is less white and more old than it was in 2010.

Tony Veloz of Reading is not surprised by this. He has seen the Latino population in particular grow in Reading and the surrounding area.

“Since about the early 2000s, maybe the late 1990s, there’s been a migration of sorts” of Latinos from other parts of the country to Berks County, he said.

And part of what he does now is to make sure that the newcomers feel like they’re part of their new home.

Veloz is the South of Penn coordinator for Barrio Alegria, an arts organization in Reading. The group’s goal, Veloz said, is to “give people a sense of belonging.”



Part of Barrio Alegria’s mission is to help members of the growing Latino community become invested in their home here, Veloz said.

The organization has done that through cultural programs, such as the “Storytelling Through Dance” series, but also with the use of neighborhood cleanups, which Veloz spearheads. He collaborated with Black Lives Matter in early June to organize a cleanup in the neighborhood south of Penn Street.

The Census Bureau categorizes Latinos as an ethnic group, not a race; so Latinos can be of any race. As a sector of the population, Latinos grew from 16% of the Berks County population in 2010 to more than 22% in 2019.

The demographic shift shown in the new Census Bureau estimates affects

The grayest generation

The baby boom of the post-World War II era has created a demographic bulge of seniors, both nationally and in Berks County. New figures from the U.S. Census Bureau show that the county's 65-and-over population grew by 24 percent since 2010. This is the case across races and in both Latino and non-Latino groups.

"When you see population growth in the county, it's coming from us living longer and baby boomers aging out," said Daniel W. Fogarty, the Berks County Workforce Development Board's chief operating officer.

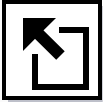
Michael Toledo, president and CEO of the Daniel Torres Hispanic Center in Reading, said the data in the latest Census Bureau estimates reflect what he sees on a daily basis.

"We're seeing an increase in registrations at the senior center; we're seeing an increase in the number of Meals on Wheels that we're providing," Toledo said.

The flip side of this change – the decrease in working-age adults – also comes as no surprise to Toledo. Younger workers are going to go where the good-paying jobs are. Those are harder to find around here, he said.

Family-supporting wages in the city are hard to come by," Toledo said. "You don't have walk-to-work jobs in the city."

That the county – as well as Pennsylvania and the nation – are getting older is not much of a surprise. The same was true a year ago, when the 2018 data came out. But the 24% growth in older Berks Countians doesn't just outpace the population growth of children and working adults.



POPULATION CHANGE BY RACE/AGE GROUP, 2010-19

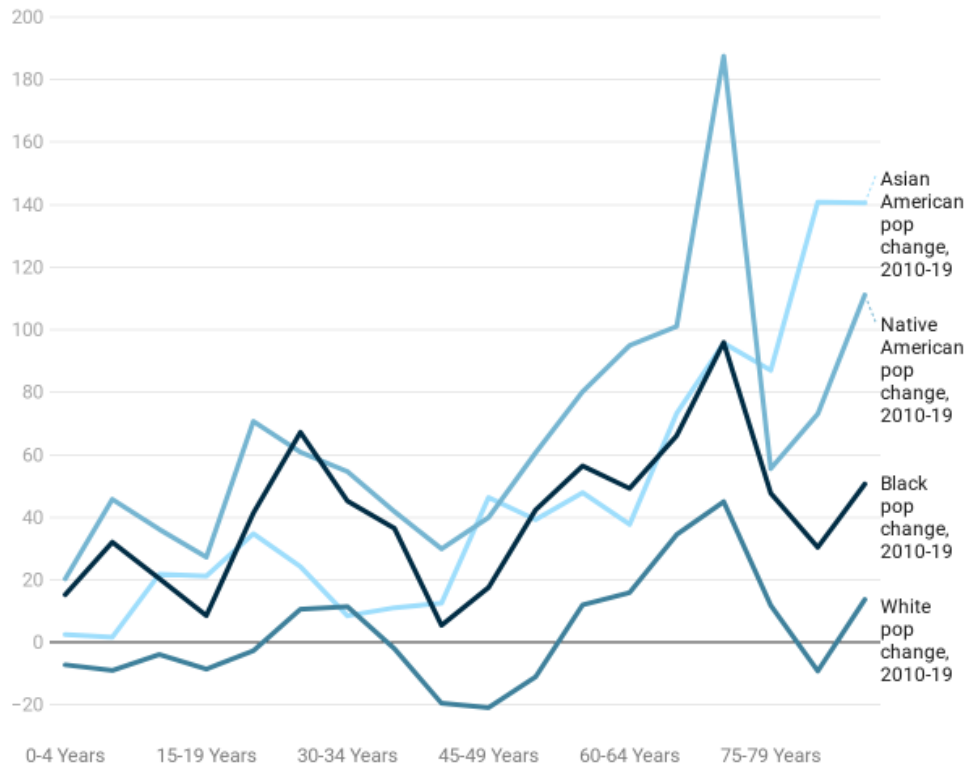
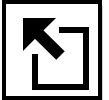


Chart: ADAM RICHTER - READING EAGLE • Source: U.S. Census Bureau estimates, 2010-2019 • Created with Datawrapper

Population change by race, 2010-19



That's also the only group that didn't lose population. And that could spell trouble, according to Michael Golembiewski, a transportation planner with county planning commission.

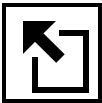
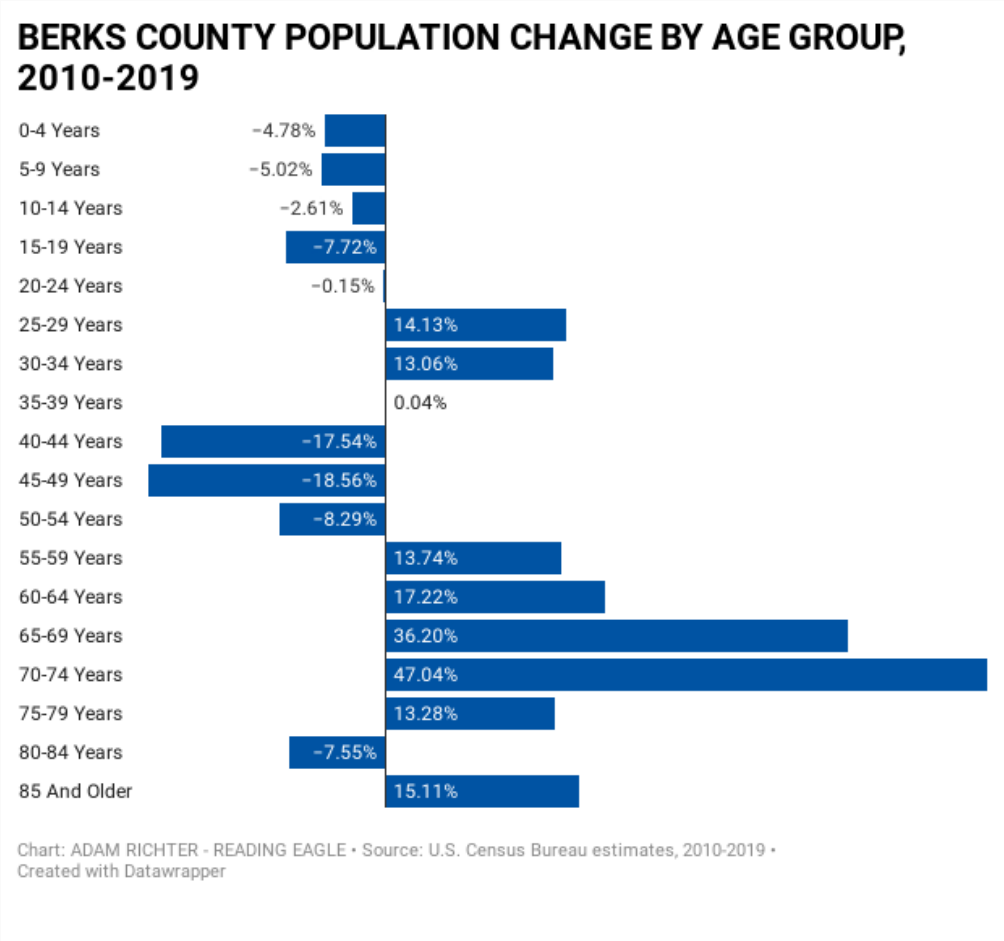
"We've got serious workforce issues coming at us right now," he said in an interview this week.

The county's total population rose by 2.2% from 2010 to 2019, according to the bureau's estimates. Normally, Golembiewski said, that growth should be closer to 8% or 9%.

And it's not just the recent past that should be concerning, Golembiewski said. The 55-64 age group also rose 15%, and in a decade that's who will be leaving the workforce.

Demographically, the aging of Berks County appears to be universal.

The black population grew by 31% since 2010, but in that group, the 65-and-older crowd increased by 64%. Native Americans and Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent have a much smaller share of the population in Berks, but they, too, had a big population growth in the over-65 group.



Population change by age group, 2010-19

In the future, that means the demand for services for seniors will increase, things like in-home care, etc., according to Dr. Ed Michalik, executive director of the Berks County Area Agency on Aging. For now, at least, the county has been able to accommodate the rapid growth of seniors.

“Right now, we’re doing OK. We’re holding our own and services are growing,” Michalik said.

The bureau’s annual estimates show population by age and race, as well as Hispanic origin.

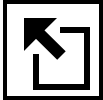
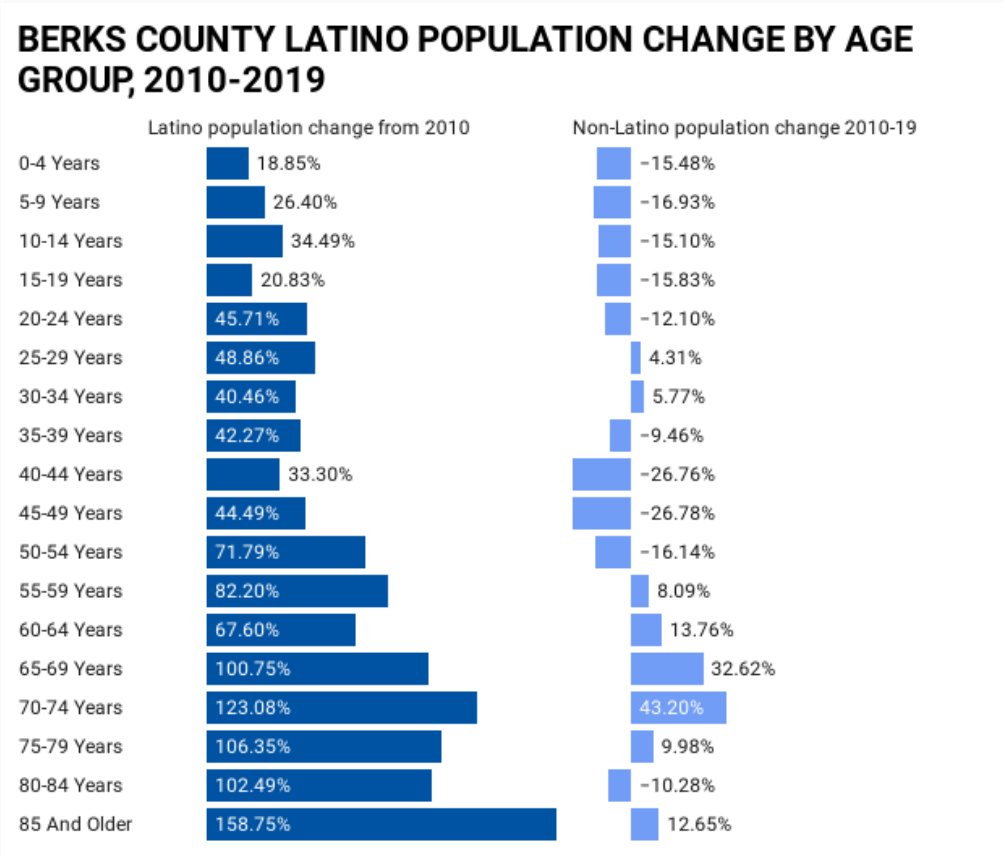
The figures are calculated based on the decennial census, plus births, minus deaths and plus net migration in a given year. The estimates provide the basis for the annual American Community Surveys, which go into more detail about population trends.

“It looks good compared to 2010, but it doesn’t look so good when you project it out,” Fogarty said.

Berks Countians over 65 accounted for 14% of the population in 2010. By 2019, they were up to 17%.

Diversity on the rise

The white population in Berks has declined over the past nine years. In 2010, 90% of Berks Countians identified as white alone. In 2010, that figure dropped to 87%. In most age groups under 55, the population of people who identify as white (alone or in combination with another race) fell, with the exception of people 25-34.



The other races – Blacks, Native Americans, Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent – all had increases in population across every age group. The Black population in Berks was 40,374 in 2019, a 31% increase from the start of the decade. Residents identifying as Black (alone or in combination with another race) now comprise 9.6% of the Berks County population.

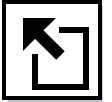
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The number of people who identify as Native American increased by nearly half, from 4,827 in 2010 to 7,191 in 2019, while the Asian-American population rose by a little more than 25%: from 8,086 in 2010 to 10,155 in 2019.

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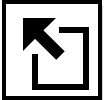


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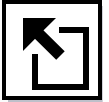
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