

# Migration into Hamilton on upswing

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** For audio with this story and to read the planning agency report, go to [www.tennesseepress.com](http://www.tennesseepress.com).

By **MATT WILSON**

Staff Writer

After eight consecutive years of more people moving out of Hamilton County than moving in, the county showed a net gain of new migrants in 2005 and 2006, according to a recent study.

"I would hope that the negative trend we've been seeing has turned," said Byron Cox, a senior planner with the Char-

■ *Some of the new residents are Hurricane Katrina evacuees.*

tanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency, which conducted the study.

Mr. Cox presented results of the study to the Hamilton County Commission on Thursday.

The county had a net gain of 515 households between 2005 and 2006; the study shows.

From 1997 to 2004, Hamilton County lost residents each year,

## NET MIGRATION

■ 2005-06:	515 households gained
■ 2004-05:	51 households gained
■ 2003-04:	68 households lost
■ 2002-03:	211 households lost
■ 2001-02:	124 households lost
■ 2000-01:	369 households lost

Source: Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency

according to the study. In 1998, the county had a net loss of 484 households.

Mr. Cox said the planning agency based the study on information from federal tax records. Tax filers whose addresses

changed from one year to the next were counted as migrants between counties, he said.

The reasons for why more people are moving into Hamilton County are not entirely clear, Mr. Cox said.

"I really can't pinpoint any particular reason," he said.

About 200 households moving into the county were evacuees from Hurricane Katrina, according to the report.

Mary Louise Maes, 80, left New Orleans for Hamilton County the day before Katrina slammed ashore in 2005. Ms. Maes' granddaughter's husband has family here, so they drove in a caravan toward Chattanooga.

"We're all contented, as much as we're going to be," Ms. Maes said. "I'm not going back. I have

## Population

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nothing to go back to."

In addition to the evacuees who made their way here on their own, 130 ailing survivors arrived in Chattanooga nearly a week after the storm aboard a plane chartered by former Vice President Al Gore.

But about three-fifths of migrants into the county in 2005 and 2006 were not Katrina evacuees, the report shows. Most came from counties in Georgia and Tennessee that border Hamilton.

Dr. Doug Bachtel, a demographer at the University of Georgia, said quality-of-life issues are the driving force for people who decide to move.

"The school system plays a real big role in that," he said. Dr. Bachtel said one factor

“The school system plays a real big role in (deciding to move).”

— Doug Bachtel, demographer

could be the availability in Tennessee of HOPE scholarships, which have been available in Georgia since 1993.

"If you're a middle- or upper-middle-class parent, you're going to put the hammer down and try to get your kid a HOPE scholarship," he said.

Tennessee started its lottery, which provides funds for HOPE scholarships, in 2004.

Mr. Cox mentioned to the commission that survey data showed that people who moved

from Hamilton County to North Georgia cited housing as a main concern.

"They felt like they could get more house for the money," he said.

David Eichenbahl, president and CEO of the Chattanooga-based Community Research Council, said Chattanooga simply has become a more attractive place to live, especially for young adults and retirees. He said legal immigrants into the area also have boosted the population.

Mr. Eichenbahl also noted that his own research based on EPB data has shown migration coming from places beyond surrounding counties.

The U.S. Census Bureau revised Chattanooga's population estimate upward by about 13,000 in November after the city challenged the count.

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