

---

States vie for snowbirds in census counts  
By ZACH PATBERG STAFF WRITER  
March 15, 2010 01:05 AM

Steve Paseltiner doesn't know it yet, but he's about to be a high-value player - one upon whom governments in two states are spending big money to secure an allegiance.

Being among the thousands of so-called snowbirds who spend winters under southern sun, the 74-year-old Lakewood resident and his wife Esta soon will find themselves pulled both ways by New Jersey and Florida in the decennial tug-of-war for inclusion in their census counts.

Like Middle America states during a national election, these migrants, normally left alone to bask in retirement, suddenly are thrust into the focus of television ads, mailed solicitations and awareness seminars as states compete for population boosters and, subsequently, federal dollars. And no county in New Jersey needs snowbirds more than Ocean, which has one of the largest per capita senior populations in the nation.

But the Paseltiners don't know this. They became seasonal residents of Delray Beach, Fla., five years ago and so missed out on the courting pressures of the 2000 Census.

"That's interesting," Steve Paseltiner, a retired high school teacher, said from his Florida home. "My place here is purely to get away, but I'd certainly not like to see New Jersey lose any more revenue than it's been losing."

Neither would New Jersey, which, in fact, is bracing to lose more than just funding. With its population growth lagging behind others, the state likely will shed a congressional seat in 2012, meaning less representation on the federal level.

"We have to find about 30,000 votes to not lose a seat," said Sharon Schulman, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

That's about as many people as Ocean County suspects it missed in the last census, said David McKeon, the county's planner. Some of them were wary immigrants. Others were lazy citizens who neglected to return census forms. And, given that nearly a third of the county's residents are seniors over 60, still others likely were snowbirds.

Ocean has a lot riding on an accurate count on April 1: Over the last decade, it appears to have bucked the state's stagnant population trend and grown significantly, a fact local political operatives hope to capitalize on when congressional districts are reshaped and the concentration of power is shifted.

And so county officials have devoted a sizeable chunk of their \$9,000 census promotion budget and much of

Gov. Charlie Crist allocated \$147,000 this year to target them, a representative of the governor said.

New Jersey, by contrast, did not include any money for census outreach in its 2010 budget, said Kevin Smith, of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Instead, the state is relying on local groups to spread the word.

But in the end, bureaucracy aside, the decision on where to be counted falls to the snowbird. And it's a difficult one for John and Gretchen Coyle, who these days split their year evenly between Long Beach Township and Useppa Island, Fla. In 2000, Gretchen Coyle didn't think to be counted down south and found it odd when she saw Florida census workers canvassing around her remote home. This year, she's not yet sure.

"I don't know. I haven't gotten that far," she said, adding, "We've heard nothing from New Jersey and nothing from down here."

If past is prologue, she likely will.

- Earth Day experiencing a midlife crisis
- Gas main struck in Middletown; no one injured

H0032.9(u)1