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Louisville growing better educated

But some parts of city lag far behind others

By **Marcus Green**

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The Courier-Journal

Louisville residents increasingly are better educated and have stronger ties to their native state than the rest of the country, according to data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau.

They're people like Casey Hyland, a 34-year-old glass artist whose craft took him to five states before he moved back to Louisville five years ago to be closer to his extended family.

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"We're basically your old-time craftspeople trying to make a go of it," said Hyland, a graduate of Washington University in St. Louis who works out of the downtown Glassworks building.

But Louisville is still struggling to bridge its education divide -- with residents of the city's central and eastern portions up to four times



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Casey Hyland, a glass artist who moved back to Louisville five years ago, worked yesterday at Glassworks while McKinley Moore watched. Louisville and Kentucky residents are more likely to stay in their native state than the rest of the nation. By Michael Hayman, The Courier-Journal

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as likely to have a college degree as those living in the west and southwest.

It's a gap that worries Ron Crouch, director of the Kentucky State Data Center, who says Louisville needs a more skilled and educated work force to fill the technical jobs that will replace the disappearing manufacturing sector.

"We're losing the blue-collar jobs that require muscle power,"

Crouch said. "And more and more to make it you have to have a higher degree of education, and I think that certainly does show some real concerns for not only west Louisville but also southwestern Jefferson County."

Those findings are included in a Census Bureau report that provides the most detailed snapshot of large cities and counties in the United States since the 2000 census.

It is part of an annual survey that ultimately is intended to replace the 10-year census.

Kentucky trails nation

The report shows that roughly 85 percent of Louisville residents have a high school diploma.

And it says a larger share of the population has a college degree -- 27 percent last year, when the survey was taken, up from nearly 24 percent in 2000.

But while education levels in Louisville and Lexington exceed the national average, Kentucky as a whole still lags behind the rest of the country.

Less than one-fifth of Kentucky residents older than 25 have completed a college degree, compared with 21 percent in Indiana. Nationwide, 27 percent of the population has earned at least a bachelor's degree.

Dave Adkisson, president and CEO of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, said education and economic development "are very closely linked, and we have got to improve the number of folks with college degrees for our incomes and our job opportunities to increase."

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Education officials say the state has made strides since 1997, when Kentucky passed a bill aimed at increasing the number of residents who enroll in and graduate from college.

Students earning associate, bachelor's, graduate and professional degrees from Kentucky's public and independent four-year colleges and universities rose 23 percent between 1998 and 2005, according to the Council on Postsecondary Education.

The nonprofit Greater Louisville Project announced last month that for Louisville to compete favorably with other regional cities, it must double to 10,000 the increase in the number of young adults with a bachelor's degree by 2010.

"The kind of work that will be stable and secure and earn good wages will require the higher levels of educational attainment," said Carolyn Gatz, the project's director.

In Southern Indiana, 18 percent of Clark County residents and 21 percent of Floyd County residents have attained a bachelor's degree.

Most remain in state

The data also show that Louisville and Kentucky residents are more likely to stay in their native state than the rest of the nation.

More than 70 percent of those residents are living in the state where they were born, compared with less than 60 percent of U.S. residents.

More than 80 percent live in the same house as the year before, the data show, and they are far less likely to have been born in a different country.

Louisville is older and slightly less diverse than the nation. Its median age, 38.3, is about two years older than the national average. About 76 percent of the city's population is white, compared with 75 percent nationally.

Crouch said the city's smaller foreign-born and minority populations could hurt Louisville, keeping it older than competing cities such as Memphis, Nashville and Indianapolis.


"It ... gives them a younger work force and also makes them competitive with a future that's becoming more diverse," Crouch said.

Louisville's Hispanic population was estimated at about 2 percent, well below the nationwide population's 15 percent, although Crouch and other experts believe the actual percentage of Hispanics locally is much higher.

Ben Ruiz, a Louisville advertising executive who recently helped create the Greater Louisville Hispanic Latino Business Council, said his organization is working with middle school students who aren't native English speakers.

"We couldn't help but notice that the kids that are learning English as a second language are far ahead of a past generation where English wasn't stressed as much," Ruiz said. "These kids are just gobbling up everything they can learn."

Reporter Marcus Green can be reached at (502) 582-4675.

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One problem in encouraging education is the number of places that advertise specifically for a college graduate, and then pass over applicants with degrees in favor of someone without. (And for the record, the CJ, in the past, has paid for college degrees yet been unwilling to promote from within those individuals, only to have them take their degrees and go elsewhere.)

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