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## More young workers lured to Louisville

Area still older than competing cities

By **Marcus Green**  
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The Courier-Journal

After three years in Cary, N.C., and eight in Nashville, Tenn., Tess McNair and her husband, Dan, settled in Louisville in 2003.

For Dan, it was a return to his hometown. For Tess, who was raised in suburban Dallas and Hartford, Conn., it was a move to "one of the most vibrant cities I've ever lived in."

City	County	State	Median age
Louisville	Jefferson Co., Ky.		38.2
Nashville	Davidson Co., Tenn.		35.5
Indianapolis	Marion Co., Ind.		34.5
Memphis	Shelby Co., Tenn.		34.5
Charlotte	Mecklenburg Co., N.C.		34.2

U.S. Census Bureau 2004 American Community Survey By Steve Jurbin, The Courier-Journal

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metropolitan area during the late 1990s.

But, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Louisville is still older than many of the regional cities it competes with for companies, jobs and young, educated workers.

Jefferson County's median age in 2004 was 38.2 -- about three years older than Nashville, and about four years older than Memphis, Tenn.; Indianapolis; Atlanta; Charlotte, N.C.; and Columbus, Ohio.

The big reason?

Louisville lacks diversity, said Ron Crouch, director of the Kentucky State Data Center at the University of Louisville.

The census data, released last year as part of the annual survey of American communities, illustrates that "diversity is going to play a key role in the future in terms of economic development, because the white population is aging," Crouch said.

In 2004, 75 percent of Jefferson County residents were white, compared with 66 percent in Indianapolis' Marion County, 62 percent in Nashville's Davidson County and 57 percent in Charlotte's Mecklenburg County.

Nationwide, Crouch said, minorities are the only growing segment of America's population younger than age 45.

For Jefferson County to be competitive with those other counties, "we're going to have to attract foreign-born and the Hispanic population," he said.

### Making progress

Jefferson has made progress, officials said. As of last year, 4.2 percent of the county's residents were born outside the United States -- up from 3.4 percent

"It feels young because there's so much to do," said Tess McNair, 31, a Humana communications manager.

Despite concerns about a "brain drain," the metro Louisville area is doing a better job attracting young people like the McNairs. A study released last fall found that workers ages 25 to 29 were the biggest group of newcomers to the



Tess McNair, 31, a Humana communications manager, and her husband settled in Louisville in 2003. She called Louisville "one of the most vibrant cities I've ever lived in."

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in 2000 and 1.5 percent in 1990.

The census numbers probably understate the immigrant population, said Carol Young, director of Kentucky Refugee Ministries, which has settled 400 to 500 refugees over the last five years.

Many of the refugees, who Young said "are extremely motivated to go to work," come from African and former Soviet countries, although she estimated that as many as 40 percent are fleeing Cuba.

Nearly 16,000 Jefferson County residents are Hispanic, representing slightly more than 2 percent of the population.

Louisville businessman Ben Ruiz Sr., chief executive of Louisville's Adhawk advertising agency, is helping form a local Hispanic chamber of commerce.

Among its goals, Ruiz said, are to create an awareness of the Hispanic business community, educate young Hispanics about career opportunities and offer scholarships.

"As a group, Hispanics are a lot younger than the general population, so our whole focus is going to be on youth -- starting with middle school kids," Ruiz said.

### Growth in the '90s

Even with Jefferson County's population getting older, the largest group of newcomers during the late 1990s were those in their mid- to late-20s, according to the recently released "Human Linkages: The Metro Migration Report."

The research, by Michael Price, Kentucky state demographer at the University of Louisville's Urban Studies Institute, and U of L economist Paul Coomes, was done for KentuckianaWorks, the work-force development agency for Louisville Metro Government.

"Up until the '90s we were losing that segment of our population," Price said. "They were migrating out. But in the '90s it turned around and we began to actually attract those folks."

Shelby Lasley is among them.

Lasley, 28, moved from Muncie, Ind., last year for his job as a sales consultant with TK Constructors. He also was considering Bloomington, Ind., and Columbus, Ohio, but chose Louisville.

"It's just a neat city," Lasley said. "There are a lot of happenings here."

Michael Gritton, KentuckianaWorks' executive director, said recent developments such as new downtown housing near Waterfront Park are a "way of holding on to young people or attracting young people around the region."

Still, he said, the Louisville area needs to do a better job of bringing workers here at a younger age.

"That's going to have to do partly with the kind of quality of life that we're talking about and partly about the job opportunities," Gritton said.

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