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## Auburn-Opelika area seriously undercounted in 1990 Census

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Staff Writer

Miriam Bader spent hours going over Opelika's Census 2000 mailing list, penciling in — by hand — 3,000 missed addresses.

That's how important this year's census is to Lee County.

Those addresses represent perhaps 8,000 people, estimated Bader, an Opelika city planner who has been working with a city committee to maximize the count.

The 8,000 names are vital because Lee County was recently awarded "Metropolitan Statistical Area" status, based on an estimated population topping 100,000. Now, the county has to prove it, because that designation is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal funds.

The problem is that the Auburn-Opelika area "came up on the radar screen" as seriously undercounted in the 1990 Census, said William Rankin, a representative of the Census Monitoring Board in Maryland. Rankin was in town last week to offer suggestions for making sure everyone is counted.

"Roughly 10 percent of the population won't get touched or reached by the Census, and those are the ones you will need the most," Rankin said.

Lee County's population is now estimated to be just over 102,000. Even a 3 percent undercount could jeopardize that count and the funds that go with it.

Medicaid, the government's health insurance for the poorest citizens, receives local funding based on the number of residents counted in the census. The same goes for housing, child care, drug-use prevention efforts and many other important programs.

Historically undercounted are minorities, especially children.

In 1990, Rankin estimated, U.S. population was undercounted by somewhere between five and seven million, and perhaps three million of those missed were children.

Fear about confidentiality is sometimes the reason forms aren't returned, Rankin said. Census workers, however, are solemnly sworn to support and uphold the Constitution and are not allowed to divulge any information.

Divulging Census information is punishable by 10 years in prison and \$10,000 in fines, and Rankin said the Census Board has an unblemished record. Information has never been divulged in 200 years, despite the fact that authorities have demanded access to records. Records can't be shared with the Internal Revenue Service, law enforcement officials, welfare or immigration offices or the housing authority.

Tomorrow: Where to get help with the Census

## The "Smiths" Area has averaged over 600 New Homes per year

## Lee County's population had a faster rate of growth than 59 of Alabama's 67 counties last year.

## Schools have grown over 50% in only 6 years!!



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## Lee County among growth-rate leaders

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Staff and wire reports

Lee County's population had a faster rate of growth than 59 of Alabama's 67 counties last year.

Newcomers gave Lee County a 1.7 percent boost in population, which now has a total head count of 102,164, according to 1998-99 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Lee's percentage of growth was preceded by Shelby (3.9), Bibb (3.2), St. Clair (3), Elmore (2.4), Blount (2.4), Baldwin (2.2) and Chilton (1.8) counties' rates for last year.

The population-gain statistics have caused Census watchers to conclude that many people are moving within Alabama from rural areas to metropolitan areas.

Census estimates for 1998-99 showed Alabama's overall population grew 0.4 percent to 4.3 million. For the decade ending last year, the state's population grew 8.2 percent.

Were it not for the recent establishment of a large prison population in Sussex County, Va., a county just north of Atlanta would have been the nation's fastest growing county for the second year in a row. Forsyth County, Ga., grew by 11.9 percent last year.

In Alabama, the top 10-fastest growing counties all lie within reach of a metropolitan area with the exception of Bibb County, where population growth has been stimulated by jobs in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham.

Counties surrounding metro areas have continued to grow because of the current economic prosperity, reversing an exodus of residents that hit the state in the 1980s, said Center for Business and Economic Research Assistant Director Annette Watters.

While counties surrounding Birmingham grew last year, Jefferson County showed a slight drop in population from 660,039 to 657,422 — down 0.4 percent. Next door in Shelby County, significant growth has been going on for 12 to 15 years, said County Manager Alex Dudchock.

Montgomery County has grown 3.2 percent to 215,813 residents over the decade, but slightly lost population last year — down 0.7 percent.

LOSERS:  
Choctaw, -2 — 15,518  
Marion, -1.3 — 30,464  
Conecuh, -1 — 13,728

Source: U.S. Census

### By The Numbers

Here are the top population gainers with 1 percent or more growth and population total; and losers with 1 percent or more decline for 1998-99:

#### GAINERS:

Shelby, 3.9	— 146,392
Bibb, 3.2	— 19,601
St. Clair, 3	— 63,852
Elmore, 2.4	— 63,488
Blount, 2.4	— 47,411
Baldwin, 2.2	— 135,820
Chilton, 1.8	— 37,604
Lee, 1.7	— 102,164
Winston, 1.4	— 24,459
Limestone, 1.3	— 63,037
Randolph, 1.2	— 20,263
Cleburne, 1.2	— 14,456
DeKalb, 1.2	— 58,948
Cullman, 1	— 75,661
Lawrence, 1	— 33,795