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The Exodus Of The Young

Young Adults Continue To Leave Stonington And Connecticut In Record Numbers: What It Means And Why You Should Care

By Bree Shirvell | Email the author | February 8, 2011

7 Comments

Walk around Stonington, Mystic or Pawcatuck and it's easy to run into a number of people of different ages, but only a small portion of those people will be between the ages of 25 and 34.

Connecticut continues to lose the younger members of its workforce at a startling rate. A rate that, according to [Central Connecticut State University](#), continues to be higher than any other state in the country since 2000.

While the results of the 2010 Census have not yet been fully released, the initial estimates available suggest the problem of the so-called "graying" of the state isn't going away anytime soon. And Stonington, Mystic and Pawcatuck serve as prime examples of an aging state.

The profiles from the [American Community Survey](#), produced annually, report the median age in the United States as 36.5. In Connecticut, the median age is 39.0. But the median age is still higher in Stonington, Mystic and Pawcatuck. In Pawcatuck, the median age is 40.1, in the town of Stonington it is 44.5, in Mystic it is 46.9, and in the Borough it is 48.7, a staggering 12.2 years older than the national average.

Focus specifically on the 25 to 34 age range, and the aging of the local community becomes even more evident. Nationally, 13.4 percent of the population falls between the ages 25 and 34. All areas of Stonington, Mystic and Pawcatuck fall below the national average. The lowest percentage is the town of Stonington at 7.1 percent, followed by Mystic at 8.1 percent, and Pawcatuck at 8.4 percent.

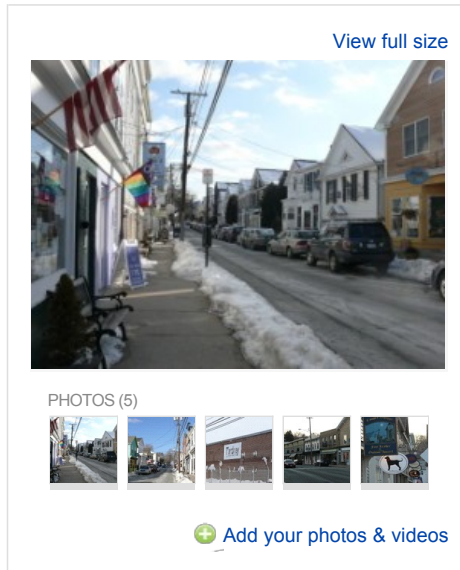
The numbers indicate the local area is aging faster than the national average, and faster than the many Connecticut towns, but what does it matter in the long run?

Tim Plungis of Mystic, a former candidate for representative of Mystic's 41st district, believes the problem will affect everyone, especially older generations.

"The younger generation that is educated may have already moved away, thus unable to support the aging population through tax revenues for programs many seniors rely on," Plungis said. "If we continue down the path of losing more and more young adults we will see difficulties within job growth as well as sustainability of programs that have expanded and grown over time."

[Stonington Human Services](#) Director Beth Stewart echoed Plungis's remarks.

"Both Connecticut and Stonington should be very concerned about our state leading the nation in the



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exodus of our youngest workers,” Stewart said.

And First Selectman Edward Haberek Jr. said the loss of young people is a very concerning one that presents a cyclical problem, where businesses don't want to come to the area because of the lack of young talent and young workers can't afford to stay without jobs and affordable housing.

“It's a deterrent to get businesses to come into the area,” Haberek said.

Housing

Stonington ranks [46th out of 169](#) in terms of least affordable towns and cities in Connecticut to purchase a home. In other words, there are 123 town and cities that are more affordable.

According to the American Community Survey, while the nationally median home value was \$185,400, the median home value in Pawcatuck was \$268,400, in the town of Stonington it was \$338,700, in Mystic it was \$398,400, and in the Borough it was \$675,000.

“The lack of affordable housing is a significant contributing factor,” Stewart said of the housing problem Stonington faces.

Stonington's [Affordable Housing Committee](#) has discussed a number of strategies to make housing in the area more affordable in a 2008 report. One is to provide a diversity of housing choices. The report states that over 72 percent of the housing are single-family homes, compared to only 7 percent of the housing that has five or more units.

Haberek said the town is also trying to improve so-called workforce housing. The Affordable Housing Committee defines workforce housing as housing for people that earn between 80 to 120 percent of the area's median income who can't afford a house or apartment in Stonington, but make too much to qualify for housing subsidies.

“Young workers can't afford to live in the area without living with their parents,” Haberek said.

Jobs

Young people go where the jobs are, and for those who want to begin their own business, Connecticut is not without its share of obstacles.

A 2010 CNBC report ranked Connecticut nationally 35 out of 50 for [“America's Top States for Business,”](#) which took into account factors such as the cost of doing business and cost of living.

With the recent news that Yardney Technical Products in Pawcatuck is moving to Rhode Island and [Pfizer](#) is laying off 1,100 workers, it's easy to see that companies don't look on the area favorably.

Plungis, who recently graduated from UConn, says he would love to stay in the area but doesn't think it's possible.

“I am currently seeking employment in Fairfield County. Not because I want to be some rich hedge fund manager, but because they have jobs out there,” Plungis said.

Rob Hunter, co-owner of Dockside Dogs, is one of the local exceptions. A self-employed, young professional in Stonington Borough, but still he says one of the main reasons young professionals leave the state is because of jobs.

“Most young people I know let their occupation choose their location, it's the rare few who choose location and then look for employment opportunities,” Hunter said.

Lifestyle

While housing and jobs are important factors, many young people will factor in lifestyle when deciding where to live.

“A faster paced lifestyle is also what many eager young people, just out of college and excited to take on new opportunities, are looking for,” Hunter said. “Larger cities have many more amenities, more nightlife, restaurants, shopping, events, even grocery stores and of course, more young people.”

While the area may offer many things not found anywhere else, especially the access to the shoreline, the lack of a vibrant community is another example of the cyclical problem. Jobs and

affordable housing bring young workers to the area, young workers bring jobs to the area, young workers bring entrepreneurship to the area.

“More young professionals cultivate entrepreneurship,” Haberek said. “The amount of young people keeps a community thriving.”

Are you concerned by our area's loss of young workers? [Tell us in the comments.](#)