

## **In 2006, Hanover's poverty rate was 2.6%**

Wednesday, Aug 29, 2007 - 12:09 AM

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New census figures released yesterday listed Hanover County with the lowest poverty rate in the nation among counties of its population.

Census data also revealed that the median household income in Virginia rose \$320 dollars, from \$55,957 in 2005 to \$56,277 last year, the ninth highest in the country. The national median household income was \$48,200, a slim increase from the previous year.

The U.S. Census Bureau's data showed that for counties and localities with populations of 65,000 to 249,999, Hanover's poverty rate was 2.6 percent last year, compared with the national rate of 12.3 percent.

Fauquier County in Northern Virginia had a poverty rate of 3.9 percent in 2006, ranking it 10th among the lowest poverty rates for the same size population as Hanover. Among the nation's largest cities and counties, the top 10 for low poverty rates included Loudoun County at 2.9 percent and Virginia Beach at 7.2 percent.

Hanover's rate was a surprise to Donna T. Douglas, director of the county's Department of Social Services. She said she recently saw data from the United Way estimating that 5.4 percent of Hanover's residents lived in poverty in 2005.

Douglas cautioned that a low poverty rate doesn't reflect the many other residents who can't make their mortgage, car and day-care payments without assistance.

"It's the population between the above-poverty [group] and the self-sufficiency standard that cross our doors every day," she said.

Other experts pointed to development in Hanover that focuses on single-family homes. Poverty is generally lowest among married families and highest among households headed by a single woman.

"Hanover County is family-concentrated," said demographer Qian Cai at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia.

U.Va. sociologist Steven Nock noted that large numbers of young people could contribute to the county's low poverty rate. He suggested that Fauquier's rate may be a blip produced by the construction boom, which would employ large numbers of single males.

The percentage of Virginians living in poverty last year was 9.6 percent, or 708,568 people, down from 10 percent in 2005, according to the Census Bureau. It was the seventh lowest rate in the country.

The nation's poverty rate also dropped last year, the first significant decline since 2000. Nationwide, 36.5 million Americans, or 12.3 percent, lived in poverty last year, a dip from 12.6 percent in 2005.

The government's definition of the poverty level differs by family size and makeup. For a family of four with two children, for example, the poverty level is \$20,444.

The state's income is concentrated in Northern Virginia. Fairfax and Loudoun counties had the nation's highest 2006 median household incomes among counties with 250,000 or more residents. Arlington County had one of the highest household incomes among counties with populations between 65,000 and 249,999.

"If you took them out, I think Virginia would look a lot more like your typical Southern state," said Martin Wegbreit, senior managing attorney with the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. "You do have that influx in Northern Virginia, and that's good. That helps tremendously with the economic health all over the

state. But that doesn't mean there isn't poverty everywhere, including Northern Virginia."

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Staff writer Will Jones contributed to this report.