

Gap widens between OC rich, poor

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

County median income rises to \$45,922

By Donna Wares

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US Census figures released Monday confirm what social-service workers have been seeing for several years: that the gulf between Orange County's wealthy residents and the working poor is widening.

The 1990 census portrays the county as a disparate and diverse urban area where the median income rose to \$45,922 — a 23 percent increase, adjusted for inflation, from the previous decade.

At the same time, the number of people living in poverty climbed, too. In 1990, 200,860 people were living below the poverty line — 8.5 percent of the population, compared with 7 percent a decade earlier.

The living standard for Orange County children was slightly worse. Eleven percent live in poverty, compared with 9 percent in 1980.

The poverty level is defined as a family of four earning less than \$12,674 a year.

"While it's not surprising, it's just as disturbing as it ever has been," said Clarence Ray, executive director of the Orange County Community Development Council. "I was hoping that in the past 10 years we'd find some answers."

The census also found that 31 percent of the county's 2.4 million residents speak a language other than English at home.

Those who own their own homes paid a median mortgage of \$1,317 a month, and one-third spent 30 percent or more of their income each month on house payments.

Renters paid heavily, too. The census showed that 46 percent of county renters spent 30 percent or more of their income on housing alone. Federal housing officials use the 30 percent benchmark as a safe amount to spend.

More Orange County residents are driving to work than ever before. Yet the census showed that

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Changing face of OC

Sample census data show how the county evolved from 1980 to 1990, as its population grew to 2.4 million from 1.9 million.

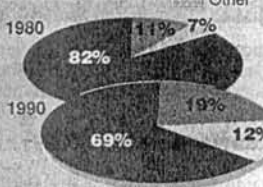
Immigrants made up more of the population ...

Percentage of residents born in foreign countries



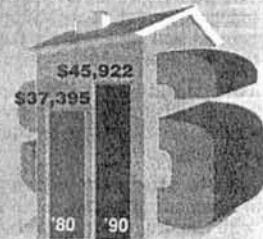
... and fewer spoke primarily English

Primary language of residents



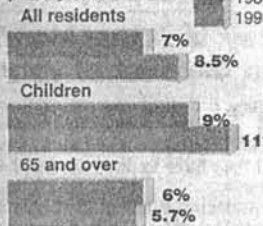
Household income up ...

Median, in 1990 dollars



... but so did poverty

Percentage living below the poverty level



Source: US Census Bureau

The Orange County Register

CENSUS

FROM 1

the percentage of people car-pooling has dipped since 1980, from 16 percent to 13.7 percent of commuters.

The average travel time to work: 25.5 minutes.

The latest snapshot of Orange County's economic, social, educational and housing status comes from the US Census Bureau long-form questionnaire, mailed to one in every six people in 1990.

The figures show that Orange County still fares better than other parts of the state in areas such as unemployment — 4.8 percent in the county vs. 6.6 percent statewide — and poverty rates — 8.5 percent in the county vs. 12.5 percent statewide.

But Angelo Doti, director of financial assistance for Orange County's Social Service Agency, said the local demand for programs such as welfare, Medicare and other assistance has doubled and tripled since 1988.

Doti said the demand isn't letting up.

"The problem in Orange County is that we are growing faster than the statewide average," he said. And the demand is likely to increase, he said, if there are federal cutbacks in defense spending, a lifeline to many local industries.

"Certainly, throwing in a two-year recession didn't help anything," Doti said.

In other areas, census figures for the county also showed:

■ The number of elderly residents living in poverty remained steady at 6 percent in 1980, compared with 6.5 percent in 1990.

■ The number of people 25 and older with four years or more of college increased from 23 percent in 1980 to 27.8 percent in 1990.

■ The number of people working at home increased from 1 percent in 1980 to 4.9 percent in 1990.

■ The number of homes without telephones in 1990 was 19,387; In 1990, it was 12,808.

Statewide, the 1990 census showed that:

■ The median household income was \$35,798.

■ 76.2 percent of residents 25 and older were at least high school graduates, compared with 81.2 percent in Orange County.

■ The poverty rate for single-female households was 26.2 percent, nearly double the 13.5 percent rate in Orange County.