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UNION CO. RANKS 7TH IN GROWTH

BOOMING POPULATIONS KEEPS COUNTY AMONG NATION'S FASTEST GROWING
JULIA OLIVER AND CLAY BARBOUR, STAFF WRITERS

Newcomers propelled two Charlotte-area counties to **rank** among the nation's fastest-growing last year, according to a U.S. Census analysis released today.

Union County ranked seventh among fast-growing U.S. counties with populations over 10,000. Mecklenburg, meanwhile, was 10th **in** sheer number of people gained **in** that time. It added about 32,000 people. The numbers came as no surprise to Bill Tillman, North Carolina's state demographer.

"Some of the same people are losing and some of the same people are gaining," he said.

Union County advertises good schools and lower taxes. It has grown at a faster rate each year since 2002.

The residential boom has strained the water and sewer systems, left schools overcrowded and the county deep **in** debt. **Union** has more debt per capita than any large or medium sized county **in** the state.

Its population grew to about 185,000, according to the estimate. That's up almost 50 percent from 2000.

Union's student population has grown by 84 percent **in** the last decade, said county schools spokeswoman Luan Ingram. **In** that time, the system has built 17 schools and spent more than \$500 million on construction, she said.

Ingram, who has spoken to national groups about school **growth**, says she believes **Union's** school construction rate is unique.

Overall, the 11-county Charlotte region grew by about 79,000. Mecklenburg, with a population of 867,000, is by far the region's biggest county. It grew by 3.8 percent.

Bob Morgan, president and CEO of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, expects that **growth** to continue. He said it means economic opportunity for the region, and also challenges - traffic, pollution and water shortages.

"But it beats the alternative," he said.

N.C. counties that ranked among 100 fastest growing

Union (7th)

Brunswick (17th)

Cabarrus (29th)

Wake (33rd)

Johnston (58th)

Pender (71st)

Mecklenburg (82nd)

Iredell (90th)

Growth rates of area counties:

Union (7.2 %)

Cabarrus (5.0 %)

Mecklenburg (3.8 %)

Iredell (3.6 %)

Lincoln (2.69 %)

Gaston (2.3 %)

Catawba (1.7 %)

Rowan (1.4 %)

Stanly (1.0 %)

Anson (-0.4 %)

