

WEST MICHIGAN VIEWPOINT

A Nation of Campers

We Americans move around a lot. From 1995 to 2000, 46 percent of U.S. residents moved to a new home and 8.4 percent relocated to a new state. But southwest Michigan gets less than its share of that 8.4 percent. From 1995 to 2000, only 6.2 percent of the area's residents have moved here from out-of-state.

The big question is whether the southwest Michigan economy is helped or hindered by the new arrivals. Are they better educated and younger than stayers or persons who moved only from within the borders of the state? The answers are yes and yes. As shown in Table 1, of the individuals who moved to southwest Michigan (comprising Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa and Van Buren counties) between 1995 and 2000 from out-of-state, 35.4 percent held a four-year degree or higher, compared to only 20 percent of the stayers or in-state movers. On the other end of the educational spectrum, out-of-state movers were less likely to be high school dropouts or to have ended their formal education after graduating from high school—33.6 percent, compared to 49.1 percent of those from in-state.

Table 1
Educational Attainment of Southwest Michigan Adults
Age 25 and Older (%)

	Nonmovers and in-state movers	Migrants from other U.S. states
Dropouts	16.0	12.8
H.S. graduates	33.1	20.8
Some college, no degree	23.3	24.0
Associate degree	7.5	7.0
Bachelor's degree	13.4	22.0
Graduate degree	6.6	13.4

Source: U.S. Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Samples

If we look solely at young adults 25 to 34 years old, the same story holds true: individuals who moved into southwest Michigan between 1995 and 2000 are better educated, on average, than stayers or in-state movers. As shown on Table 2, 34.8 percent of individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 years who moved into the nine-county region in those years

Table 2
Educational Attainment of Southwest Michigan Adults
Ages 25 to 34 (%)

	Nonmovers and in-state movers	Migrants from other U.S. states
Dropouts	11.7	11.5
H.S. graduates	30.0	19.8
Some college, no degree	26.3	26.9
Associate degree	9.5	7.0
Bachelor's degree	18.6	26.0
Graduate degree	4.0	8.8

Source: U.S. Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Samples

held a four-year degree or higher, compared with only 22.6 percent of stayers or in-state movers.

As for the age profile for our new neighbors who come from out-of-state, 61.3 percent are younger than 35 years of age, compared with only 45.2 percent of the stayers or in-state movers. Many of the movers from out-of-state are young parents with children or are college students. By the way, to no one's surprise, the state is not a retirement mecca for out-of-state residents.

Table 3
Age Profile of Southwest Michigan Residents
by Migration Status (%)

Age	Nonmovers and in-state movers	Migrants from other U.S. states
5 to 18	21.8	23.1
18 to 24	10.1	14.6
25 to 34	13.3	23.6
35 to 44	17.2	18.5
45 to 54	14.8	10.4
55 to 64	9.3	4.1
65 and older	13.5	5.7

Source: U.S. Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Samples

We need to attract more people from out-of-state. Education matters, not only to the success of the individual but to the success of the region at large. Regardless of industry, earnings and productivity are tied to the level of educational achievement of a region's labor force. Clearly, this means that the competitiveness of southwest Michigan rests, in part, on the region's ability to attract and retain educated workers.

Attracting new residents from out-of-state is not an easy task, however. While it is true that advancements in communication technology are allowing greater mobility, highly trained and educated workers still flock to larger metropolitan areas, which offer more career opportunities for two-career households. Plus it is hard to compete against the cultural and recreational offerings of San Diego, Portland, or Boston, especially for young adults.

Still, southwest Michigan has great neighborhoods, short commutes, affordable housing, and Lake Michigan. By itself, the region's affordable housing offering must be very tempting to young professionals living on either of the two coasts, especially to those in Southern California.

A common complaint I have heard around our region is that our brightest kids do not stick around. This may be true, but this has been a problem ever since the founding of Paris. Compared to small towns, big cities are exciting and offer economic opportunities for young educated adults. Yet for the 28-year-old professionals who are tired of being house-poor and stuck in traffic all their lives, southwest Michigan might sound pretty good. If only they knew about it.