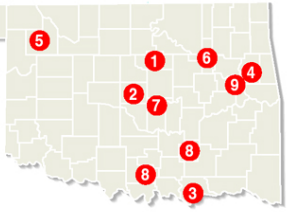


TULSA WORLD

Stillwater's growth tops in Oklahoma

Metropolitan and micropolitan changes

Rank/City	% change	Population Increase	Oklahoma statistical area changes 2000-2007. Ranked by highest percent increase.
1 Stillwater	17	11,741	
2 Oklahoma City	8.9	97,568	
3 Durant	8.3	3,029	
4 Tahlequah	6.8	2,872	
5 Woodward	5.5	1,019	
6 Tulsa	5.4	46,223	
7 Shawnee	5.4	3,517	
8 Ardmore	4.1	2,242	
8 Ada	4.1	1,428	
9 Muskogee	2.4	1,665	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Being equidistant from Tulsa and Oklahoma City doesn't hurt.

The city of Stillwater in recent years has cropped up on a slew of attractive lists, with publications touting everything from its friendliness to livability to public safety.

"Those types of things do have value when people start looking at where they want to live, work and raise a family," said Larry Brown, president and chief executive officer of the Stillwater Chamber of Commerce.

The census folk can attest to that.

With a 17 percent growth rate, Stillwater topped the state in metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas change from 2000-07, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates released Thursday.

In northeastern Oklahoma, Tahlequah ranked fourth. Tulsa was sixth and Muskogee was 10th in the state.

Metropolitan Statistical Areas represent a population of at least 50,000; micropolitan denotes areas between 10,000 and 49,999.

Stillwater's equal distance between the state's two largest cities -- Oklahoma City and Tulsa -- has made it an ideal place for squatting, as well as commuting, Brown said.

It also is home to Oklahoma State University, whose roughly 5,600 jobs make the institution the largest employer in the city. Tonkawa-based Northern Oklahoma opened a Stillwater campus in 2003.

"It's been great because it gets those kids into the atmosphere of Oklahoma State University, the thought being that they can seamlessly transfer from NOC over to Oklahoma State University," Brown said.

He added that Stillwater, whose MSA reached 79,931 in '07, has become a fertile ground for entrepreneurs such as Steve Irby.

Irby, a keyboardist who performed in rock bands in high school and college, founded Stillwater Designs in 1973, building custom speakers in his garage. Seven years later, he developed the original Kicker, a full-range enclosed speaker system designed to fit behind the seat in pickup trucks.

The product launched the Kicker car audio brand, which is sold in all 50 states and in more than 60 countries.

"He is a shining example of what people in Stillwater can accomplish," Brown said.

Tulsa watched its MSA grow by 46,223 from 2000 to 2007, totaling 905,755 in its metropolitan area.

Oklahoma City ranked second and grew by 97,568.

Tahlequah Mayor Ken Purdy wasn't surprised by the population surge in his Illinois River town.

He said the city continues to see residential expansion in all its quadrants. Tahlequah also benefits, he said, from energy generated from Northeastern State University and from being the headquarters of two tribes, the Cherokee Nation and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians.

"Drive around the community and see for yourself," Purdy said. "There is every indicator that we are a growing, thriving community in both the residential aspect and our business sector, as well."

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World staff writer Curtis Killman contributed to this story.

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