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## Fort Worth added more residents than any other North Texas city in 2008

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Fort Worth continues to lead the way for growth in the Metroplex.

Cowtown added 17,400 residents last year — up from 16,000 in 2007 — and now has a population of 720,250, according to figures released Thursday afternoon by the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

But while Fort Worth continues to boom, growth overall in the 16-county North Texas region has slowed, mostly because of declines in the housing market.

Overall, the region's population grew by 92,480; the first time the estimated growth was less than 100,000 in 13 years. Last year, the region added 131,000 residents.

Duane Dankesreiter, manager of research and information services for the North Central Texas council, said the slower growth reflected the mortgage crisis and broader economic recession. Both are scaring off residential construction in the area. Just 27,339 single-family units were built in the region in 2008, a 30 percent drop from the year before.

Construction of new multifamily units kept pace with previous years.

"We still have people coming into the region, but it's definitely slowed," Dankesreiter said. "I don't think it will go too much lower, given that our economy is still better than most out there."

Fort Worth was the leader in growth, but Dallas and Arlington grew as well, Dallas by 6,000 residents and Arlington by 1,300. Tarrant County as a whole gained 27,650 people last year, more than any other county in the North Central Texas region, which is anchored by Dallas, Tarrant, Collin and Denton counties.

Fort Worth Mayor Mike Moncrief attributed the city's growth to its unique quality of life and diverse work force. But with the growth comes the need for more police, fire and other city services.

"As the city grows and our numbers grow, then the demands grow accordingly," Moncrief said. "I'd much rather have 17,400 new people than lose 17,400 Fort Worth citizens, any day."

Dankesreiter admitted to being surprised by Fort Worth's resilience. He had not expected to see the city add more people in 2008 than it did in 2007, he said. He guessed that the new jobs created by the Barnett Shale — a huge natural gas field that lies beneath Fort Worth and other parts of North Texas -- may have been an important factor.

Moncrief agreed that jobs related to activity in the Barnett Shale have helped insulate the city from economic problems that other parts of the country are experiencing.

"I know that Fort Worth is not bulletproof," he said. "I do believe we are going to be affected less. I think we're going to be affected last."

### Mansfield leads the charge

Mansfield saw the largest percentage growth in Tarrant County, a 5.2 percent jump, bringing the city's population to 55,950. Spokeswoman Belinda Willis said the city's building boom began to ebb about four years ago, after several years of seeing requests of more than 1,000 single-housing permits annually.

"If that trend had continued, we'd actually be at 65,000, but that trend has backed off for quite awhile now," Willis said.

Roanoke in Denton County also saw a large increase, growing by 800 people, or 13 percent, to 6,950 people.

### Farmers Branch leads Dallas County

In Dallas County, Farmers Branch had the biggest growth, jumping 8.1 percent to 31,100 people. Spokesman Tom Bryson said city leaders have been working to foster quality mixed-use and multifamily developments. A 2-year-old controversy over aggressive measures to force out illegal immigrants in the city had spurred concerns that it might deter the city's growth.

"I'd say that if you go through anecdotal information, obviously you hear things on both sides, but I think the numbers speak for themselves," Bryson said.

Nearby Addison had by far the largest population drop in the region, of 12.4 percent, which Dankesreiter attributed to the city's demolition of several multifamily units to make room for a new mixed-use development.

The Council of Governments' population estimates are based on current housing inventories and weighed against other statistics including occupancy rates and labor force estimates.