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Southern Islands growth phenomenal

A first look at newly-released 2006 census figures indicates that population growth on the Southern Gulf Islands may be the highest in the province. And Islands residents average nearly the oldest in the province; only the inhabitants of Qualicum Beach are older.

Population growth from 2001–2006 in census division 'Capital G,' which includes Pender, Mayne, Saturna, and Galiano Islands (but not Salt Spring) was 18.6%, compared to growth in the previous five years of 3.6%.

Statistics Canada enumerated 5,101 people living on the Islands, but they occupy only 54.3% of the available dwellings, indicating the existence of a very high percentage of recreational properties and second homes.

On Salt Spring Island (census division Capital F) in 2006 there were 9,640 residents, a mere 3.9% more than in 2001. But they occupied 84.2% of the available dwellings. Population growth from 1996–2001 was even lower at 0.3%.

For comparison, Gabriola Island (census division 'Nanaimo B') showed population growth of 15% from 2001–2006, compared to growth of 1.2% in the previous five years. Residents occupy 72.4% of Gabriola's housing stock.

How Old?

A researcher once cabled Cary Grant (this is an old story): 'How old, Cary Grant? The reply came back: 'Old Cary Grant fine. How you?'

Even though it comes as a surprise to many of us (and we're doing fine), Islanders are getting elderly, like the rest of Canadians. 28.4% of Southern Gulf Islanders, and 22.2% of Salt Spring Islanders, are over 65. Statistically, 20.9% of Gabriola Islanders are seniors.

None of these figures come close to Qualicum Beach, however, which has a seniors' population of 3,490 out of a total of 8,502, or 41%. The median age (in 2006) in Qualicum Beach is 60.9, compared to the Southern Islands at 56.8, Gabriola at 52.9 and Salt Spring at a youthful 51.3.

For the province as a whole, seniors make up only 14.6% of the population, which has a median age of 40.8.

As for youth, 18.9% of Salt Spring's population is under 19; this compares to 11.6% for the Southern Gulf Islands, 15.3% for Gabriola, and 13.7% for Qualicum Beach. The provincial figure is 23.2%.

Building Continues...

The Southern Gulf Islands saw a 10.5% increase in their housing stock in 2001–2006. Compared to the population increase of 18.4%, this may mean that a number of new residents moved into houses that were previously held as recreational properties. Comparative housing stock increases were: Salt Spring: 4.4%, Gabriola: 11.4%, and Qualicum Beach: 20.1%. The province as a whole saw an 8.8% increase in housing stock. ☞

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