

Statewide marketing program to help attract older residents - 5/29/2006

(Killeen-Temple-Fort Hood: Demographics)

The state Agriculture Department launches its "certified retirement community" program this week when it starts accepting applications from towns that want to join a marketing campaign aimed at retirees. "We're going to promote Texas as a retirement destination," said Robert Wood, the assistant commissioner for rural economic development, who will oversee the program created by the 2005 Legislature. Mr. Wood said the state will create a Retire in Texas Web site. "Texas' lower cost of living is drawing retirees from Florida and California," he said. "They're selling their \$500,000 houses, buying \$250,000 homes in Texas and putting the rest into their retirement nest eggs." Especially popular with seniors are small to midsize towns within a couple of hours' drive from big cities. "Retirees want a combination of small-town friendliness and urban amenities," Wake Forest University gerontologist Charles F. Longino Jr. said. Gene Warren, a Phoenix-based consultant, expects as many as one in five boomers, or 15 million Americans, will relocate upon retirement in the next 25 years. "The stakes are enormous," he said. "Each household will spend an average of \$36,000 a year and pay an average of \$3,000 in state and local taxes. That's like adding a job-and-a-half to your community." Because the Legislature appropriated no money for the program, application fees from the towns will finance it. Communities with fewer than 20,000 people will pay \$5,000; others will pay 25 cents per resident. Mr. Longino found in his research that native Texans account for a fifth of the retirees settling in the Lone Star State. These counties are Texas' most popular destinations for out-of-state retirees: 1. Hidalgo (the Valley) 2. Cameron (Brownsville) 3. Bexar (San Antonio) 4. Williamson (Austin area) 5. Collin (North Texas) 6. Bandera, Frio, Gillespie, Kendall, Kerr and Medina (the Hill Country) 7. Parker and Tarrant (Fort Worth area) 8. Chambers, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller (Houston area) 9. Bell and Coryell (Temple-Killeen area) 10. Blanco, Brown, Burnet, Coleman, Hamilton, Lampasas, Llano, Mills and San Saba (the Hill Country and Central Texas)

[Dallas Morning News]