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DEMOGRAPHICS MAY 23

Big Elm? A little Denton County community grows into a city



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In 2000, when George W. Bush was still governor of Texas, Little Elm was a bedroom community on the shores of Lake Lewisville with only about 3,600 year-round residents.

Today, the Denton County town is the region's newest big city, surpassing 50,000 residents in newly released population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Little Elm's growth is in line with other North Texas cities like Frisco and McKinney, which grew by 6% and 5% from 2017 to 2018. Frisco is one of the 15 fastest-growing cities in the country, along with six other Texas cities.

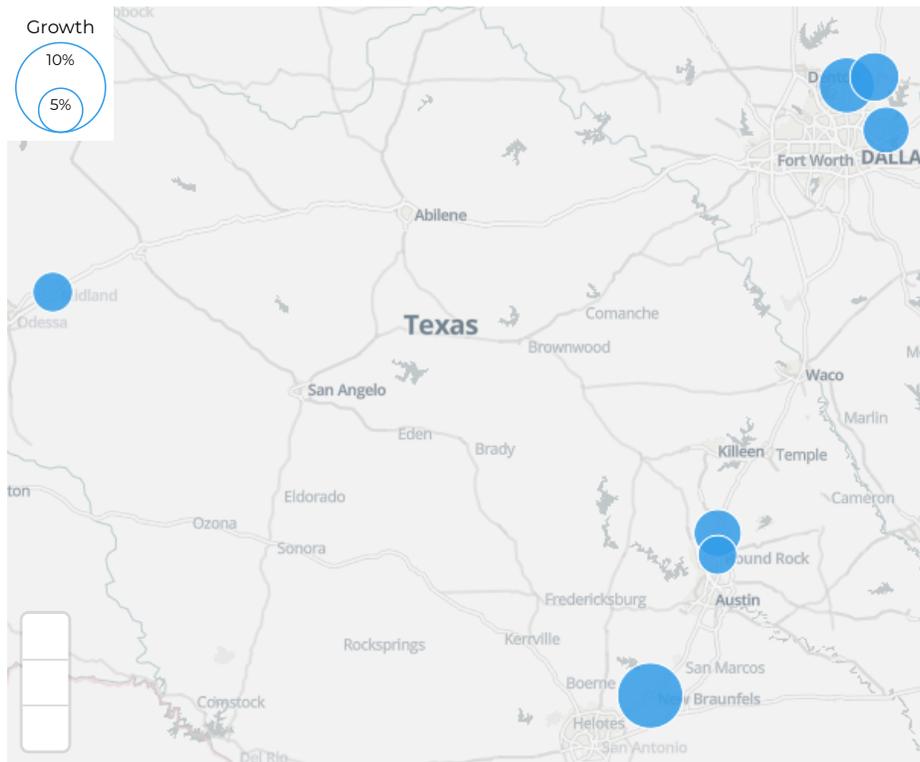
New Braunfels took the second spot, with McKinney, Georgetown, Rowlett, Midland and Round Rock also making the list.

Laila Assanie, a senior business economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, said there are no signs the growth will end anytime soon.

"So far we don't see anything on the horizon that would tell us that the boom is coming to an end, though we do expect growth to slow down a bit," Assanie said. "We can't keep on growing at the pace we have been."

Growing fast

According to a new report released by the U.S. Census, seven of the nation's 15 fastest growing cities are in Texas. Three of those cities, Frisco, McKinney and Rowlett, are in North Texas. Click the circles to see more details about each city:



Source: U.S. Census. **Note:** Cities with populations of 50,000 or more on July 1, 2017 ranked in percent growth between July 1, 2017, and July 1, 2018.

John Hancock/DMN

From tiny town to large suburb

What makes Little Elm different is how small it was when nearby suburbs began booming, said Town Manager Matt Mueller. Most homes, schools and offices in the town are less than 15 years old.

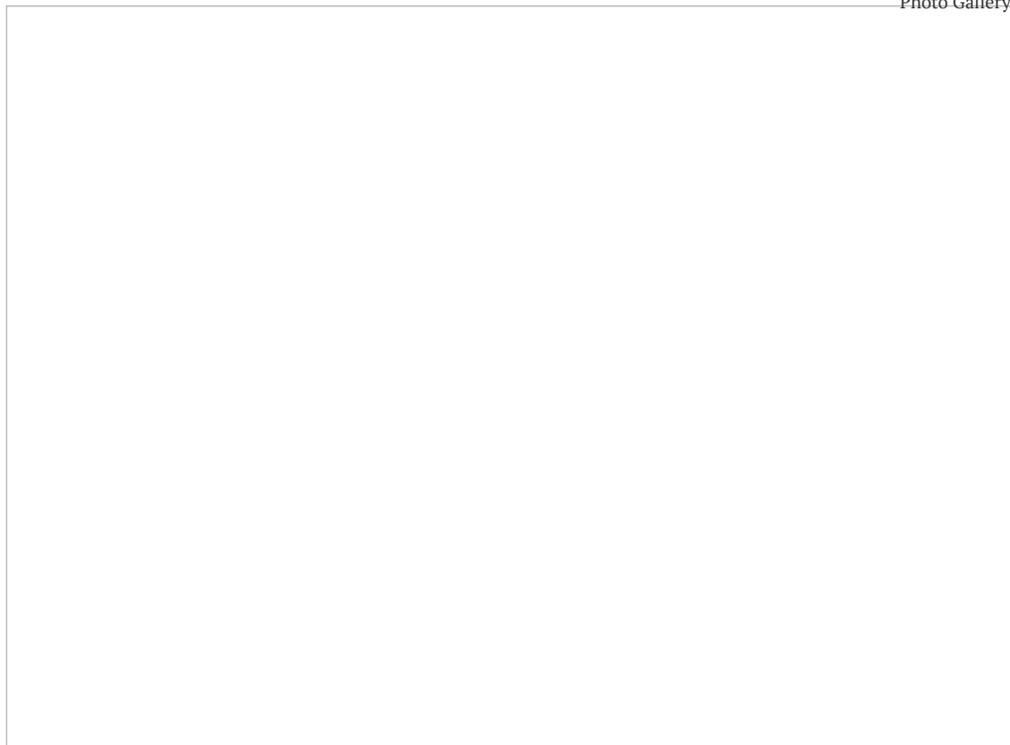
"It's almost like playing SimCity for a living because in many ways it's a blank slate we're working with," Mueller said.

Jared Hunt and his wife, Rebecca, moved into their first house in Little Elm in March after living in an apartment in The Colony. Hunt grew up in Gainesville, Ga., northeast of Atlanta, and his wife was raised in Denton.

The couple were looking for a community that was close to their jobs in McKinney and Coppell. Unlike larger North Texas cities, Little Elm doesn't have any anchor businesses that bring in new residents. Most residents commute to work.

Hunt, who lives in a new home in the less-developed Oak Point neighborhood, said he likes that the area doesn't feel like suburbia.

"I can walk out on my back steps in the morning and hear the roosters crowing," he said. "I grew up near a farm, and that's the kind of community I like."



(Vernon Bryant/Staff Photographer)



Mueller said he hopes Little Elm can retain some of that rural lifestyle, even as he envisions a decade more of growth. The eastern side of Little Elm, which borders Frisco, has more apartment communities and neighborhoods than the sparsely developed northern and western corners of town.

The town's first hotel, in its Lakefront District, is under development.

"People here are excited about the growth," Mueller said. "They like to see new people and businesses move here, and folks love how it still has a hometown feel despite its growth. And that's intentional."

If Little Elm can remain an attractive place to live and the economy of North Texas keeps improving, Hunt hopes to turn a profit on his starter house in three to five years.

"One of the reasons we chose this area is it's so close to Frisco and that's one of the most desirable areas in the state," Hunt said. "Our hope is that our property value will increase and this will have been a good investment."

A 'self-contained' city

Tony Felker, president and chief executive officer of Frisco Chamber of Commerce, remembers a time when he had to leave Frisco to buy a pair of socks. Now the city of 188,000 has 10 high schools and nearly 80,000 jobs.

"I like to jokingly say, 'If you don't know where Frisco is, Dallas is our suburb just 30 miles south,'" Felker said. "The visionary people in Frisco have always said we don't want to be a suburb of Dallas — we want to be self-contained."

Fastest growing cities

The 15 Fastest-Growing Large Cities Between July 1, 2017, and July 1, 2018, With Populations of 50,000 or More on July 1, 2017

Rank	Name	State	Percent increase	2018 total population
1	Buckeye	Arizona	8.5	74,370
2	New Braunfels	Texas	7.2	84,612
3	Apex	North Carolina	6.8	53,852
4	Frisco	Texas	6.1	188,170
5	Meridian	Idaho	6.1	106,804
6	McKinney	Texas	5.4	191,645
7	Georgetown	Texas	5.2	74,180
8	Rowlett	Texas	5.1	66,285
9	St. Cloud	Florida	5	54,115
10	Ankeny	Iowa	4.6	65,284
11	Dublin	California	4.5	63,445
12	South Jordan	Utah	4.4	74,149
13	Midland	Texas	4.4	142,344
14	Castle Rock	Colorado	4.3	64,827
15	Round Rock	Texas	4.3	128,739

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 Population Estimates

Stephanie Lamm / DMN

From 2017 to 2018, Frisco was the fourth-fastest-growing city in the nation, adding 10,000 residents through birth or migration. Since 2010, Frisco has added more than 70,000 residents — a 60% increase.

For Michael Buss, who moved to Frisco from San Francisco a year ago for work, the booming suburb's balance of big-city amenities and its suburban pace felt just right for his family of four.

"My wife and I really like the fact that we can own a house here. We never could have done that in California," Buss said. "Everything is within 2 miles of our house. If we never wanted to go further than 2 or 3 miles from our house, we wouldn't miss anything."

Ashish Yaduka works remotely for an Indianapolis-based IT company. When he decided to leave Indianapolis, he said, he could live anywhere he wanted but chose Frisco for its good schools, proximity to a major airport and low crime.

"I feel very welcome here and I've made friends from all walks of life," Yaduka said. "I like that my kids don't go to a school that is overrun by one type of people. There are lots of different cultures."

But as the city grows, some longtime residents and people who moved to Frisco for cheap large lots are pushing back. The [Stonebriar Legacy Association of Neighborhoods](#) represents a group of about 5,000 residents who want to pump the brakes on [Frisco's breakneck growth](#). The group vocally opposed a plan to add more than 2,000 residential units to Hall Office Park, where thousands of people work.

"Some old-timers complain and call it 'little New York,'" Buss said. "They hate the growth that has happened. I get it, and I'm sorry, but that's what progress looks like."

Felker understands the pushback but is more concerned with what future residents will want.

"Two or three years ago, we started saying we're not your grandfather's chamber, and now we're saying we're not your father's chamber, either," he said. "We're developing a city and business community that is appealing for what a 20-something-year-old will be interested in."

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