

## Raleigh area is poised to flourish

BY BARBARA BARRETT - Washington correspondent

Published Sun, May 09, 2010 04:40 AM / Modified Sun, May 09, 2010 03:08 PM

WASHINGTON -- The Raleigh metropolitan region got a little younger, a bit smarter and a lot more populous in the 2000s, but the median income fell amid the economic S-curves that repeatedly wracked the country in the past decade.

Still, a new report by the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., labels Raleigh one of the country's "New Heartland" cities - a sort of new Middle America that is home to more families and to employees in the kinds of jobs that economists say are going to propel the United States in the coming years.

In its report, "The State of Metropolitan America," the Washington think tank crunched a variety of demographic data for the nation's largest 100 metropolitan areas. The Durham-Chapel Hill metro area was classified separately and not among the 100 biggest metropolitan areas. It was not included in the study.

The report concluded that nationally, the wage achievement gap between high- and low-wage workers widened even before the most recent recession hit. Low-wage workers saw their hourly earnings decline by 8 percent from 2000-2008, while high-wage workers saw their hourly earnings climb by 3 percent.

Raleigh was the second-fastest-growing metro region in the country, after Provo, Utah - but the largest among the nation's top 50 metropolitan areas.

"Clearly people see a lot of opportunity there, and an opportunity for a high quality of life," said Alan Berube, a senior fellow at Brookings and one of the report's authors.

And though the median income decreased by 6.5 percent, that was better than the national average, Berube said.

The Raleigh region saw a nearly 60 percent jump in the percentage of its nonwhite population, the eighth-largest increase in the country.

Still, Berube said, the community's racial and ethnic breakdown is largely a black-white divide, although Hispanics form a growing - and young - chunk of the populace.

The region is helped by the nearby Research Triangle Park and the metro area's technology niche and higher education opportunities. The challenge for local policymakers, Berube said, will be to build on Raleigh's success.

"Growing their capacity in that regard and hanging on to some of the talent that goes through some of the universities from abroad to create economic value in that region," he said, "there's big potential there."

bbarrett@mcclatchydc.com or 202-383-0012