

Paterson is seeking 779 more residents

Count could mean aid in the millions

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STAFF WRITER

PATERSON – Paterson needs 779 more residents to make it eligible for millions more dollars in federal aid.

With the 2010 census approaching, the city wants residents to fully participate in it to ensure that Paterson gets a fair share of an estimated \$435 billion pot of federal funding that is distributed based on census data.

By the numbers

149,222: Population of Paterson

74,774 residents, or 50.1 percent: Hispanic population

45,913 residents, or 30.8 percent: white population

49,095, or 32.9 percent: black population

48,924: Foreign-born residents

30.5 years: Median age

\$32,778: Median household income

6,376: Single-family, owner-occupied homes

51,535: High school graduates or beyond

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

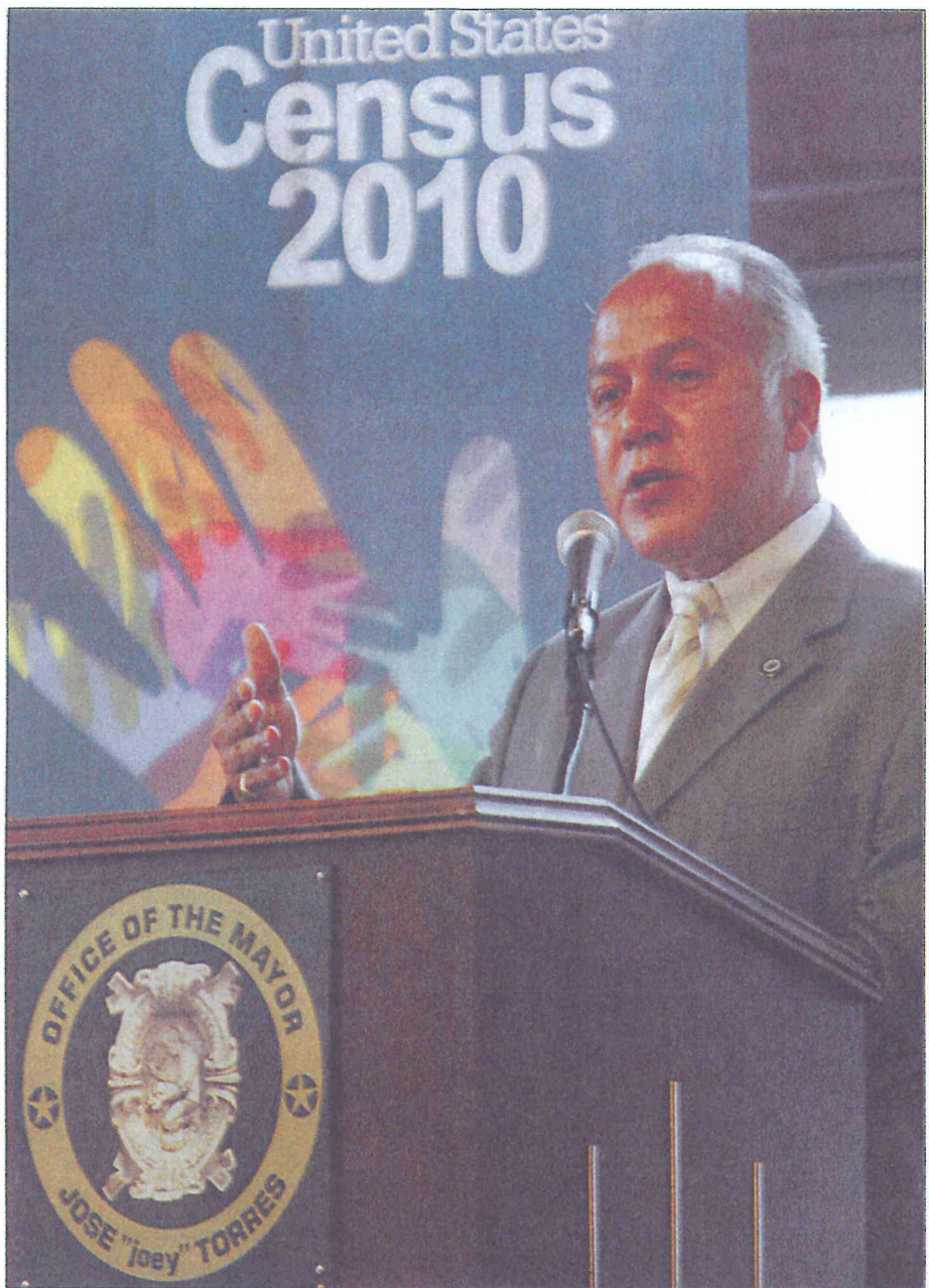
Mayor Joey Torres on Thursday hosted U.S. Census Bureau officials during his annual State of the City address and kicked off a public awareness campaign, announcing a resolution to form a Complete Count committee to address the issue.

“Are we ready to make Paterson a first-class city?” he said, revving up the crowd in the

City Council chambers. “Amen!” one man shouted back.

Most federal grant aid – from stimulus-package funds to COPS law enforcement grants to money for infrastructure and roadway projects – hinges on the census count.

For decades, Census Bureau officials have struggled to get an accurate population count in Paterson. Census 2000, the previous U.S. census, counted 149,222 residents in Silk City.



LESLIE BARBARO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Paterson Mayor Joey Torres on Thursday announced a resolution to form a committee of volunteers to ensure accuracy in next year's census count in the city.

But only 53 percent of city residents who received census forms by mail actually filled them out and returned them in the 2000 count, said Ligia Jaquez, the New York regional census center's deputy director. That's below the 68 percent national average.

There's an army of census-takers to knock on the doors of those who failed to fill out forms, but the bureau has had trouble locating residents who live in illegal dwellings, Jaquez said.

Fear, in part, explains why many residents fail to fill out the questionnaires. Some may have outstanding arrest warrants and worry about sharing information with data collectors, and illegal immigrants may fear deportation, officials say.

Jaquez said the Census Bureau doesn't share the information and that it is only used for statistical purposes.

The state Legislature has broken down New Jersey's 566 municipalities into four

classes. Only Jersey City and Newark fall into the highest class. Paterson is a Class 2 city, falling shy of the 150,000-population count needed to attain Class 1 status.

Former Mayor Marty Barnes believed that the 2000 census count was off by at least 20,000 and threatened to sue the Census Bureau.

“They don't know how to count,” Barnes said when the 2000 figures were released.

Just 10 years earlier, in 1990, Rep Bill Pascrell Jr., D-Paterson, then Paterson's mayor, challenged the 1990 count and successfully lobbied the Census Bureau to include Paterson in a test census, which increased the count by nearly 8,000 to 148,394.

Jaquez said community leaders and other volunteers will play a crucial role in boosting the count. “It's like a campaign. You need to motivate everyone and let them know how important it is that everyone is counted,” Jaquez said after the mayor's address.