

Chalkboard

By

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Data. Anyone with a computer and access to the Internet can generate a lot of information. For example, check out this quote from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:Cite&page=Gentry%2C_Arkansas&id=55769733.

“As of the census of 2000, there were 153,406 people, 58,212 households, and 43,484 families residing in the county. The population density was 70/km² (181/mi²). There were 64,281 housing units at an average density of 29/km² (76/mi²). The racial makeup of the county was 90.87% White, 0.41% Black or African American, 1.65% Native American, 1.09% Asian, 0.08% Pacific Islander, 4.08% from other races, and 1.82% from two or more races. 8.78% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race.

There were 58,212 households out of which 34.40% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 63.00% were married couples living together, 8.20% had a female householder with no husband present, and 25.30% were non-families. 21.10% of all households were made up of individuals and 8.50% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.60 and the average family size was 3.01.

In the county the population was spread out with 26.60% under the age of 18, 8.60% from 18 to 24, 29.40% from 25 to 44, 21.10% from 45 to 64, and 14.30% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 35 years. For every 100 females there were 97.40 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 94.90 males.

The median income for a household in the county was \$40,281, and the median income for a family was \$45,235. Males had a median income of \$30,327 versus \$22,469 for females. The per capita income for the county was \$19,377. About 7.30% of families and 10.10% of the population were below the poverty line, including 13.80% of those under age 18 and 7.30% of those age 65 or over.”

Note that I made no mention of accuracy or reliability in my opening sentences. While the above demographics for Benton County are probably

accurate, the information is dated; it was taken from the last United States Census taken in 2000. Obviously many, if not all, of the categories would have new numbers in 2007. For example, results found when visiting the web site <http://www.muninetguide.com/states/arkansas/municipality/Gentry.php> shows an adjusted median income of \$48,473, up \$8,192 from the \$40,281 shown above in the 2000 Census. Time changes data. For example, in 2007 the racial composition of the community is obviously different than that reported in the last 2000 census.

Where am I headed with this article? Sadly, for those of you who like monumental works, I'm headed nowhere dramatic. I actually began my "research" for this article by "Googling" *Gentry Arkansas & Churches*. Then, somewhere in browser land what little there is left in me of English teacher (circa 1979-80) flickered into consciousness and said, "Where are the note cards?"

The English teacher quickly sought repose and my next major thought had to do with need for having current data when planning for the future. Gentry Public Schools, as its name implies, serves the public. A historical view of the demographics of the area reveals what citizens of the area already know- Gentry of 2007 is a different place than Gentry of 2000 and Gentry of 1990. What I am trying to envision is what demographics will Gentry of 2020 have. Note that next year's beginning kindergarten class should graduate that year.

What's driving this research mode of thinking? The Gentry School Board and the Arkansas Leadership Academy have moved into the "goal setting" mode of thinking. Knowing what goals need to be set, depend initially on understanding the "current reality". Current reality might best be described as the various data sets that describe our district. So what type data should be compiled? At the beginning, as much data as possible should be gathered on multiple topics. Community demographics are certainly one of the data sets required for making informed decisions for the future.

Oh, how many churches were there in Gentry? Let me plug the "Main Street Gentry/Chamber of Commerce's site at <http://www.gentrychamber.com/> for that answer. Or maybe that's just the seventh grade English teacher eking out one more, "Don't ask me...go look it up..."

I will continue on with you on this topic next week.