

IN SPORTS, D1

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How Hasay is handling stardom



IN LIVING, H1

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ARTS&CULTURE, H2

## She's the heart of SLO's Little Theatre

Meet Donna Sellars

### SLO COUNTY POPULATION

# Younger working class more likely to leave

Those 18-45 are twice as likely to move away as those over 45; when they do leave, it's usually because of the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing, survey finds

By BOB CUDDY  
bcuddy@tribunenews.com

Younger, working-age people are twice as likely to leave San Luis Obispo County over the next two years as are residents over 45, according to a new survey.

The two main reasons: the cost of living and the lack of affordable housing.

The survey, conducted by Opinion Studies of San Luis Obispo, underscores a long-term threat of losing the county's middle class, according to a local expert in business development.

"This is a very negative thing, a brain drain," said Mike Manchak, president and chief executive of the nonprofit

Economic Vitality Corp. of San Luis Obispo County.

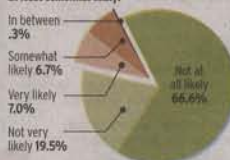
The departure of people between the ages of 18 and 44 would hurt the economy and the community in numerous ways, Manchak said.

Until people know they can afford to stay, they remain less vested in their community, he said. In addition, companies know that high housing prices make finding workers difficult, and facing such a hurdle, firms may leave the county or even the state.

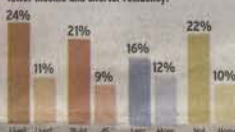
The research shows that only a small percentage of residents plan to leave. And the county is

Please see SURVEY, A10

How likely are you to move away from SLO County within the next two years? About 14% say they are at least somewhat likely:



Those who say they were very or somewhat likely to move away tended to be younger renters, of lower income and shorter residency:



Of those who were very or somewhat likely to move away, the fewest came from the North Coast:



Note: Students 18-24 are excluded  
SOURCE: Opinion Studies



# Survey

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not losing net population. But those who stay or are moving in are in most cases retired. That demographic shift occurred in Santa Barbara and created a population living in what one economist calls a "geriatric ghetto."

## How many may leave and why

The study asked "How likely are you to move away from SLO County within the next two years?"

Robyn Letters of Opinion Studies decided to ask the question because there has been so much talk about whether increasing home costs are forcing people out of the area.

"We asked this question to find out just how many people are leaving and why," she said. "While we found that 86 percent of residents are planning to stay, we also found that a small but significant group is planning to leave, due to high costs."

Residents who earn less than \$50,000 a year, have lived in the county less than five years and who do not own their own homes also are candidates for exodus, according to Letters.

Of those who said they in-

tend to leave, 38 percent gave cost of living as the reason and 23 percent said they could no longer find housing they could afford. The median home price in February, according to the California Association of Realtors, was \$604,170.

Letters said the numbers indicate that "we are becoming like Santa Barbara County, losing the middle class at a disproportionate rate."

Those who plan to stay have higher incomes or are retired, she said. "It's a more stable group."

More than 20 percent of those between 18 and 44 said they plan to move, while

only 9 percent of those older than 45 expected to leave.

Opinion Studies conducted the poll of 400 people in late December. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent.

Letters said she plans to ask the question again in future surveys. "This information can be a barometer for county planners to gauge residents' concerns."

## Population stable overall

The research showed that SLO County's overall turnover is similar to the rest of the country. Fourteen percent of those questioned said they are at least

**'This is a very negative thing, a brain drain.'**

*Mike Manchak, president and chief executive of the nonprofit Economic Vitality Corp. of San Luis Obispo County*

# Even with two incomes, a house is still elusive

Jason Schmidt and his wife are an increasingly common story in San Luis Obispo County.

Schmidt, 25, teaches Spanish at Arroyo Grande High School, and his wife teaches at a Pismo Beach middle school. But even with a two-teacher income, they can't afford a house in the county.

"The only reason we can live here is because we are living in a house owned by family," Schmidt said Friday. That house is in Morro Bay, giving both the Schmidts a long commute.

The Schmidts are expecting a child next month and figure they will have to leave town in the next couple of years. "We've been looking at housing, but it's a wasted effort," he says.

"We can do the same jobs we're doing somewhere else and pay for a home," Schmidt said.

— Bob Cuddy

somewhat likely to leave in the next two years. Nationally, that figure is 12 percent.

Letters said there is a general perception that people are leaving the county in substantial numbers. "This kind of says, gosh, we're like everybody else. We're not being emptied out."

An influx of new people will help the county continue to grow, so there will be no net loss of people. "We've been growing at a moderate rate since the mid-1990s," said Peter Brown of the San Luis Obispo Council of Govern-

ments. "That trend is expected to continue."

Brown said the county's population in January of 2005 was 260,727, up from 258,127 the previous January.

The percentage of people who said they might leave was remarkably similar throughout the county — about 15 to 16 percent — except for one area.

The North Coast beach towns of Morro Bay, Cayucos and Cambria are "the most entrenched," Letters said, with only 6 percent saying they might leave.