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Today is official census day; forms due April 19

Count Day

Danielle Arndt
Daily News staff writer

Today is National Census Day and the Montcalm Human Services Coalition (MHSC) is reminding local residents the importance of completing their questionnaires. Lisa Lund, community development coordinator for the MHSC, said most people should have received their U.S. Census forms already in the mail. The next step is filling it out. There are four Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) located in Montcalm County and five in Ionia County to help residents properly complete their forms. Lund said these centers also have additional forms available in case one gets lost or a resident never received one. Lund said residents should have received a postage-paid envelope with their form to mail it back. The correct address should be on these envelopes, but Lund said the address also is listed on the form in case the envelope is lost and residents need to mail it back themselves. Envelopes can be picked up at the QAC centers as well. Duane Shore, QAC representative stationed at the Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Belding, said the assistance centers also have large-print forms or Spanish forms available. Residents must deliver their census forms to the mailbox or post office box themselves. "They cannot ... have the QAC representative collect the form and mail it in for them," Lund said. "This is to prevent tampering." Currently, the census mail participation rates for Montcalm and Ionia counties are above the national and state averages. The Census Bureau is tracking on a daily basis the percentage of forms mailed back by households that received them. The state's rate as of Wednesday was 57 percent, 5 percent above the national rate. Montcalm County was at 59 percent Wednesday and Ionia County was at 64 percent. Today's date is a reference point for people to use when filling out their forms. "It is the 'as of' date," Lund said. "The information people enter is supposed to be accurate as of April 1. They should answer the questions about their (living) situations like they are answering them (today)." Residents should return the forms by April 19. This is when census workers take to the streets, going door to door to hit non-response homes. Dichondra Johnson-Geiger, regional partnership specialist for the U.S. Census Bureau, said the state has estimated for each person in Montcalm and Ionia counties it receives about \$1,000 in federal funding to be put toward job training, public education, senior centers, hospitals, emergency services, transportation projects and local government agencies. "With the economy and unemployment rates here, we need to ensure our county has every advantage," Lund said. She believes Montcalm County will see an increase in population over the 2000 census based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates in recent years. According to Census.gov, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated Montcalm County's population at 62,971 in 2008, compared to 61,266 at the 2000 Census. Ionia County was thought to have a population of 63,833 in 2008. Its official count in 2000 was 61,518. "It's interesting that we have continued to grow. It kind of bucks the trend in the state," Lund said. "The state as a whole is at risk of losing 80,000 people off the top, so if everyone does not make an effort to complete the census, it would not be good for us." Johnson-Geiger confirmed Michigan's population likely will be down significantly. She said officials believe the state will lose one of its 15 members in the U.S. House of Representatives. The reapportionment of congressional districts will begin in April 2011 based on population figures gleaned from the census, Johnson-Geiger said.

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