

Local News

Population shifts revealed in Newington census data

By ALEX SYPHERS
CORRESPONDENT

As we prepare to usher in the New Year and the end of a decade, it is important to look back on the development and social progress made in Newington over the last 10 years, and with the 2010 Census set to be released in the coming months this information is more relevant than ever.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2000 Census, Newington

had a total population of 29,306. In the Census Bureau's 2005-2009 American Community Survey five-year estimate, the population in Newington is predicted to be 29,503. The five-year estimate represents the average housing or population characteristics of the town between January 2005 and December 2009.

The Census Bureau recorded 12,264 housing units in Newington in 2000 and predicted that between 2005 and 2009 this number would

drop to 12,222. The number of vacant houses was recorded at 250 in 2000 and is was expected to be 378 in the five years since 2005, with estimates showing that the average household size would expand to 2.44 family members, up from 2.39 in 2000.

The median household income from the 2005-2009 estimate was expected to be around \$69,221 (adjusted to 2009 inflation rates), an increase of 2.1 percent from the 2000 census median household

income of \$57,118.

With a stable population base, the ethnicity distribution in Newington has also remained constant with slight variations. According to the 2000 census, of the 29,306 residents in Newington 92.5 percent were white, with the second-largest population at 3.7 percent, or 1,079 residents, being Hispanic. The Asian population was 2.8 percent or 824 residents followed by African-Americans at 2.1 percent or 609 residents.

In the five-year estimate the Census Bureau estimated a slight change in ethnicity distribution in Newington with Hispanics increasing to 1,879, making up 6.4 percent of the population. African-Americans were expected to increase to 3.7 percent of the population or 1,083 individuals, and Asians are expected to represent 3.6 percent of the population or 1,054 individuals. Whites are expected to decrease to 26,342 individuals or 89.2 percent of the total population.

Pete Cocolla — a teacher with a style all his own

By ALEX SYPHERS
STAFF WRITER

In the corner of a light blue room with a grand piano nestled against the window, you will find Pete Cocolla.

He may be resting in his music chair, guitar in hand releasing the vibrations of sound that are known as "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" by Led Zeppelin. Pete Cocolla has been strumming on that guitar for the last 30 years, teaching area residents how to play guitar and, no, he has no interest in leaving.

"I was always the teaching type of person. I always liked teaching..." said Cocolla, during an interview at his home, "I've been working for years to make sure I'm actually teaching somebody so when they walk out of here they can actually do something."

Cocolla started teaching guitar out of his home on Thornton Drive in Newington, in 1980. Yet, his musical career began sometime before that when he started playing violin as a youngster.

Through the years he gradually progressed to guitar, something he attributes to seeing "The Beatles" play on the Ed Sullivan Show. Soon after he was playing in his own rock band, "Elysian Field."

Cocolla made his official teaching debut as a student teacher at the Hartford Conservatory during the early 1970's and it carried on from there, he said, when he moved to Newington in 1977 and soon after started teaching out of his home.

There are no short cuts no instant gratification in Cocolla's teaching of guitar.

He likes to step away from what he calls "parrot teaching" and allows his student to take what they have learned and jam with it.

"You might as well read a book about driving a car rather than actually driving a car..." said Cocolla, "you have to teach a person one piece of information and find a way for them to use it right on the spot."

He teaches students the theory of music and makes them apply it. Cocolla is not only adamant about teaching students to apply the chords and theories they have learned but is big on terminology and explaining that terminology.

"People get lost or intimidated by big or funny words," he said, "People forget to explain those funny words. I don't forget. I can tell if a student doesn't understand what they're looking at on the page."

That's his specialty, said Cocolla, being able to spot when a student becomes confused and his ability to quickly get them to understand what they are reading and get them back to learning.

"My real thing is after you teach students what music is, is to teach them how to create music. My students can improvise on the spot, they can write their own music. It's taught in music school but they don't give you opportunities to practice doing it. They explain it theoretically, vaguely. There's no exercises to practice it; that's what I give them."

He has begun to create his own guide book on writing songs, which he says is a "toolbox" for learning the mechanics of music writing and improvisation.

According to Cocolla, you can learn a lot from other musicians but you have to learn how to create for yourself, "to actually create music," said Cocolla, "which I think most people want to do. They just want to create something on their own. It isn't hard if you show people and just let them go at it."

Nowadays, Cocolla says he has seen an increase in the number of adults who have come to him to learn how to play guitar from doctors, lawyers, and EMTs. Only a third of his students are children.

"It's really all walks of life... very interesting people come through here. They need something fun to do," said Cocolla, "Everyone likes beauty and art. Everyone has some of that in them and it's just a fabulous thing to connect with that. If you can sing a song, play an instrument. If you can do something with other people it's communal. "Bringing people together," says Cocolla, "that's what music is about."

As for the advice he gives his future musicians, Cocolla says one has to be a well-rounded individual.

Learn music and "learn everything you can and keep learning." Secondly, learn about people and relationships; learn how to communicate and a little bit about running a business.

But over all, said Cocolla, "Surround yourself with good people." And remember, "If you're an artist, you're an artist."

For more information about

Pete Cocolla's guitar instruction contact him at: peter@guitarstarinstruction.com or (860) 463-2734.



Pete Cocolla, is celebrating his 30th anniversary of teaching guitar in Newington this year. Here he sits with his cat Stripe.