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Grand Forks Herald

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Census numbers show a surge in diversity

By Sam Easter
Grand Forks Herald

GRAND FORKS — Grand Forks is far more racially diverse than it was 10 years ago, according to 2020 data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Census data shows that the share of white residents in Grand Forks County fell from 90.3% in 2010 to 82.1% in 2020 as the share of Black, Asian and mixed-race residents all saw increases of nearly 2% or more.

In fact, among people who only identify by one race, white residents were the only group to actually see a population loss in Grand Forks County between 2010 and 2020, with the total population falling by 302 — from 60,358 to 60,056. Black residents saw a gain of 1,704 people; Asian residents saw an increase of 1,203, and mixed-race people saw an increase of 1,490 persons.

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Phyllis Curden, a cook at South Middle School, prepares vegetable cups in the kitchen Friday.

Eric Hylden / Grand Forks Herald

GOT MILK? OR PIZZA?

Schools in the region struggle with lunchroom supply chain disruptions

By Ingrid Harbo
Grand Forks Herald

Grand Forks National supply chain disruptions are forcing schools across the region to change menus, create contingency plans and make do with available resources.

And for some students, that means their favorite foods — including popular entrees like Crisпитos and pizza — aren't on the menu as much this school year.

It's been an ongoing problem, says Wendy Mankie, director of child nutrition at Grand Forks Public Schools, but the problem has worsened in recent months.

"More recently, November

and December, is when we started feeling more effects of it," she said.

On Jan. 6, Grand Forks Public Schools issued a message on Facebook warning families of supply chain-prompted menu changes.

The message read: "We work hard to plan our menus, but due to national supply chain issues, we're having difficulty getting all of the food we ordered delivered to us. While this challenge is not in our control, our team is doing our best to create backup plans."

Mankie said as substitutions in meals have become more common, she felt families should know about the supply chain issues.

"I have not gotten any complaints from parents or children, really, but I just thought that it needed to be communicated," said Mankie.

Other schools in the region are facing similar problems. Fan favorites

Some nutrition directors and cooks in the region report that some of the most popular items among students are the hardest to get.

"A lot of the breakfast pizzas and stuff like that are really hard to get a hold of right now," said Kim Johnson, head cook at Northwood Public Schools. "Even the regular pizza for lunch is really hard to get."

Fargo Public Schools and Grand Forks Public Schools

both contract with Sysco for food deliveries, and have had issues with chicken products and pizza. The district in Grafton contracts with U.S. Foods and Cash-Wa, and has had issues with cereal and Crisпитos, a Tyson taco roll-up that is especially popular with students.

"That's probably their most favorite meal in the high school and we have not been able to get those all year from any of our suppliers," said Sandy Sackett, food service director at Grafton Public Schools.

Students in Northwood miss Crisпитos as well, says Johnson.

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UND professor gets millions in funding for COVID research

By Adam Kurtz
Grand Forks Herald

GRAND FORKS — A UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences researcher has received a multi-million-dollar grant for a research project that seeks to push the boundaries of COVID-19 research.

According to an SMHS news release, Abraam Yakoub, a professor in the department of biomedical sciences, received a \$4.5 million grant over five years from the National Institutes of Health. The grant was awarded through the NIH Director's Trans-



Yakoub

formative Award, a program that supports researchers doing cutting-edge work with the potential to set new medical standards. Yakoub joins the ranks of more than 40 researchers awarded funds this year, at locations including the Mayo Clinic and MIT and Harvard University.

"I think what we're doing here is extremely cutting edge, extremely innovative, very transformative and paradigm shifting," Yakoub said. "We hope people in North Dakota can get more excited and more interested in both research and supporting research."

Yakoub's project aims to examine the illness via what is called a

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UND

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system-based approach, rather than thinking of the virus as specific to the lungs. Yakoub will lead a team of people looking at how the coronavirus impacts other organs in the body.

In particular, the research team will study if the immune response to the virus might

become so exaggerated in some individuals that it ends up hurting them, instead of helping them. Yakoub said his experiments could lead to discovering the “black box of COVID-19.”

“Why is the virus killing millions of people?” Yakoub asked. “Is it just a lung infection or something beyond? We told the NIH we have an idea why this might be happening, and they liked the idea. This award is a

testimony to our exceptionally innovative, trail-blazing research program. It means we really are thinking outside the box in order to crack a scientific mystery.”

According to the news release, Francis Collins, former director of the NIH, praised this year’s crop of Transformative Award winners, calling their ideas “exceptionally novel and creative.” Many of the other researchers are also

studying COVID-19.

“These visionary investigators come from a wide breadth of career stages and show that groundbreaking science can happen at any career level given the right opportunity,” Collins said.

Yakoub will also be bringing more research dollars to the SMHS in the form of a second NIH grant for \$3.5 million, and will take a similar-creative approach to

studying treatments of neurodegenerative disorders, such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease. The former, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is the No. 3 killer of North Dakotans, after heart disease and cancer.

The latter research program will consist of directing the evolution of a protein, to the point where it has therapeutic uses for neurodegenerative disorders. It is a

branch of his research where the aim is to take one disease or virus, and use it in a cure for another.

Yakoub said his work has the potential to reveal the inner workings in illnesses that impact people around the world. He is hoping his projects shine a light on the need to support research in the state.

“What we’re doing, it’s not for me — it’s for us,” he said.

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Kevin Iverson, North Dakota’s state demographer, said this is what happens when people around the country follow the promise of economic opportunity: Grand Forks and North Dakota start to look like the rest of the U.S. And Iverson said that’s likely to continue.

Grand Forks and North Dakota are still far more white than the rest of the nation. But Iverson said years of ample jobs and low unemployment have spurred interest in North Dakota.

“There’s a couple of

things going on here,” Iverson said. “You have in-migration coming into the state. The state has an abundance of jobs and demand for individuals. This is something that, I’d say 20 years ago, we didn’t face. There weren’t a lot of ‘help wanted’ signs out.”

That shows up in interesting ways in some of the other federal data on the region. Grand Forks County’s gender mix was 0.4% more male in 2019 than it was 10 years prior — which Iverson said is often a demographic quirk of places that see waves of in-migration.

Other federal data show the share of Grand Forks County residents in federally defined pov-

erty fell by about 1% from 2009 to 2019, and the share of native-born residents dropped by 2.8%.

“The question of, is (that diversity) a cause of economic success or a result of economic success — the answer is yes to both,” said UND economist David Flynn. “It’s not one or the other. I think economic successes attract population, and it attracts a diverse population. The diversity also can become attractive in terms of economic growth and development prospects as well. It’s not a surprise to see the two go hand in hand.”

The local numbers are similar across the border. In Polk County,

2020 census data show the white share of the population dropped by 6% between 2020 and 2010, from about 93.3% to 87.3%. Other federal demographic data shows a 1.2% increase in the share of men in Polk County between 2009 and 2019.

This is not to say that everything is rosy in Grand Forks’ economy. Fargo, just a short drive to the south, has begun to eclipse Grand Forks’ economic power in the state, with robust workforce growth that far outpaced its neighbor to the north. In fact, Federal Reserve data show that Grand Forks County’s civilian labor force is still close to late 1990s

levels, while Cass County’s is far higher.

But, Flynn points out, there’s also a question of composition. The kinds of jobs that comprise that workforce has likely changed over the years.

“(And) it’s no secret, it’s an ongoing issue to retain workers,” Flynn said. “Attracting workers can be an issue as well. The fact that you have economic success and a community that can be viewed as already clearly welcoming people of different backgrounds can be an enormous asset in terms of that attraction and retention.”

Keith Lund, the head of the local Economic Development Corpora-

tion, also hailed the news of Grand Forks’ diversity as a sign of economic potential.

“There are a lot of research and reports that (indicate) the greater the diversity in your community, the greater the growth and stability in your economy,” he said.

He noted that it can be hard to parse, though. Which one is causing the other?

“I would say that generally speaking, from my point of view, opportunity drives growth,” Lund added. “And opportunity drives growth across the board. If the community is welcoming and opening to newcomers, that will move the diversity needle.”

SCHOOLS

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The United States Department of Agriculture, which oversees the National School Lunch Program, has specific nutritional requirements for food served in schools. For example, half of the grains served need to be whole grain-rich, and fruits and vegetables need to be served with every meal. The USDA has also set goals for sodium reduction in schools.

Because of these requirements, nutrition directors rely on items made to serve in schools. Cindy Hogenson, nutrition services director for Fargo Public Schools, gave the examples of pizza with a whole grain crust or low-sodium chicken nuggets.

“The manufacturers going into the school year didn’t have the staff and resources to ramp up their normal production for school food, so those manufacturers cut their variety and just focused the resources they did have on a few items to manufacture,” said Hogenson.

Whole lines of food for schools have not been available all year, or are becoming unavailable. Hogenson said chicken has been hard to come by, and she just received word that the beef supplier for Fargo Public Schools will be ceasing production. She says when chicken is available, it’s increasingly expensive.

“Prices have really exploded since the beginning of the year,” said Hogenson.

Food distribution companies play a role in some shortages. Manvel Public Schools contracts with U.S. Foods. Superintendent Dave Wheeler said the district had issues at the beginning of the school year, but things have improved in recent months.

“It’s better for us than it’s been probably all year,” he said.

Got milk?

Milk is one of the most recent, and most local, lunch essentials to be affected by supply chain issues in the region. Many districts in the area source their



A kindergarten student takes a carton of milk from the cooler during lunch on Thursday at Lewis and Clark Elementary in Fargo.

Michael Vosburg / The Forum

milk from Fargo’s Cass-Clay Creamery, or a dairy that distributes Cass-Clay products. In December, Cass-Clay notified clients that there could potentially be a shortage of milk in half-pint containers, which are used by K-12 schools. The problem was not with the milk, but instead with the container.

“They told us there are just three manufacturers of that shape of carton across the country, and I’m sure due to supply and labor shortages, they fell behind in production,” said Hogenson.

“A lot of districts, including us, had to come up with contingency plans in case we started getting milk in bulk,” said Hogenson.

Mankie reported that Grand Forks Public Schools received the same notice from Cass-Clay, and planned to pour servings of milk for students if the half-pint packages did not arrive.

“It would have been a little more work, but they would still be able to accept milk if they want,” said Mankie.

Hogenson says Fargo schools received all the half-pint cartons they ordered, and received word from Cass-

Clay that the carton manufacturers should be able to keep up with orders moving forward.

“But, of course, we are still monitoring the situation and making sure that we’re ready to adapt if we need to,” said Hogenson.

Manville Public Schools serves Cass-Clay milk sourced from a dairy in Devils Lake, and Wheeler says his district is still having some issues. Usually, the district orders three varieties of milk — skim, 2% and chocolate — and kids can choose the kind they want.

“Right now we’re probably getting one of those three options. He’s giving us all chocolate one time or all 2% at one time, just to try to fill in the order,” said Wheeler.

Little can be done

With many supply chain issues rooted in labor shortages at a manufacturing level, school administrators can do little to solve the food issues in their districts. But, when the lunch bell rings, students need to be fed.

Most of the pressure falls on lunchroom employees and planners. When typical items go out of stock, they need to find alternatives to order. If a truck comes without an entree, it’s the cooks’ and nutrition directors’ job to figure out what to substitute on the menu.


Mankie, who has a background as a dietitian, does the best she can to continue to

serve students within federal nutrition guidelines. She said the USDA has been more flexible with nutrition requirements among the supply chain challenges.

When a manufacturer or food distributor cannot provide a product that adheres to the nutrition requirements, schools can ask for a waiver

from the USDA for that product. The added flexibility takes some pressure off nutrition directors so they can focus on the task at hand — feeding students.

“My goal, and my whole staff’s goal really, is to continue to feed them still, as healthy of meals as we can get them,” said Mankie.



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Dakota REIT is a North Dakota Real Estate Investment Trust.

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GRAND FORKS COUNTY COMMISSION
Grand Forks, North Dakota
January 18, 2022

3:00 Public Safety and Infrastructure Committee
a) Courthouse Front Entrance Security

4:00 County Commission Agenda
1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes
3. Approval of Order of Agenda
4. Approval of Consent Agenda
a) Bills
b) Employee Status Changes
c) Overtime
d) Beer and Liquor License - Rest & Relax LLC
5. Public Health
a) COVID-19 Update
6. Emergency Management Director
7. Tax Equalization Director
a) 2022 Agricultural Land Values
8. Human Resource Director
a) Introduce Human Service Zone Director
b) COVID Administrative Pay Requirements
9. Director of Administration
10. State’s Attorney
a) Mental Health Services Contract
11. Committee Reports
12. Unfinished/New Business
13. Correspondence
14. Adjournment

Notice is hereby given that the Grand Forks County Commission will meet on the above date and time at the County Office Bldg, 151 South Fourth Street, 6th floor, Grand Forks, ND. Persons with disabilities who may need assistance should contact the ADA Coordinator at least 24 hours prior to this meeting at 780-8415.