

# Census ranks Cleveland nation's poorest big city

CLEVELAND (AP) - Crushed by the loss of steel and other manufacturing jobs, Cleveland has ranked high for poverty before — but never No. 1. That changed when a report from the U.S. Census Bureau recently rated it as the nation's poorest big city, putting it ahead of Detroit, Miami and Newark, N.J.

"To be ranked No. 1, that's bad," said Councilman Zachary Reed. "Let's be honest, the fact is people in our community are living in poverty and just making it day to day."

The unwanted distinction

is the latest in a litany of struggles for Cleveland, which appeared to be on the rebound over the past decade, with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland Browns Stadium, Jacobs Field and Gund Arena.

But this year the budget-strapped port city laid off hundreds of police officers and firefighters and reduced trash pick up and other city services.

Hundreds of teachers and other workers were laid off from city schools and officials are pushing a \$68 million tax increase on the No-

vember ballot to try to ease some of the schools' financial needs.

With a poverty rate of 31.3 percent in 2003, Cleveland stands out even in Ohio: Cincinnati's was 21.1 percent, Toledo 20.3 percent and Columbus 16.5 percent.

The overall poverty rate in the United States was 12.7 percent, according to the survey released Aug. 26.

"I guess I am a little surprised, because my sense was that Cleveland was a city on the rebound," said Tom Kaplan, the associate director of the Institute for Re-

search on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Despite Cleveland's thriving image in the 1990s, poverty was always in the background, said Myron Robinson, president of the Urban League of Greater Cleveland and co-chair of a newly formed civic committee on job creation.

"We had probably about 42,000 African-American males unemployed then, as now. It didn't get a lot of attention until now. It's like we hit rock bottom."

The city remains home to

a few steel and other manufacturing companies, many with scaled back work forces.

Hospitals, banks, law firms and universities are other big employers in Cleveland, which has a 12.2 percent unemployment rate. That's nearly double the state rate of 6.3 percent in August, when the national rate was 5.4 percent.

Deann Hazey, spokeswoman for the Convention & Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland, views tourism as one solution to the poverty problem.

"We want to create a

greater demand in the hospitality industries. Those with good people skills, not necessarily a college degree, can find a good job opportunity and work their way up," she said.

Rose Blade lives in Cleveland's Mount Pleasant neighborhood, where well-maintained homes and businesses mix with those in disrepair. The former factory worker is among the thousands who are unemployed.

"Things are really tough around here," said Blade, 45. "There's too many hungry people."

## Cops

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budget cycle after the grant expired.

Some communities, such as Bismarck, N.D., have been able to use the grant program to permanently expand their police force as intended. Police Chief Deborah Ness said all 11 positions added with COPS money since 1997 have been retained, and the City Commission had time to plan for absorbing their salaries.

In Cheyenne, Wyo., Police Chief Robert Fecht said four officers added with COPS funds have helped his force, but acknowledges it's still hard work just to maintain the status quo.

In Sundown, Texas, Police Chief Shawn Myatt said he and another officer had to answer calls and cover for each other on days off before COPS funds allowed the tiny community to add a third officer.

"In a small department, one officer is worth his weight in gold," he said. The manpower allowed officers to put on programs on topics such as crime prevention and drugs, for students and parents, he said.

Other cities have been less fortunate. Tiny Miles City, Mont., hired two officers through COPS grants in recent years. Both are still there, but budget cuts prevented the city from filling two other positions. So the COPS program, in the long run, has yet to actually increase the city's police force, said Capt. Kevin Krausz.

In November, voters in Billings, Mont., the state's largest city, will be asked to pass a public safety mill levy that would help maintain or strengthen the police force, Chief Ron Tussing said.

COPS funds have put officers on the streets of the city of 92,000, but grants for five of those officers are expected to expire within the next two years, and the local budget is tight. Some retiring officers already aren't being replaced.

"We've about reached the doing-more-with-less limit. There is a point where people want to see a cop, and they want to see one soon," Tussing said.

Kristen Mahoney, director of grants and government relations for the Baltimore Police Department, said the city saw a reduction in violent crime with the addition of 200 COPS-funded officers playing a huge role.

A loss of dollars could mean communities returning to "baseline services, and that's not where they want their tax dollars... They deserve more," she said.

Mahoney called the COPS program "a success story in government."

Bill Johnson, executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations, said any hiring money would help local departments, and he holds out hope that Congress will act.

"I don't think there's any substitute for an officer on the street," he said.

"If your home is broken into at 2 in the morning, you want lots of officers in your home. You don't take comfort in a new computer back at the station. What matters is the officer."

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