

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

On a cold Sunday afternoon, earlier this month, Gary Lee of Imperial was working on a hunting lodge he is renovating on a farm in between Imperial and Wauneta.

A car drove down the inroad, and a woman with a laptop computer got out and approached him. She asked the address of the "house." He explained that it didn't have an address. She said it also didn't look like a two-story home, as indicated in her records.

Lee told her that the house hadn't been lived in for awhile and had been torn down.

The woman explained that she was part of Census 2010, and was preparing for the upcoming count of the population.

She actually is part of the ACS, or American Community Survey, according to Steve Rein, local census office manager at the Lincoln Census 2010 office.

Census 2010 is the U.S. government's effort to count every person in every household. The Census is required by the U.S. Constitution.

Beginning in March, employees will conduct an address canvassing, making sure all residences are correctly recorded.

In 2010 everyone will receive a "short form" of 10 questions to answer and mail back. Rein said "It only takes 10 minutes to take."

This fall branch census offices will be opened in Omaha and North Platte.

"They are more designed to address the 2010 non-response follow-up," Reins noted, "when the 'census taker' knocks on doors and asks the 10 questions you didn't answer."

Population tallies gathered from Census 2010 are used to apportion seats in Congress, draw local political boundaries and distribute federal funds.

Imperial City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland detailed some of the things funded by population.

They are state aid to government subdivisions, or monies paid by the state to cities that saw reduced income from a change in personal property tax; representation on both the state and federal levels; anything involved in Community Development Block Grants and U.S. Department of Agriculture funds; municipal equalization money due to a change in the levy a city can apply; and anything as far as Nebraska Investment Finance Authority funds for housing, or rural development funds.

The city of Imperial protested the 2000 Census Bureau findings, which lowered the population from 2,007 in 1990 to 1,982.

Leyland contended that the census missed counting persons residing in Imperial Heights, as well as several persons living in apartments in what was Imperial Hotel.

She also questioned the Hispanic count of 139, as well as the report that there were 500 people under the age of 18 of all races in Imperial. Leyland noted that there were 582 students enrolled in Imperial Grade School and Chase County High School alone at that time.

While the city protested the count, and the Census Bureau agreed that the city was correct and it had missed some people, Leyland said, "They refused to change the number."

The difference in the Heights and Imperial Hotel would have been about 35 persons, Leyland said, and "To them it was a miniscule amount and not worth their effort.

"I tried to explain to them that would have been an increase (in population) to us," she commented.

“Everything we get for the next 10 years is based on our population, plus it listed us as a population that declined. It could affect economic development efforts,” she said.

Leyland didn't know how much the city lost in funding because of the miscount, “but the money was rightfully ours.”

How does Imperial guarantee that another under-count doesn't occur next year?

The Census Bureau has already contacted the city to determine proper city boundaries and “tracts,” or two to three-block areas of houses.

Leyland goes over those, checks the tracts for the addition or demolition of houses, and replies to the Census Bureau. “There were a lot of changes I sent in” for Census 2010, she stated.

“I participate in everything and try to make sure they have everything right,” she added.

The Census Bureau recognizes the fact that minorities are often reluctant to fill out the census forms.

Rein said Census 2010 has a “very concerted advertising program coming out to let everybody know the census is simple and safe.

“An individual's information can't be released to anybody,” he said

That means, he said, that Hispanics who may be illegal immigrants don't need to worry that they will be reported as such by the Census Bureau.

“We're working with Hispanic leaders through advertising, and also hiring ‘partners’ that work hard to count areas and build trust with local leadership to establish a bond of trust with anybody who feels intimidated in any way. That information can never be used against them in any way,” he stated.

Jobs available

Rein said Census 2010 tries to hire employees from within a community to canvass that community, as they are familiar with it and the residents.

Positions are now available.

“We are emphasizing that although Census 2010 is a year away, we are now hiring for that throughout Nebraska.”

Rein said he'd like to get a “good pool” of employees in Chase County.

Leyland said there have been three different testing dates for prospective employees so far, with about four people total applying. No Hispanic persons have applied, to her knowledge.

Those interested in the job may call (866) 861-2010. Most positions last up to 10 weeks. Hourly wages start at \$11 to \$14 with flexible hours. Testing for positions will continue in Imperial throughout several months, according to a spokesperson from North Platte.

Applicants must take a 30-minute test measuring clerical, reading and number skills. A U.S.-based identification is required.

Rein said the test may also be administered in Spanish.