

# Changing Demographics Unsettling for Antioch

By Federal Glover

I remember when Pittsburg and Antioch were about the same size in population and each town had only one high school. The adolescent rivalry used to separate the two towns.

Antioch began to outpace Pittsburg in terms of growth starting in the late 1950s. Antioch's vast tracts of grazing land were the perfect setting for housing tracts. Housing kept moving southward following Lone Tree Way, eventually gobbling up the tiny Antioch airport where piper cubs used to take off and parachutists used to float down to the empty fields across the street, right near where Deer Valley High School is today.

Lone Tree was widened and housing crept up the hillsides, pushing farmers and ranchers out of the area. Thousands of new homes changed the face of Antioch and the new residents, some of them my Pittsburg High classmates, changed the makeup of the community as it became more racially and culturally diverse.

They weren't always welcomed with open arms. Eventually, the barriers broke down and today, many of Antioch's most vocal defenders can trace their roots back to Pittsburg families.

Today, Antioch continues to attract new homebuyers from far and wide. What's happening in Antioch reflects what is occurring throughout the state of California. The city is more racially and culturally mixed than the Antioch of my youth.

Unfortunately, the changes that are happening in Antioch are also giving rise to the racial and ethnic stereotypes that some find comfort in believing. In Antioch, there is a new twist to these old prejudices. A few residents want to blame all that is wrong with Antioch on Section 8 tenants.

The county is responsible for operating the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program in Antioch and other parts of the county.

"The benefits of the program far outweigh the problems caused by a small group of participants and, sometimes, a few irresponsible landlords. To cast blame for the criminal activity and growth problems within the southeast community of Antioch upon the HCV participants is much too simplistic," says Rudy Tamayo, executive director of the Contra Costa County Housing Authority which oversees the HCV program.

"Don't rapid urban growth, a mobile work force, commuter or work force housing, and predatory business ventures also contribute to these community problems?" asks Tamayo.

Antioch has 1,470 Section 8 units according to Housing Authority records. But only 229 of them are in the newer southeast Antioch part of town.

The county does not actively seek out homeowners to participate in the Section 8 program. For a variety of reasons, these landlords apply to the housing authority. The Housing Authority does not become the landlord of the properties. The landlord is still responsible for screening and selecting prospective tenants from the Section 8 clients.

The landlord is also responsible for notifying the Housing Authority when they have troublesome tenants.

There are many great property owners in the Section 8 program, says Tamayo. “They properly screen their tenants, maintain their properties and enforce the lease. Many have long-standing landlord-tenant-Housing Authority relationships.”

The Section 8 HCV program has provisions for ending rental assistance for participants engaged in criminal activity on a case-by-case basis, points out Tamayo.

The county’s Housing Authority actively pursues terminations for participants engaged in criminal activity and who commit serious lease violations. In the past four months, 66 participants were dropped from the program, five participants for criminal activity and 61 participants for lease violations. (The assistance of property owners is vital for documenting serious lease violations).

It should be noted that the Housing Authority can only drop them from the Section 8 HCV program but the landlord is responsible for evicting tenants. Evictions may take three days or with appeals and hearings the tenant is entitled to have, the process may last as long as two to three months.

Critics shouldn’t blame all Section 8 participants for the actions of a few. Most tenants work at low-wage jobs, or are elderly or disabled. Most tenants are contributors to society and are trying to improve their temporary situation.

The Antioch I knew as a kid no longer exists. The city has become suburbia’s poster child. Shopping malls, fast-food outlets and modern schools abound. Along with the progress have come traffic woes, a shortage of employment opportunities, a loss of commitment to the community and a wariness of our neighbors.

In response to the high interest in the Section 8 program, the Housing Authority has established a satellite office in Antioch to handle local inquiries. It is located at 801 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street in Antioch. The telephone is 925-957-8050.

Fear shouldn’t distort the way we see the future or keep us from getting to know each other.

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