

Phoenix has reclaimed its spot as the nation's fifth-largest city.

Estimates to be released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau show Phoenix last July surpassed Philadelphia, its closest population rival, for the first time after losing the title in 2010.

The 2016 data puts Phoenix's total population at 1,615,017.

The average 88 people per day the city added between July 1, 2015 and July 1, 2016 gives Phoenix another national distinction: It's the fastest-growing city in the country, based on numeric increase.

"It's a positive thing people are voting with their feet and coming to Phoenix," Mayor Greg Stanton said. In that one-year period, 32,113 people moved to the city, according to the Census Bureau.

Maricopa County, Buckeye also grow quickly

City leaders said all the indicators pointed to significant growth.

Building permits are up, vacancy rates are down and companies are relocating here, Phoenix Community and Economic Development Director Christine Mackay said.

Still, with the friendly competition between Phoenix and Philadelphia, the official designation is exciting, she said. A new city branding video will highlight facts about Phoenix that include the number five.

"We're highly competitive people," Mackay said.

Phoenix isn't the only place growing in Arizona. Maricopa County has the nation's highest annual population increase among counties, according to recent census statistics.

And Buckeye will land in a top-10 ranking Thursday. Its population growth is ranked seventh among large cities, based on percent increase.

The Census Bureau will release population estimates this summer by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin.

Mayor: Quality over quantity

In Phoenix, the No. 5 ranking isn't on its own a selling point, Mackay said. But she said it helps combat the "Wild West" impression people have of Arizona.

Recently, the city has become home to people and companies from the Bay Area. While sprawl used to provide a barrier to living here, new construction downtown means Phoenix also offers an urban lifestyle, Mackay said.

But Stanton and Mackay both said the quality of Phoenix is more important than the number of people who live here.

That means retaining people who grew up or were educated here, as well as sustaining the growth.

Phoenix also is working toward a more innovative economy, aided by the fact that the city may be big but is still young, Stanton said.

"We're still deciding what we want to be when we grow up," he said.

Top 10 U.S. cities by population (based on U.S. Census Bureau 2016 population estimates)

1. New York: 8,537,6732
2. Los Angeles: 3,976,322
3. Chicago: 2,704,958
4. Houston: 2,303,482
5. Phoenix: 1,615,017
6. Philadelphia: 1,567,872
7. San Antonio: 1,492,510
8. San Diego: 1,406,630
9. Dallas: 1,317,929
10. San Jose: 1,025,350