

**2000 CENSUS: Pine Lake -- bucolic, charming and a magnet for unmarried couples
The DeKalb town's changes signal a rise in gay and lesbian households**

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The town of **Pine Lake** resembles nothing so much as a green and tranquil idyll, a lake-centered community of artists and artisans who congregate weekend nights at the town's Beach House. Atlanta families fleeing heat and humidity discovered the DeKalb County community in the 1930s and lined the hilly streets with weekend bungalows.

Today, a different kind of Atlantan is discovering **Pine Lake's** bucolic charms.

Among Georgia cities, **Pine Lake** has the highest percentage of households in which unmarried partners reside. The small town prides itself on its disproportionately large number of gay and lesbian residents.

Overall, the number of unmarried Georgians living together skyrocketed 108 percent the past decade, according to U.S. Census Bureau statistics released today. Nationwide, the increase was 72 percent.

Not all unmarried partners are gay or lesbian, of course. Young adults fresh from college often live together, as do heterosexual couples who haven't chosen to marry.

The Census Bureau makes no effort to distinguish sexual orientation of Americans. But it will release more information this summer on living arrangements, which will show the number of same-sex partners sharing households.

In **Pine Lake**, unmarried partners share 36 of the 621 homes, the Census Bureau reports. Mayor Al Fowler's own estimate is that one of every three **Pine Lake** residents is gay or lesbian.

"It's a landmark achievement and something I'm very proud of," Fowler said Monday. "Gays and straights live here and nobody really cares."

Certainly not Fowler, who's openly gay and lives with his partner in **Pine Lake**.

And not Janis Lang, either. "You have the right as any citizen to live life the way you choose," said the **Pine Lake** resident, self-described as straight, single and available. "This is not a gay and lesbian community. It is a community. It's a great place to live."

The rise in unmarried partners is but one of a grab-bag of statistical morsels being released today by the Census Bureau. Together, they portray a much-changed Georgia where alternatives to the traditional family thrive in some places. For example:

- > The percentage of homes run by single dads, with kids under 18, rose 85 percent.
- > Households headed by single women with kids under 18 were up 36 percent.
- > Traditional married-couple-with-kids households increased 16 percent.
- > More than 710,000 Georgians lived alone in 2000, up 32 percent from 1990.

"The trends are continuing from previous decades, but they've been slowing down from what we've seen in past decades," said Census Bureau demographer Tavia Simmons. "Divorce rates, for example, are leveling off. We're seeing a little bit less out-of-wedlock births."

The bureau only began tallying unmarried couples in 1990. Still, Simmons and others remain impressed with the significant rise in folks living together out of wedlock.

"Even if only half of them are gay, that's still a lot of people willing to self-identify themselves that way," said Harry Knox, executive director of Georgia Equality Inc., a political and educational advocacy group for gays, lesbians and others. Atlanta is home to the nation's third-largest concentration of gays and lesbians, said Knox. It was, until recently, the only Georgia city where they'd feel somewhat comfortable. That appears no longer to be true.

Despite the sharp increase in the number of unmarried-partner households, they accounted for just 145,743 of the 8.1 million people the census counted in Georgia last year. But Georgia Equality estimates there are a half-million gays and lesbians in the state, and it has established community advocacy groups in Savannah, Statesboro, Macon, Valdosta, Augusta and Dalton.

Pine Lake today is working on a new, more inclusive and welcoming reputation, one its mayor believes could prove beneficial for all Georgians.

"I would imagine average Georgians don't have a clue about the increase in gays and lesbians," Fowler said. "But it's something average Georgians will have to deal with in coming years."

Graphic: MORE UNMARRIED

Georgia saw a 108 percent increase in unmarried partners from 1990 to 2000. Places with the highest percentages of unmarried partners:

Place.....	Unmarried..... partners.....	Percent .of pop.
Pine Lake36.....	5.80
Damascus.....	.14.....	5.05
Ranger.....	3.....	4.00
Manassas.....	4.....	4.00
Ila.....	13.....	3.96
Santa Claus.....	9.....	3.80
Flowery Branch.....	64.....	3.54
North Druid Hills.....	634.....	3.54
Sunny Side.....	5.....	3.52
College Park.....	695.....	3.44

Source: U.S. Census Bureau
/ CHUCK BLEVINS / Staff

Photo: Once known for the traffic tickets it issued, **Pine Lake**, where Al Fowler (above) is mayor, is acknowledging its residents' sexual diversity. / RENEE HANNANS / Staff