

## Getting to work in **Olmsted County**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 statistics

PB Graphic

# Windshield time is limited

By Mike Klein

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Most workday mornings, Mark and Kim Jensen hop in the car together and drive from their southwest Rochester home to the downtown Mayo Building, where both work as physical therapists.

They listen to the radio and talk about family and work matters during the 15-minute drive.

"We'd feel kind of silly not driving together when we both work at the same location," Kim said. "With parking the way it is downtown, parking can be a hassle."

The Jensens are typical. Census statistics show that Olmsted County residents have the highest rate of carpooling and the shortest commutes of the Minnesota's 12 most populous counties.

Olmsted residents had a mean commute of 16.7 minutes in 2005, compared to 16.3 minutes in 2000. In addition, 13.1 percent of drivers carpool, up from 11.3 percent in 2000, for an increase of 2,000 people.

Nationwide, the average commute time is 25.1 minutes, and just 10.7 percent of people carpool.

Why? Despite its growing population, Rochester has remained relatively compact because its growth management plan preserves agricultural land and concentrates development, said Phil Wheeler, director of the Rochester-Olmsted planning department.

"Although we have the appearance of sprawl, we have more compact development than most growing areas of the state," Wheeler said. And that pays dividends in quality of life.

Carpooling is an attractive option because people live close to each other, many of them work at the same place (Mayo Clinic), and there's a shortage of parking downtown, Wheeler said.

The statistics, which are issued for Minnesota's 12 most populous counties along with the state and nation, come from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community survey for 2005, based on 3 million interviews nationwide.

Commute times and carpooling are up most dramatically in Rochester. That's thanks largely to the continuing influx of immigrants, who are twice as likely to carpool.

In Olmsted County, 23 percent of foreign-born people carpool, compared to 12 percent of native-born Americans.

Many immigrants don't have licenses or cars, said Kristi Arend, development director for the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association. Rochester immigrants tend to be Somali, Asian or Bosnian.

"Where they come from, resources are much more limited, and they're better at sharing them than we are," Arend said. "There's more of a communal culture. The rugged individualism of the U.S. is part of getting in a car by yourself and driving."

But many people have turned to carpooling just to save on gas. Sonya Trelstad, re-employment assistance coordinator at the Workforce Development Center, carpools from Austin to Rochester about twice a week with two other women. The other two work at the nearby Home Federal Bank.

"I usually save \$40 to \$50 a month on gas, and sometimes more," Trelstad said. "It's just nice to have the company on a couple of days a week."