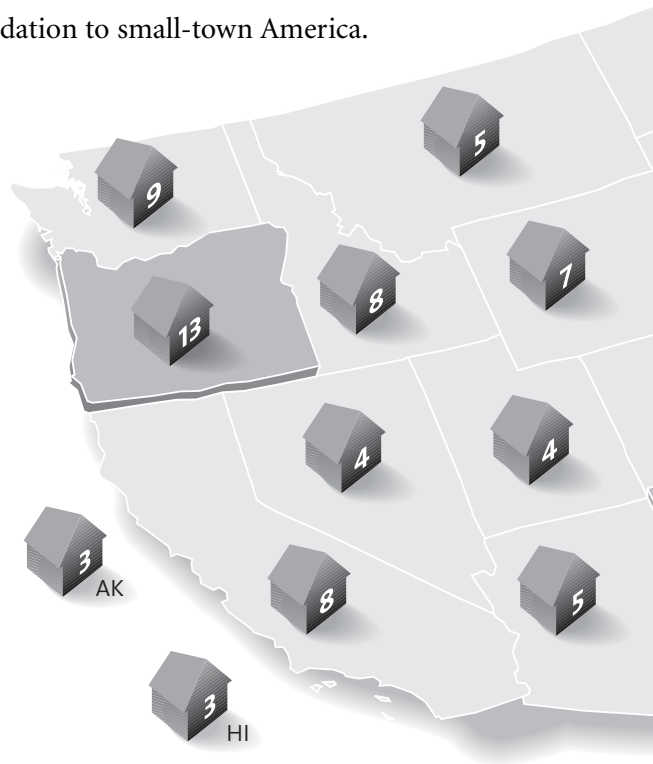


BY WILLIAM H. FREY

Just a year ago, the federal government introduced a new census concept – the “micropolitan” area – giving official status to the Mayberry RFD-type communities previously lost in the vast statistical wasteland outside metropolitan areas. While the name itself has spawned the predictable jokes (Will they form Micropolitan Symphony Orchestras? Will there be a baseball team called “The Mics?”), micro areas do offer a sort of validation to small-town America.

Not all, by the way, could serve as backdrops for old sitcoms. Some are enclaves for upscale exurbanites within commuting distance of big cities; others lure middle-income retirees with sunshine and cheap housing. Micropolitan areas range in size from 13,000 to 182,000 people, and are named after the most prominent hamlets – think Pahrump, Nev. (near Las Vegas) and Mountain Home, Idaho. All told, the 560 micros are home to one American in ten.

Mississippi, Kansas and Iowa each have more micro areas than California, while highly urbanized Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island are micro-free. Micros generally gained population in the early 1990s, then lost some of it to hot metros like Seattle and Boise, then picked up a bit in the wake of 9/11. But it can be misleading to lump them together. Ninety-nine micro areas grew by more than a fifth over the 1990-2002 period, led by highfliers such as Palm Coast,

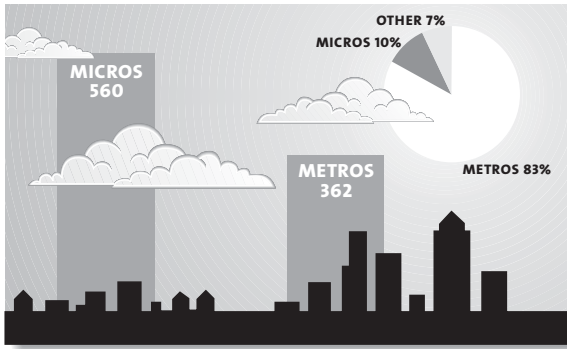


Fla. (near Daytona Beach) and amenity-rich Branson, Mo. Meanwhile, another 110 micros in the South, Midwest and Plains states actually lost population.

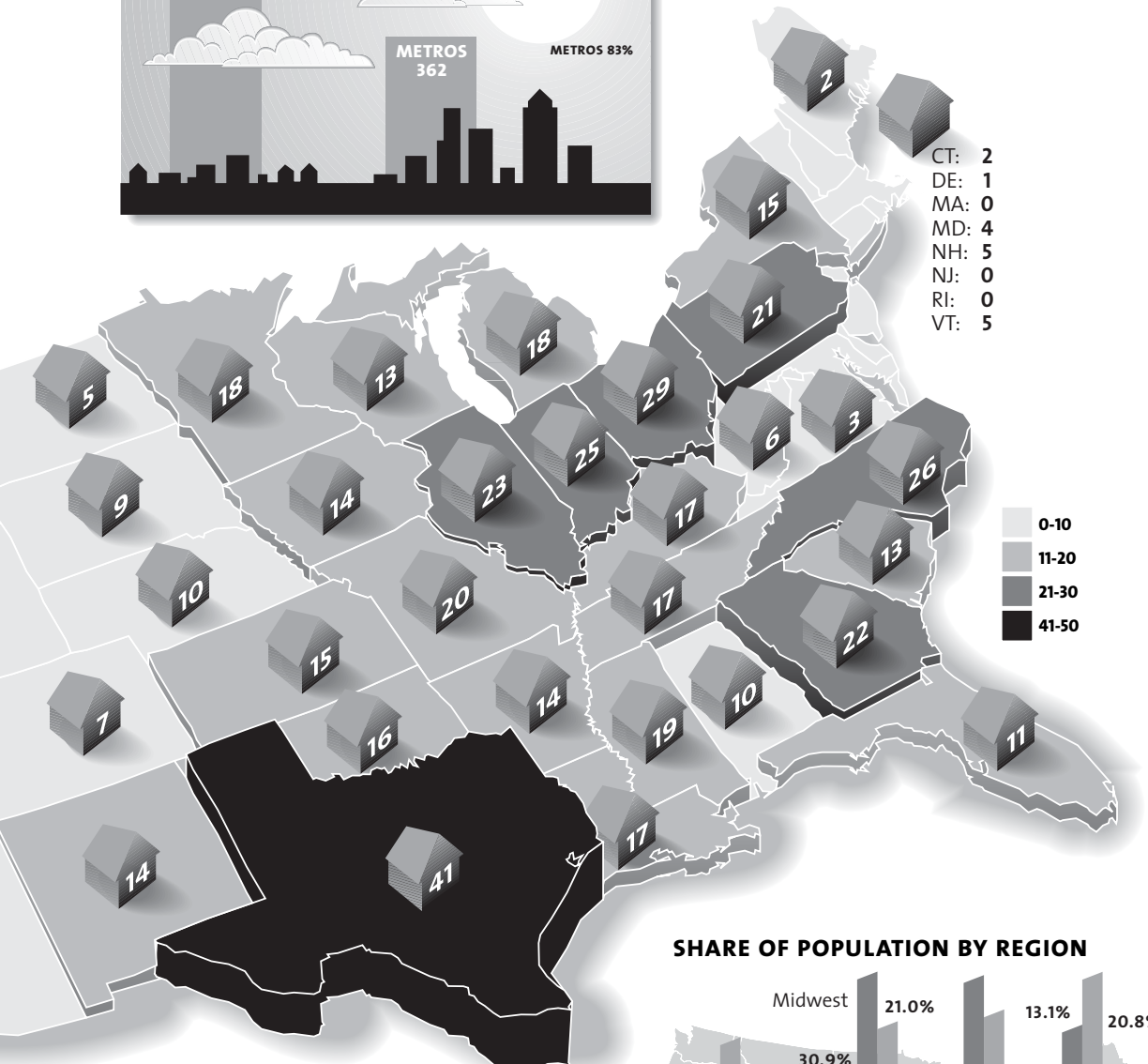
Micro residents are generally older, poorer, more conservative, less educated and less

BILL FREY is a senior fellow in demography at the Milken Institute and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington.

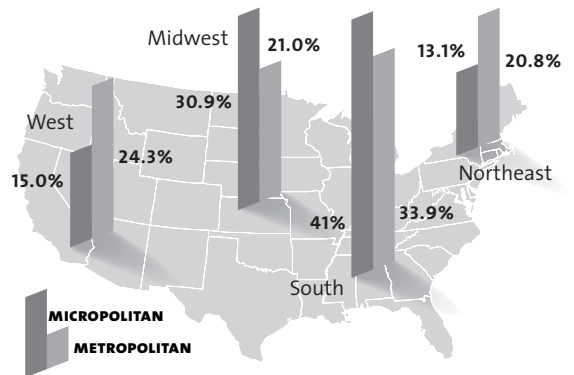
WHERE WE LIVE



MICROS BY STATE



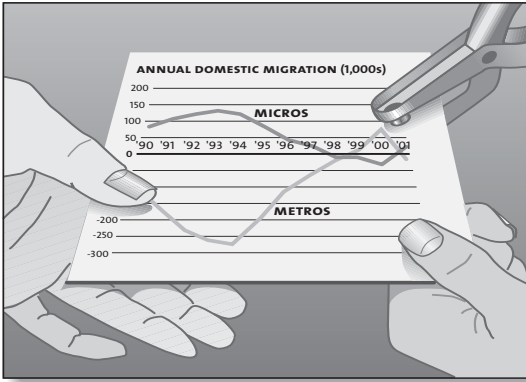
SHARE OF POPULATION BY REGION



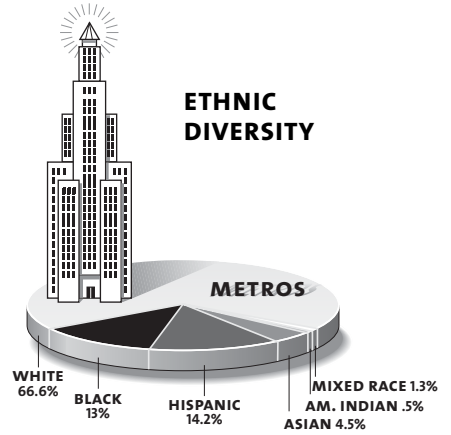
BRUCE SANDERS AND MAX HARLESS

diverse than their metro counterparts. But there are striking exceptions, including Jackson, Wyo. and Los Alamos, NM. Whatever they are, get used to hearing about them; a torrent of government statistics about them are coming your way soon. **M**

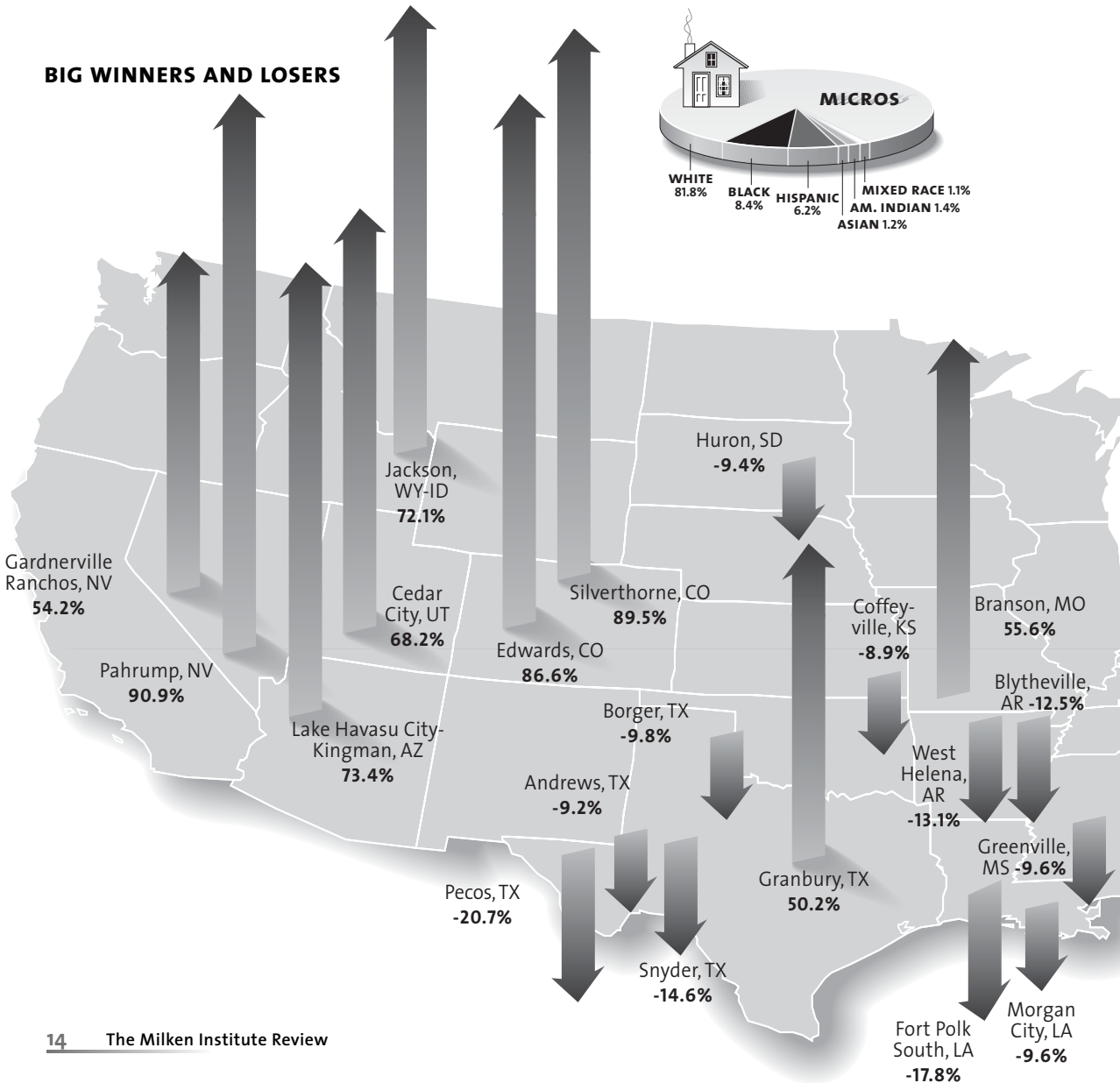
COMING AND GOING



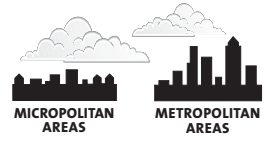
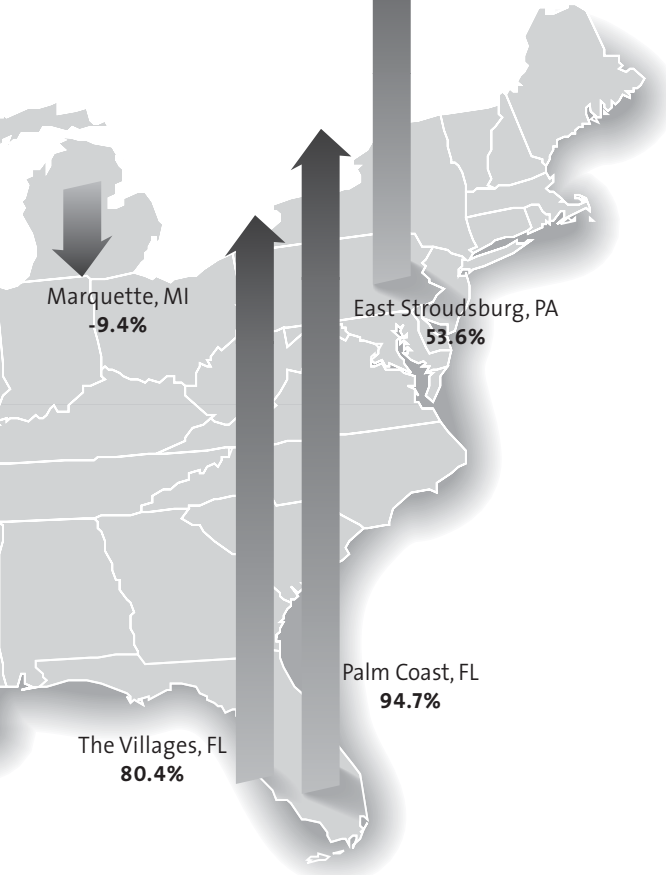
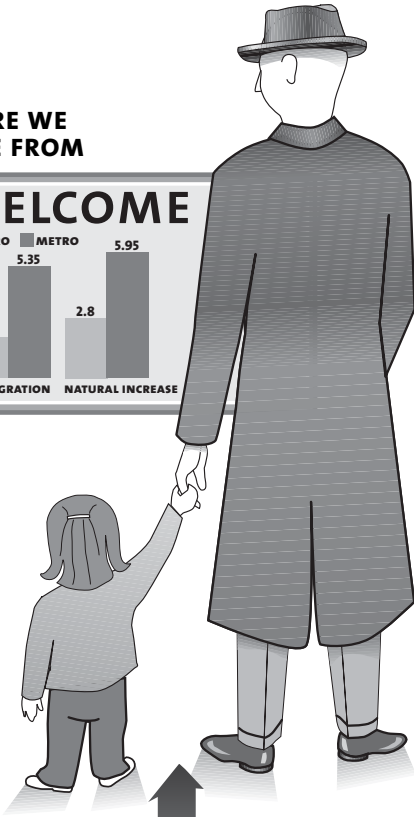
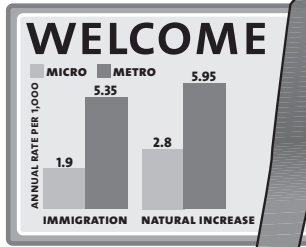
ETHNIC DIVERSITY



BIG WINNERS AND LOSERS



WHERE WE COME FROM



MICRO AREAS ARE OLDER, LESS UPSCALE AND MORE TRADITIONAL THAN METRO AREAS

	MICROPOLITAN AREAS	METROPOLITAN AREAS
Percent Over Age 55	23.9	20.3
Percent College Grads	16.4	26.4
Percent HS Dropouts	22.1	18.8
Brains to Brawn Ratio*	0.74	1.41
Percent Mgrs and Professionals	27.0	35.0
Percent HH Incomes >\$75,000	13.6	24.7
Percent HH Incomes <\$25,000	35.5	26.8
Percent Married	57.3	53.6
Percent Widowed	7.5	6.4
Percent Single, Never Married	23.4	28.1

*Ratio of College Grads/HS Dropouts

OLDEST MICROS: MICROS WITH GREATEST 65+ POPULATION

AREA	PERCENT
Sebring, FL	33.0
Homosassa Springs, FL	32.1
Palm Coast, FL	28.5
The Villages, FL	27.4
Mountain Home, AR	26.7
Brookings, OR	26.6
Kerrville, TX	24.8
Southern Pines, NC	21.8
Brevard, NC	21.4
Port Angeles, WA	21.4

YOUNGEST MICROS: MICROS WITH GREATEST UNDER 15 POPULATION

AREA	PERCENT
Rio Grande City, TX	31.4
Eagle Pass, TX	31.1
Gallup, NM	30.9
Brigham City, UT	28.8
Nogales, AZ	28.7
Garden City, KS	28.5
Blackfoot, ID	28.2
Dumas, TX	28.0
Hereford, TX	27.9
Elko, NV	27.7

EGGHEAD MICROS: MICROS WITH GREATEST COLLEGE GRAD POPULATION

AREA	PERCENT
Los Alamos, NM	60.5
Silverthorne, CO	48.3
Laramie, WY	44.1
Pullman, WA	44.0
Jackson, WY-ID	41.9
Bozeman, MT	41.0
Moscow, ID	41.0
Edwards, CO	39.2
Vermillion, SD	38.7
Durango, CO	36.4

DROPOUT MICROS: MICROS WITH GREATEST LESS THAN HS POPULATION

AREA	PERCENT
Rio Grande City, TX	65.3
Eagle Pass, TX	57.9
Pecos, TX	53.4
Raymondville, TX	51.3
Clewiston, FL	45.8
Middlesborough, KY	43.4
Wauchula, FL	42.0
Del Rio, TX	41.3
La Follette, TN	41.3
Indianola, MS	40.7

MARRIED MICROS: MICROS WITH GREATEST PERCENT MARRIED

AREA	PERCENT
Los Alamos, NM	68.0
Palestine, TX	67.7
Palm Coast, FL	67.2
Lamesa, TX	67.1
Canon City, CO	66.5
Granbury, TX	65.9
Mountain Home, ID	65.7
Pampa, TX	65.7
Crossville, TN	65.6
Mountain Home, AR	65.3

SINGLE MICROS: MICROS WITH GREATEST NEVER MARRIED POPULATIONS

AREA	PERCENT
Starkville, MS	44.6
Pullman, WA	44.2
Mount Pleasant, MI	43.6
Silverthorne, CO	43.4
Athens, OH	42.9
Carbondale, IL	42.4
Laramie, WY	42.3
Vermillion, SD	42.3
Indianola, MS	41.9
Oxford, MS	41.6