

[EDITORIAL]

## Integration, one community at a time

Something has changed about where people choose to live in Hampton Roads.

For the past few decades, as neighborhoods were built, people moved in without worrying too much about the race or ethnic group of their neighbors.

That seems like a small thing today. But over decades, that change made growth in Hampton Roads very different from 40 or 50 years ago. It made this part of the once-segregated South much more reflective of a diverse culture and a dynamic nation.

"[N]ewer suburban developments in northern and eastern Suffolk, southwestern Virginia Beach and the Greenbrier section of Chesapeake... boast high integration rates, which helped Hampton Roads become one of the most racially mixed regions in the nation."

That's from Pilot staffer Meghan Hoyer's story on what Census data shows about the racial makeup of our neighborhoods.

One conclusion, borne out over and over through the years: Many people today not only see the differences among their neighbors but live with them, too. That experience is necessary to understand just how insignificant those differences truly are.

As Hoyer reported in Sunday's Pilot, natural integration has been a prominent feature of new development in Hampton Roads, but older communities have remained relatively unchanged.

"Figures from the 2010 census show that South Hampton Roads' most segregated neighborhoods have remained persistently separate the past 10 years, hurting the region's overall integration rate," Hoyer wrote.

Perhaps, on one level, that's no surprise. Well-settled people don't move unless they have to, and in ordinary times, they don't often have to.

Such self-segregation, however, can lead to disparities in school funding, for example, or in municipal attention. It can lead to other inequalities, as well.

"To the extent that the country's becoming more integrated, it tends not to happen in the already historically formed minority neighborhoods," John Logan, a sociology professor at Brown University, told Hoyer. "If it's had an identity for 30 or 40 years, then it's very hard to change. It

turns out that white home buyers are very reluctant to move into primarily minority neighborhoods."

New developments begin from scratch, attracting whoever is willing and able to buy a house. Neighborhoods with established residents change slowly, over long periods. But they do, inexorably, change.

Lingering segregation - especially of neighborhoods in the urban cores of Norfolk, Portsmouth and Suffolk - is a largely temporal legacy of another, more separate time, perhaps in ways similar to the segregation of our churches.

Like everything else, those neighborhoods will eventually change, as many churches have. None of us is likely to see a moment when every neighborhood looks like every other one. But our suburban neighbors are leading the way toward diversity, giving us hope that our all-white and all-black neighborhoods will follow.