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Study: Give millennials reasons to stay on Long Island

Long Islanders between the ages of 20 and 44 continue to leave Nassau County, largely because they find the region's housing, along with student debt and often challenging public transportation to be burdensome.

This is according to "This Is Nassau: The Deal for The Next Generation," a report released by County Comptroller Jack Schnirman this week.

The report shows that Nassau has seen a 9.3 percent decline in residents in this age bracket since 2000. The report was released at a public forum at Molloy College last week.

The panel discussion included County Leg. Josh Lafazan, Molloy Professor Errol Pierre, Association for a Better Long Island Executive Director Kyle Strober, Jillian's Circus Founder Jillian Weston and Director of Policy Planning and Strategic Initiatives for the Comptroller's Office Marv McMoore Jr.

For prior generations, Nassau County was an affordable option for young families with "a quality of life based upon our schools, services, beaches, parks and access to New York City," Schnirman said in a statement.

"Working together, policymakers must recommit to making this deal work for the next generation of Nassau County residents," he added.

The Office of the Nassau County Comptroller's Policy & Research Unit developed the report, with assistance from the office's summer college interns.

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According to the report, those ages 25 to 34 on Long Island are increasingly living with their parents, and 44 percent of Long Islanders between the ages of 25 and 34 live at home, compared with 16 percent nationally.

"Long Island is facing a potential demographic catastrophe, which will turn into economic crisis if corrective action isn't taken soon," Strober said in a statement.

"One important step in addressing this threat would be reducing the red tape that currently challenges economic development projects, and coupling that action with a recognition that transit-oriented rental housing needs to be approved to serve this unmet need," he added.

The report revealed that Long Island's median rental price of \$1,760 would take 53 percent of an average millennial's monthly salary. As a result, young people opt to reside with their parents or move to lower-cost regions. Nassau County lost 22 percent of its affordable housing stock and the price per acre of property has increased 28 percent during the past decade. The report also notes that transportation options, particularly for north-south commutes, are lacking in many areas.

"If we had more public transportation, if we didn't have to use our cars as much, of course that would contribute to a more eco-friendly Long Island, which is something that I think a lot of millennials and the next generation are very passionate about," Weston said in a

statement.

Student debt plays a big role in the ability to afford housing on Long Island. According to the report, the average student debt balance for Long Islanders is \$33,900. That burden is furthered by the fact that 9.5 percent of Long Islanders with student loan debt are more than 90 days late on payments.

Although unemployment is at record lows, 34 percent of college graduates are underemployed, according to the comptroller's office. While jobs in the gig economy have provided more flexible employment opportunities, lack of healthcare or long-term career trajectories hamper the ability to build a strong financial base. Building up professional resources for the next generation could help them get started on careers that allow them to stay in this region.

"Young people often feel that asking questions or asking for help is a sign of weakness, because you're admitting that you don't know something," Lafazan said. "I think it's the surest

sign of strength and humility because, you're admitting that you need to know something, because you don't have that life experience."

The report outlines a number of areas for policy development that could help provide the next generation of Long Islanders with the support needed to prevent them from leaving the region completely. These options include efforts to reduce the burden of student loan debt and increase financial aid. In addition, updating zoning codes to allow for more transit-oriented development, specifically around LIRR stations, would also benefit millennials. Expanding public transportation options that connect the north and south shores was also included as an option, as was increasing access to affordable childcare options, such as expanded pre-K.

— ADINA GENN

Molloy gains accreditation for an MS program

Molloy College in Rockville Centre has

been granted accreditation for its Master of Science in clinical mental health counseling. The program, which recently got the nod from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, was launched by Molloy in 2015 and graduated its first class last year.

The master's program in clinical mental health counseling is a 60-credit, part-time, evening program that can be completed in three years. It is designed to provide graduate students with "the professional identity, core knowledge, necessary counseling skills and multi-cultural sensitivity to excel in a variety of mental health settings," according to Molloy.

In conjunction with the program, the college this year launched its Mental Health and Wellness Center, which offers mental health services to the community and provides graduate students with hands-on clinical training.

— BERNADETTE STARZEE

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Carl Oliveri, CPA, CCIFP, CFE
Partner, Construction Practice Leader
 t. 212-223-5047 e. coliveri@grassicpas.com

50 Jericho Quadrangle, Suite 200
 Jericho, NY 11753
 GrassiCPAS.com

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