

State sees 2 percent growth

By **DAVID MARTIN** Green River Star Staff Writer

Population statistics released by the Wyoming Department of Administration and Information show the state's population increased by two percent during the year 2007.

The net migration of the state shows 7,000 more people moved to Wyoming during the year than had moved out of state.

"The 2 percent population expansion in the state was the strongest increase since 1982, the end year of the oil boom," Wenlin Liu, senior economist for the state's economic analysis division said in the release.

"Wyoming's population growth has been lagging behind job increase for quite a few years. Certainly the strong population growth has brought some relief to the severe labor force shortage the state has been facing," Liu said.

The estimate only counts in-state residents, and does not count temporary workers from outside the state.

Locally the population increase has been apparent to the Green River Chamber of Commerce.

"Request for our relocation packets have tripled over the past three years," Janet Hartford, director of the Green River Chamber said.

Hartford said the chamber received two requests from residents in Texas and Washington for employees during the week-long holiday break.

The packets contain information about local schools, churches, utilities and city amenities, along with a publication from the Sweetwater Joint Travel and Tourism Board about recreation opportunities in the area.

Hartford said the local economic upswing is due to the development in the oil and gas industry, adding that there are still an estimated 1,000 open jobs Throughout the county and nearly 800 more open jobs expected by the summer months as work in the oil and gas industry increases.

Sweetwater County's unemployment rate was recently listed at 1.8 percent by the Wyoming Department of Employment.

Even with the projected jobs and service needs throughout Green River, Hartford said Green River's economic growth has been slower than Rock Springs because the city isn't a hub for big box stores such as Wal-Mart and Home Depot.

"There's more of a market for niche businesses in Green River," Hartford said, saying smaller mom-and-pop businesses seem to fare better in Green River.