**The "Buzz" About New Britain, Connecticut - A City Profile**

By Caroline Czajkowski, Research Analyst, CT Department of Labor

New Britain, Connecticut, or lovingly called “Hard Hittin” New Britain due to its industrial and blue-collar past, was originally settled as part of Farmington in 1687. By 1754, the rural hamlet separated from Farmington and became part of the township of Berlin. However, due to its central location and access to waterpower from local rivers, the area developed into a major manufacturing hub specifically in hardware and tools. With the establishment of Russwin (P.&F. Corbin) in 1839 and Stanley Works (now Stanley Black and Decker) in 1843, the community grew large enough to be incorporated as a city in 1850. Eventually the city garnered the moniker of “Hardware City” due to the residence of many high-profile companies such as Corbin Cabinet Lock Company, North & Judd Manufacturing Company, Fafnir Bearing Company, and Landers, Fray & Clark, in addition to the two previously mentioned. New Britain was compared to a beehive buzzing with activity and hard work. This imagery was even adopted into the city’s seal and emblem. New Britain’s need for a growing workforce while the prospect of attaining the American Dream attracted waves of immigrants including Italian, Irish, German, Polish, and Ukrainian populations. These communities influenced much of what is still seen in the city’s local color. New Britain reached its industrial peak in the early 20th century. It helped war efforts by producing manufactured goods for the armed forces during World War II. However, starting in the mid-20th century, American industry saw a drastic turnover. Manufacturing took a backseat to deindustrialization. Moreover, global competition and outsourcing eclipsed American-made goods. As with many manufacturing cities such as Detroit, Pittsburgh and Cleveland, New Britain also struggled to live up to its glory days. Loss of manufacturing jobs led to unemployment and population loss. That population loss has reversed in the current century. New Britain’s population is higher today than it was in 2000. Economic diversity through healthcare, small business and education have been leading factors rejuvenating the city. In recent years, infrastructure and redevelopment projects have been implemented to improve the city and its industry.

**LOCATION**

New Britain, centrally located in the state of Connecticut, is part of Hartford County. It lies approximately 10 miles southwest of Hartford, the state’s capital. The city covers about 13.5 square miles and is a mix of residential neighborhoods, industrial areas and open spaces. It is bordered by Farmington to the North, Newington to the East, Berlin to the South, Plainville to the West, and Southington to the South-West.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

New Britain has a population of approximately 74,100 residents which is roughly 2.05 % of Connecticut’s total population of 3.62 million. 51.6 % of New Britain’s inhabitants are female and 48.4% are male while the median age for a resident in the city is between 33 and 35 years. New Britain’s diverse demographics show that roughly 46% identify as White, 14.8% as Black/African American, 2.6% as Asian, 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 21% as some other race. Of the city’s population, 14.9 % consider themselves as mixed race while 85.1% identify as coming from a single ethnicity. Notably, 44.3% of New Britain’s population consider themselves as Hispanic or Latino which is around 5% of Connecticut’s total Hispanic/Latino population of 623,293.

New Britain’s diverse backgrounds influence language spoken at home. Over 49% of its residents speak a language other than English at home which is significantly higher than the roughly 24% reported statewide. The breakdown of language in the city is: 50.9% solely English, 30.2% Spanish, 12.9% Indo-European languages, 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4.2% other languages.

The diversity of language can be partly accredited to New Britain’s industrial past. Starting from the early 1850’s, an influx of international communities called the city home because of job opportunities in local manufacturing establishments such as the Stanley Works or Corbin Cabinet Lock Company to name a few. These included Italian, Irish, German, Polish, and Ukrainian folk. In 1917, when Puerto Rico became a U.S. territory, families traveled to the mainland without immigration restrictions. Many Puerto Ricans arrived in New Britain for jobs in the manufacturing industry, particularly those producing hardware and goods. The city actively accepted and fostered the immigrant communities which encouraged further migration as well as retention within New Britain.

**TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUTING**

New Britain is easily accessed through Interstate 84 and Route 9. On average city residents spend roughly 22 minutes commuting to work less than the 27-minute state average. Many New Britain residents work within the city limits or neighboring towns, commuting to jobs in local government, education, healthcare, retail, and small manufacturing. This contributes to a shorter average commute time for those living and working within the city. Of the population that commutes, roughly 85.2% drive alone and 6.7% carpool. Public transportation use is at 2.6% with CTtransit and CTfastrack offering public transportation options. The city has also invested in bike lanes and paths for easier movements about the town and neighboring areas. 4.2% of the working population walk to work as a means of transportation while 0.3% use a bike. Future rail plans are in development to link New Britain to regional train services providing another commuting option. Taxi services and rideshares such as Lyft and Uber are also options for travel which about 2.1% of the working population utilize. Approximately 6.9% of employees work from home (City-Data.com).

**AMENITIES**

New Britain offers a wide range of amenities for both its residents and visitors. It is home to Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) as well as over 15 elementary and middle schools. Notable parks and nature centers include the historic Walnut Hill Park, Stanley Quarter Park and Willow Brook Park as well as the Hungerford Nature Center. Key cultural and educational experiences include the New Britain Museum of American Art, the New Britain Industrial Museum, the New Britain Youth Museum and the New Britain Art League. The city also has several performing arts centers including Trinity-on-Main, Hole in the Wall Theater, New Britain Symphony Orchestra, the Repertory Theatre of New Britain, as well as CCSU’s theater department. It boasts a baseball stadium which is the home of the New Britain Bees and has a 27-hole golf course, the Stanley Golf Course. Several community centers and social services are also available. These include the New Britain Senior Center, the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, YWCA and the New Britain Social Services Department. The Hospital of Central Connecticut at New Britain General as well as the Hospital of Special Care are two of the main health care facilities located within the city.

**INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT**

Total employment, based on the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) for 2023, was 23,947 for employees in all sectors

(Figure 1) for the city of New Britain. The five industries that employed the greatest number of workers were Manufacturing, Retail Trade, Healthcare/Social Assistance, Accommodations/Food Service, and Government – specifically State and Local Government. The largest of the five, Healthcare and Social Assistance, made up 30.3% of the city’s workers. Government positions including the public school system amounted to 21.1% of employees in New Britain, while Manufacturing came in at 13.7%, Retail at 7.6%, and Accommodations/Food Service at 4.9%.

**WAGES**

The annual average wage for all workers in New Britain in 2023 was $69,198. This was a 91% increase, or $31,358 more than the $37,840 in 2000. Wages increases were due to inflationary pressures, labor shortages, the cost of living, and the need for skilled workers. However, statewide, the annual average wage in 2000 was $45,454 while in 2023 the average was $83,773. This puts New Britain below the CT state average. The highest change in wages in New Britain was seen in the Insurance Industry. Wages increased from $42,302 in 2000 to $133,761 in 2023, a $91,459 change in earnings. Construction also saw a large wage increase. Average construction wages in 2000 were $46,861 and rose to $104,872 in 2023 which is a $58,011 growth in earnings. The lowest increase in wages was in the Art, Entertainment and Recreation Industry which was closely followed by the Accommodation and Food Industry. Wage in 2000 for employees in the Art, Entertainment and Recreation Industry were $13,169 in 2023, which rose to $27,443, a $14,274 difference. Workers in the Accommodation and Food Industry received a $15,768 increase in wages over the span of 23 years from 2000 earnings of $11,962 to $27,730 in 2023.

**UNEMPLOYMENT**

While trending similarly to both indexes, New Britain's unemployment rate was higher than both the state and national averages from 2010 to 2023 (Figure 2). Straight out of the Great Recession from 2008 through 2009, New Britain saw an unemployment rate of 13.1% in 2010 while Connecticut and the rest of the United States saw unemployment rates in the low to mid 9%’s. National, state, and city unemployment rates declined until 2020 when the COVID outbreak erupted, and national lockdowns were implemented. With business restrictions or closures, shifts in consumer behavior, and the disruption of the global supply chain, unemployment rates quickly skyrocketed. New Britain jumped back up to a

10.9 % unemployment rate while at the national and state levels, unemployment increased to 8.1% and 8.0%. Unemployment rates have been dropping for all three while jobs have been increasing in most sectors. New Britain’s unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) was just 3.6% in November 2024 (latest available).

**ESTABLISHMENTS**

New Britain has seen steady growth in establishments since 2012 (Figure 3). During this timeframe 486 businesses were established in the city. Interestingly, even in 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, New Britain saw a growth in new businesses. Other aspects that have restored interest in New Britain can be attributed to the modernizing of the city’s infrastructure, citywide improvements with a focus on the downtown area, updates on public areas and buildings such as schools, and investments in housing.

**HOUSING**

The housing characteristics in New Britain, Connecticut, reflect its diverse population and historical roots. There are approximately 30,000 housing units in the city which are a mix of single-family homes, multi-family units, and apartment complexes. Multi-family units dominate because of New Britain’s urban environment and historical past which accommodated its industrial workforce. Forty percent of New Britain’s residents are homeowners with the median home price of $250,000 in 2022. Most families, students from Central Connecticut State University, and young professionals rent their accommodations. Monthly rents range from around $1,000 to $1,800 for a two-bedroom unit, depending on location and amenities. New Britain has a significant amount of affordable and subsidized housing. The city has made efforts to expand options for low-income families because of a rise in demand and limited new construction. The pressure on housing availability has induced the city’s prioritization of housing developments as part of its broader revitalization efforts, including mixed-use developments and updates to existing properties. Redevelopment initiatives in the downtown area aim to attract residents and businesses, with new apartment complexes and renovated buildings catering to a range of incomes.

**CONCLUSION**

New Britain, Connecticut, known for its rich industrial heritage and moniker “Hardware City,” has undergone a significant transformation over the years. From its bustling manufacturing peak in the early 20th century to the challenges of deindustrialization and economic shifts, the city has consistently demonstrated resilience. Its central location, cultural diversity, and historical significance have shaped its identity as a vibrant and evolving community.

Today, New Britain balances its industrial roots with a diversified economy that includes healthcare, education, retail, and small business development. Investments in infrastructure, housing, and community revitalization continue to breathe new life into the city. With a blend of cultural institutions, green spaces, and a strong sense of community, New Britain stands as an example of adaptation and innovation, offering a promising future while honoring its storied past. n