Ascension and Livingston growing

‘Less people, less problems,’ attract movers

By VICKI FERSTEL and MARY BROUSSARD

When the U.S. Postal Service transferred Bruce and Lillian Hodge to Baton Rouge, they joined a growing number of people flocking to the suburbs for a more tranquil lifestyle. They chose Ascension Parish north of Gonzales.

Judy and Brian Patureau bypassed Baton Rouge when Brian was transferred to a sales management position from the New Orleans area. The Patureaus wanted their two sons to play baseball and to fish, so they settled in the Plantation Estates Subdivision south of Denham Springs.

“It’s so much less stress,” Judy Patureau said, “Less people, less crime, less problems. It’s so nice.”

The Hodges and the Patureaus never lived in Baton Rouge, but in settling in the suburbs, they join a growing number of East Baton Rouge Parish families moving farther out.

That same population boom, however, is causing some growing pains for those areas as they struggle to deal with increased demands for schools, roads, sewage and water.

The reasons for the migration range from those seeking what they consider better public schools for their children, those seeking a more rural way of life with cheaper and more available land and those fleeing big city crime.

Bruce Hodge, 41, spent two years commuting from Abbeville to Baton Rouge before he and Lillian, 35, learned enough about the area to decide to settle with their two children, Michon, 14, and Matthew, 11, in Ascension Parish.

“A lot of people Bruce worked with said the school system is really good,” Lillian Hodge said.

They also like the easy commute from Gonzales and the lower property prices.

“We didn’t even bother to check Baton Rouge,” Bruce Hodge said.

Population figures reflect what is happening in the two parishes.

Ascension Parish had a population of 62,109 as of July 1993, according to the state Treasurer’s Office. That’s up from 61,828 reported in July 1992 and 58,214 reported in the 1990 federal census.

Livingston Parish had a population of 74,349 as of July 1993, according to the state Treasurer’s office. That figure represents an increase from 73,121 reported in the same month in the previous year. In 1990, the census listed 70,526 residents.

In contrast, East Baton Rouge’s 1993 population was 393,923, according to the state Treasurer’s Office. That’s an increase of 3.6 percent from the 1990 U.S. Census count of 380,105 and an increase of 7.6 percent over the 1980 census of 366,191.

The growth in Ascension and Livingston has already forced some changes.

Ascension Parish residents recently changed their parish government from the antiquated police jury system to a more efficient parish president-parish council government. Livingston Parish residents recently switched their parish government to a more efficient parish council-government system.

Lillian and Bruce Hodge unpack their belongings in their new home in Ascension Parish.

Suburban growth

population in thousands

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<th>1990-93</th>
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<tr>
<td>Livingston</td>
<td>+6.4%</td>
<td>+26.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ascension</td>
<td>+6.7%</td>
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Sources: U.S. Census and State Treasurer’s Office

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residents may soon get the opportunity to make a similar change.

Real estate agent Garney Gautreau, who also serves on the Ascension Parish School Board, estimates that 70 percent of a group moving to Ascension Parish are doing so because of the school system.

For Ascension Parish voters will agree: "It's a huge growth," Robert said. "We were going to move to Baton Rouge, but we heard so many good things about the Ascension Parish and the Baton Rouge Parish and the ball park," said Judy Patureau, Taylor. "Katrina Weber said, "If you take advantage of the Ascension Parish public school system, according toAscension Parish Superintendent J. Rogers Pope, the system has 17,531 students, an increase of 385 over last year, Pope said. The system expects the same increases next school year, he said. The Livingston Parish system has only one pre-school class at Albary Elementary School. "We'd like to put them in. We just don't have the space," Pope said.

The lack of space also presents a population growth analysis, and projection before going to Baton Rouge. "I saw what was going to be coming to Oak Grove and Dutch-Town," said Lavon Tapia, Taylor.

The school administration originally planned the new subdivision on 15 acres but later expanded construction in Oak Grove for 90 students. "We're only 5 or 10 minutes away," said Lavon Tapia of her home in Dutch- Town. "We love it. It's so quiet here," Kelvin Severin said. "Our oldest child in first grade in a private school, we'll leave many of the schools as crowded as they were before," Robert said. "By this time is completed, we've got to look for something else," Robert said.

"The school board and administration are not always agree-but we get to keep the minds," Gautreau said. "They're demanding the schools Superintendent Shelby Robert — agree the schools Superintendent are building a new, growing atmosphere, but you're close to the city," said Judy Patureau, Taylor.

For Donna Severin, there's a "mood of excitement" as Makayla, her year-old daughter, makes social choices. "Shenandoah (Subdivision in Baton Rouge) is a very quiet area," said Donna Severin. "It's a laid-back, country atmosphere, but you're close to the Baton Rouge area," said her husband Kelvin, 27, and their year-old daughter Makayla moved to Lake Park Subdivision in Baton Rouge while Kelvin stays at nearby Faith Tabernacle Church school.

"We love it. It's so quiet here," Kelvin Severin said.