Where will Lafayette grow next?

Maurice — In a village as small as Maurice, there has been a great many of its history, no surprise when everybody knows everybody. That may be especially true for Gary Villien, whose male relatives have streets named after them.

Villien's great-grandfather, Maurice Villien, arrived in Acadia from France shortly before the Civil War. In the 1880s, he donated the land for Maurice's St. Alphonse Catholic Church. Villien's grandfather Joseph acted as the village's first mayor.

Gary Villien himself is a three-term alderman who can remember when he recognized everybody he saw at the grocery store. "It's not like that now," Villien said Thursday in an interview.

Vernilion Parish's growth has suddenly become the talk of the fastest-growing municipalities in Louisiana, according to calculations based on the U.S. Census Bureau's yearly estimates. Its population growth — which has nearly doubled to 1,171 since 1990 — almost certainly benefits from the rapid growth across the line in Lafayette Parish, home to three of the 10 fastest-growing Louisiana municipalities this decade.

"You've got to have the land to build the houses," Hefner said. "We've got that, at least compared with a lot of other places."

Hefner said Carencro (10 percent growth to 8,306 this decade) benefits from the availability of land. Mayor Glenn Breauxes points to a new subdivision being developed east of the Old Evangeline Downs.

Other factors that have fueled Lafayette Parish's growth since the end of the 1980s oil bust are still there. The businesses along U.S. 90, many of them related to energy, help swell the populations of Youngsville, Louisiana's fastest-growing city this decade, and Broussard, which ranks fifth. They're also close enough to serve as bedroom communities for Lafayette.

Recent experience suggests that wherever the population growth might be, local officials will have to hustle to stay ahead of the demand for services and new public infrastructure.

Factors in growth

Lafayette Parish has come to dominate the list of fast-growing cities. A decade ago, the top 10 would have included a handful of cities near Baton Rouge and a few more from the North Shore.

Demographer and former Lafayette Parish School Board member Mike Hefner said the outflow from New Orleans to the parishes north of Lake Pontchartrain isn't there anymore. Land for development in the Belle Terre community around Baton Rouge has become scarcer, he said.

"I live in the western part of the parish," Hefner said. "You can almost get to Baton Rouge on I-10 faster than you can get to somewhere like Le Triomphe (near Broussard).

Lafayette city's growth for this decade looks modest at about 3 percent to 124,276. But that means that Lafayette has 3,557 new residents since 2010. Only New Orleans (34,886) and Bossier City (4,702) added more people.

Keeping up with growth

Approving new construction permits is one thing. Making sure the new residents have water, sewerage, treatment, roads, schools, police protection and other important services can be something else again.

Take Youngsville, which gets credit for keeping its water and sewer systems ahead of rapid growth and paying ample attention to its roads. But the city has an Achilles heel: classroom space.

"If you want to stay ahead of the demand for services, you have to hustle to stay ahead of the demand for services and new public infrastructure.

Broussard, which also needs more classroom space, explored the idea of letting its voters decide whether to use city money to build a school there. Mayor Charles Langlais said he was interested only in providing a building, not in managing a school. There's nothing new on that front so far.

"Carenco's enjoyment of new growth is being tempered by the need to spend money to increase its sewage treatment capacity. Mayor Brasseaux said the city government will probably go to the Louisiana Bond Commission within the next couple of weeks for permission to borrow $5.28 million by issuing bonds. Most of the money would go to fix sewage system damage inflicted by the March 12, 2012, flood. About $2 million would go toward purchasing land on which to build a sewage treatment plant. It won't be just an aeration pond. Carenco is looking for a modern treatment facility.

Then comes the tough part: finding $20 million to build the plant.

"We're going to have to find some funding sources," Brasseaux said. "We don't have a choice. We'll be at capacity within two years.

Growing pride

Back in Maurice, Villien said Maurice's growth comes from people moving north to get added protection from hurricanes, and people from Lafayette looking for a small-town lifestyle.

Like the other communities, Maurice has had to make some adjustments from the new residents, including a bond issue to expand the sewage treatment capacity. More people are coming, too. A new subdivision with 43 lots is being developed on Andreve Avenue.

Villien is pleased to be a descendant of the village's founding father at this point in Maurice's history. "It's an honor to have followed in his footsteps, knowing that Louisiana has the opportunity to be where this community is, at the crossroads of growth, having an input and seeing the vision for this community."

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