

Hispanic arrivals help La. growth, census says

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BY BILL LODGE

Advocate staff writer

New Hispanic residents offset population declines among Louisiana's white and black residents during the past nine years, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released Thursday.

Hispanics numbered only 162,981 of the state's estimated population of 4.49 million on July 1, the bureau said.

That was a gain of about 50 percent over the estimated 108,653 Hispanics believed to have been living in Louisiana on July 1, 2000.

"Hispanics are the fastest-

growing population group in the state," said Troy Blanchard, a sociology professor and demographer at LSU.

Over the nine years, nearly half of that Hispanic growth was in East Baton Rouge (6,064) and four other large parishes: Jefferson (10,941), St. Tammany (4,056), Ascension (2,733) and Bossier (2,635).

Continued expansion of the Hispanic population would increase the possibility that public school systems will have to address language issues, Blanchard said.

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"And this is definitely a population that we can expect to continue to grow," he said.

Without the influx of Hispanics, the state would not have recorded an overall population gain of 0.52 percent in the nine years, Blanchard said.

That's because the state's non-Hispanic white population declined over that period by 39,695 while the non-Hispanic black population decreased by 17,466.

Blanchard said the Hispanic increase of 54,328 combined with small growth among Asian and mixed-race groups enabled Louisiana to record a population gain of 23,097 in that period.

One surprise, Blanchard said, was that Livingston Parish led the state with a 94 percent increase over the nine years in its non-Hispanic black population.

"That's a place that has been over 95 percent white going way back," Blanchard said.

In fact, gains in Livingston Parish's white population dwarfed the increase in its black residents by 24,559 to 3,633.

The 28 percent growth rate for Livingston's white population over the nine-year period was second only to Ascension Parish's 29 percent.

Overall growth in both Livingston and Ascension, Blanchard said, indicates both areas remain "very attractive in terms of schools and housing."

Blanchard also said the BP well gushing millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico may mean considerable hardship for Hispanic and other new residents in four coastal parishes.

In Jefferson, Lafourche, Plaquemines and Terrebonne, Hispanic populations increased at rates ranging from 25 percent to 49.1 percent over the nine years, Blanchard said.

Many of those families were attracted to those parishes by construction jobs available after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Since then, the demographer said, some may have moved into the oil industry or other industries affected by the massive oil leak, such as commercial fishing.

Such hard times could be more difficult for Hispanic families, who may have not had time to develop supportive social systems that families who have lived in the area for generations have developed, he said.