

The Herald

The two sides of Brownsville's growth

Sprawling across north Brownsville, Cameron Park and Paseo de la Resaca gobble up open spaces with the same ferocity, but in vastly different ways.

They are both part of the Brownsville community — officially and unofficially. The new homes of the Paseo area are spacious and fine, featuring well-trimmed lawns and manufactured resacas with walking trails cutting through what developer Bill Hudson calls "One Thousand Acres of Excellence."

The Paseo de la Resaca area along Paredes Line and FM 802 is bustling with new restaurants, stores, shopping centers and a volume of traffic that makes it one of the busiest intersections in the Rio Grande Valley.

It's a hot zone of growth, a face of the new Brownsville.

Less than a mile down Paredes Line Road, on the other end of Brownsville's equation, is Cameron Park with its 6,000 residents living in an unincorporated community. A new Census report says that Cameron Park ranks last nationally among places with 1,000 or more households when it comes to per-capita income.

On average, a Cameron Park household tries to get by on a yearly income of \$4,103. A person's worth and dignity, of course, are not measured by how much revenue is generated in a household.

Cameron Park, over the last 30 years, has always been a place for new immigrants, a place where lots are cheap and homes can be had for a low price in an area with relatively little public housing.

Cameron Park has had plenty of success stories and is sure to have many more. Just down the road on Paredes Line, there are many more success stories to be found in the Hudson development.

New homes — most of them two-story structures that take up most of the allotted lot spaces — are everywhere, and in them are families are moving up the American economic ladder.

These are the extremes of our border region. Rapid population and job growth coupled with some of the lowest per capita income areas in the country. Growing universities and public school systems expanding in a city where nearly half of the adult population still does not have at least a high school education.

More than half of Brownsville's households earn less than \$25,000 a year, and yet the city was recently ranked by Forbes magazine as one of the 10 best places to do business in the United States. Brownsville leaped from 59th to 9th on the Forbes list over the past year. The business magazine reports a 19 percent job growth rate in Brownsville over the past year.

"With 150 manufacturers on both sides of the Rio Grande, high tech output is exploding," Forbes says of the Brownsville/Matamoros area. The McAllen area ranked a bit higher on the Forbes list, finishing 5th after placing 25th the year before. Dallas, Austin, Houston and San Antonio ranked far below the two Valley cities on the Forbes list.

It's good stuff, no doubt, and information to build on and highlight in promoting our region.

The 2000 Census figures, however, bring other perspectives along with heavy doses of reality about our community.

Nearly 90 percent of Brownsville's population over the age of 5 speaks a language other than English (Spanish). Forty-two percent say they speak English "less than very well." The largest industry in the number of jobs comes under the category of "educational, health and social services," a testament to the size of the Brownsville school district and the growing medical/health field.

Well over a quarter of Brownsville's population (31.5 percent) is foreign born, a fact that points to

Brownsville becoming more Spanish dominant than ever before (if that's possible) and a place where immigration is causing even more shifts in the city's landscape.

Just over 91 percent of Brownsville's population is of Hispanic descent. Sixty-eight percent of the city's residents are natives of the area.

Taking in this broad Census snapshot, we see a city that is growing, expanding, prospering in places with vibrant economic growth while still mired in some of the lowest income and educational levels in the country. Brownsville is a city brimming with possibilities, pushing up against its future. You can see it. You can feel it.

The true measure of success may come in eight years when the next Census is done. How far of an economic gulf will exist in 2010 between Cameron Park and the One Thousand Acres of Excellence?

Side-by-side, Cameron Park and Paseo de la Resaca, the two faces of Brownsville providing a reflection of their community.

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