

## The Challenges of Growth

Recent articles in the Herald-Zietung pointed out the continued growth of New Braunfels. As the second fastest growing city by percentage in the nation, New Braunfels welcomes about 15 new people each day—that's about 5,500 new residents per year. Providing schools, libraries, parks, medical facilities, police, firefighters, and other services that our growing population will need is going to be a challenge. But, the city is planning for those challenges. It will almost certainly build or acquire most of those needed traditional public services.

Insuring that we continue to provide needed natural resources will be the greater challenge. Water is the most basic of those natural resources. Our water comes from the Edward's Aquifer, on which the city is built. As we take more water from the aquifer, we must ensure that enough water is returned to it. This means that the streams that feed it must continue to flow.

Equally important, the caves, sinkholes, cracks, and other features of the recharge zone—the area in which surface water returns to the aquifer—must be protected. Austin and San Antonio, who also get their water from the Edward's Aquifer, have made its protection a priority by purchasing land and/or development rights to keep roofs, roads, and parking lots from obstructing the recharge zone. Unfortunately, we, in the New Braunfels area, have not made protection of the aquifer a high priority.

Another vital natural resource was alluded to in one of the articles. The mayor was quoted as calling this one of the most beautiful places in Texas. It certainly is. Preserving this beauty in large degree means preserving open spaces. Open spaces allow birds to nest, wild critters to raise their young, and each of us to enjoy this beautiful place and remain grounded in it.

The census tells us that the population of New Braunfels is now about 84,000. If five years from now that population is 110,000 or 120,000, will we still have the water and the beauty of natural open spaces? We can hope so, but hope is not a substitute for action. Our time is running short. We must act to preserve key natural places. As time passes, we will have fewer of them and those remaining will be more difficult to preserve.

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