

## Sask. population rises 0.35%

### Albertans continue to flood into province

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REGINA -- Former Albertans Jason Beaumont and Nicole Hassen left their one-bedroom apartment in Calgary behind, unlocked the door to their south-end Regina home and became key players in a growing Saskatchewan trend.

At the beginning of May, the young couple moved to Regina from Calgary, a city in which they couldn't find an affordable home.

"We weren't planning on leaving Calgary but we had always wanted to come back to Saskatchewan -- this is where we wanted to be. We wanted to take part in the economic boom so when we got a job offer . . . at Dundee Securities we decided to take it and move back here," Beaumont said Wednesday.



CREDIT: L-P Photo by Don Healy  
Nicole Hassen and Jason Beaumont in front of their new home in south Regina

He and Hassen are among the latest Alberta arrivals to Saskatchewan.

According to a Statistics Canada report released Wednesday, in the first quarter of 2008 the province's population rose 0.35 per cent to an estimated 1,010,146, up 3,502 people from the end 2007.

Saskatchewan's population has grown by nearly 18,000 people in the past year.

"This stands in stark contrast between 2001 and 2006 when Saskatchewan's population decreased by 35,000 people," said Advanced Education, Employment and Labour Minister Rob Norris at a news conference.

The first-quarter increase was the highest recorded in Saskatchewan in decades. Only Alberta posted stronger demographic growth in the country, but it lost residents to Saskatchewan.

"In the first quarter of 2008, we're seeing over 1,000 people coming back from Alberta or to Saskatchewan from Alberta for the first time," Norris said. "We're obviously also seeing play from across the West and we've put some attention recently into Ontario and we're beginning to see some of the benefits.

"Just the other day, I was talking to two engineers who are moving their families in from Ontario. They're already working here so we're seeing it from right across the country."

Norris expects Saskatchewan's growth to continue.

"That first quarter reflects, if you want, a bit of a cool season in Saskatchewan between January and March, so I anticipate that we'll be seeing those numbers at least matched during the warmer season and certainly during the summer when it's a lot easier to move families," he said.

Interprovincial migration is the largest component of population change in Saskatchewan, Norris said.

During the past year, 30,307 people moved to Saskatchewan from other provinces, compared to 19,361 who moved out, for a net interprovincial in-migration of 11,036 people. In addition, 3,839 immigrants from other countries moved to Saskatchewan.

But with the province's boom has come a labour shortage in many sectors, including the construction industry.

"We need more people to help build more houses," Norris said. "Certainly the housing piece, the infrastructure piece, these are some of the challenges of growth but the great news is we're actually addressing challenges of growth. For too long, Saskatchewan was addressing challenges relating to decline."

The province has conducted an aggressive marketing campaign in Ontario, Manitoba, the Philippines and Ukraine to attract more skilled workers. Norris predicts an increase in immigration from outside the country.

The SaskJobs.ca website is a good indicator of job opportunities, said Chris Jones-Bonk, manager of marketing communications with Saskatchewan Advanced Education, Employment and Labour.

"The number of vacancies posted on the SaskJobs website is close to triple what it was three years ago," Jones-Bonk said. "It's gone from 12,542 in the first quarter of 2005 to 33,522 in the first quarter of 2008."

With job offers in hand, Beaumont and Hassen started looking for a Regina home in April.

"The prices of houses were higher than we'd thought but yet still very affordable for a young couple," Beaumont said.

They say Albertans' attitudes are slowly changing and residents are starting to recognize their neighbour's potential.

"I worked with lots of people that were from Saskatchewan and they were looking for opportunities to come back. It's just waiting for that opportunity to come up," Hassen said.

Beaumont was born and raised in Hanley and Hassen's hometown is Bruno. Both are happy to return.

"We want to let people know across Canada that it's a good place to be, it's a good place to have a family and come back to -- there's lots of opportunities here," Beaumont said.

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