

Kids' KOrner

Mexico City fights back against staggering growth

WASHINGTON — The numbers are staggering: Mexico City now has a population of 16 million people.

Half are under the age of 18, assuring a tremendous future growth even with a lowered birthrate. About 400,000 rural im-

migrants pour into the capital to live each year. By 2000, the city may be home to 30 million people.

The problems caused by this growth, and by the infelicitous location of the city by the Aztecs in 1325 on a sign from a god, are equally grave:

It is one of the world's few major cities far from a source of water. It stands on mushy, sinking soil of an old lake bed. It is girded by mountains that prevent dispersion of the smoke from 30,000 factories and nearly 3 million motor vehicles, causing what many call the world's worst pollution.

Presidential Fears

So grave are those problems that Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado has said that "Mexico City's growth and gigantic size are alarming and out of all known proportion."

Yet there is reason for optimism. Some hope that Mexico City will be able to bear the brunt of the growth and improve the lot of those who leave the countryside for a better life in the city.

Neighborhood groups have formed to improve physical conditions in run-down areas. City planning began in 1980. And national population growth has slowed from 3.5 percent in 1970 to 2.4 percent in 1982, though the birthrate in 1980 was still more than twice that of the United States.

"This city is still very Mexican," writes Bart McDowell, an assistant editor. "And if Mexicans seem short on self-restraint, they are brilliant at improvising."

McDowell describes the numerous rural Mexicans he talked with among the thousand who arrive in the capital by bus each day, "wearing country clothes and expressions of con-

fused excitement. "Invariably, they told him that they came "to better myself"—to get a job, to earn more money, to make a better life for the family.

Jose Ruiz came from Oaxaca, first with the military and then to follow a cousin Margarita who had taken a job as a cook in a private (Turn to Page B11)



Unbridled development marches across Netzahualcoyotl, a neighbor to Mexico City and, like the Mexican capital, one of the world's fastest growing cities. Though social services are scant for Netzahualcoyotl's 2.4 million people, this city means opportunity to rural emigrants who flock to it.



Home to a family of 20, this Mexico City house grew with its three-generation household. A courtyard faucet fills jugs for drinking and tubs for washing clothes. More than half of the city's housing units are built by their occupants, and 40 percent, including this one, lack adequate sewerage.

COLOR THIS!

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|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. ORANGE |
| 2. RED | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

SUNFLOWERS ARE A GARDEN FAVORITE. ITS RAY-LIKE BLOOMS OFTEN REACH 12 INCHES IN DIAMETER. FARMERS GROW TWO TYPES OF FLOWERS, ONE FOR ITS EDIBLE SEEDS AND THE OTHER FOR ITS OIL. THESE BLAZING YELLOW FLOWERS TURN THEIR HEADS DAILY AS THEY FOLLOW THE SUN.

