

The Hill is Sugar Land's oldest
community, established in 1914

Celebrating Our Golden Anniversary



The owners of Imperial Sugar established Sugar Land as a company town in 1908



Written by Crystal Rawls
Photos by Nneka Kimble

The rain magnified the already frigid air on that December day in 1959. It would have been easier to stay indoors, to leave well enough alone. But the residents of Sugar Land had a choice to make: allow their neighborhoods to be annexed by a surrounding town, or incorporate a city of their own. So, 480 people decided to brave the rugged weather to change history when they cast their votes, giving birth to one of America's fastest growing cities.

Company Town

Before the heavily trafficked streets, busy shopping centers, and sprawling neighborhood developments that now characterize Sugar Land, there was the Imperial Sugar Company. But, a business cannot thrive without a successful, well-adjusted workforce, so Imperial owners Ike Kempner and William Eldridge established a company town in 1908, complete with a mercantile store, bank and grocery; a capitalist utopia.

For five decades, the community grew into its own. Outsiders, like Sugar Land native Bruce Kelly's grandparents, flocked to the area in search of a better life. And they weren't disappointed. Everyone had a job, and any expenses, including food, clothes, and transportation, was deducted from payroll. Even the stock market crash of 1929 couldn't interrupt the success of this idyllic community.

Sugar Land Turns 50

Sugar Land has been named by CNN as one of the 100 Best Cities to Live in the United States



Sugarland or Sugar Land?

“When the Industries were first chartered, a New York lawyer producing the documents unknowingly spelled it Sugarland,” says Bruce Kelly. “The area, and later the company town, had always been referred to as Sugar Land, as evidenced by the name given to the very first post office.”

Benjamin Franklin Terry and William Jefferson Kyle (plantation owners 1853-1886) were the first to call the area Sugar Land.

“Sugar Land was isolated when I grew up,” says Kelly. “Two thousand people in the middle of nowhere.”

Kelly spent his early childhood in one of the company-owned houses in the Flats area. He recalls a community so close, he and his brother would listen for the sugar refinery’s lunch hour whistle, signaling his father’s return home from work for his noonday meal.

“We popped up in anticipation of greeting him on our side of Brooks Street,” Kelly recalls. “There was no need of traffic lights in those days. No cars approached. It seemed he crossed the street without even looking for traffic.”

By the mid-1950s as surrounding cities flourished, and as U.S. 59 extended past Houston, it became evident that a change needed to

take place. If the company town did not incorporate, they faced annexation by one of the neighboring towns. So, with support from Imperial Sugar and Sugarland Industries, the quaint company town became the City of Sugar Land in 1959.

Suburban Metropolis

It’s almost as if former Sugar Land Mayor, and a founding city council member, Bill Little, could foresee a future of prosperity in those early days of the city’s founding. In 1962, he met a young man from Bernard Johnson Engineers in Houston who was selling comprehensive city plans. Seeing it as an ideal opportunity for Sugar Land, he presented it before the council, who agreed to purchase the plan. One of the engineering firm’s predictions? That Sugar Land would have approximately 55-60,000 residents by 2000.

Little attributes Sugar Land’s startling growth to several factors. “It’s the quality of life in the city, it’s a progressive city, a comfortable place to live,” says Little, who worked for Imperial Sugar for 36 years, and whose three children still reside in the same city their father founded.

Keeping the Small Town Charm

Since those early days, Sugar Land has shaken off its small company town image and is coming into its own with shopping and dining centers, sprawling master-planned communities, two college campuses, and the best fixed-base operations airport in America. And the country has taken notice: In 2006, CNN/Money Magazine ranked Sugar Land third on its list of 100 Best Cities to Live in the United States; CQ Press ranked it the Fifth Safest City in the United States in 2007; and in 2008, Forbes.com selected Sugar Land as one of three Houston-area Top Suburbs to Live Well.

Even with the hustle and bustle of Houston right next door, Sugar Land has not lost the charm of the old days, says Kelly.

“The change we’ve had is good,” says the life-long resident. “There are advantages to having the growth, but at the same time neighborhoods are still the same. We have the best of both worlds.”

Re-live Sugar Land’s history as the City of Sugar Land celebrates with walking tours of old Sugar Land and Imperial Sugar on the first Saturday of each month in 2009 from 9 a.m.-11 a.m. beginning at Lakeview Elementary School on Wood at 2nd Street. And culminate the year at the city’s 50th Anniversary New Year’s Eve Signature Event. For more information, visit sugarlandtx.gov, or call 281-275-2216. SLM

Crystal Rawls is a marketing specialist and freelance writer.

RIVER PARK DENTAL
Liyen L. Keen, DDS
Family and Cosmetic Dentistry Family and Cosmetic Dentistry Family and Cosmetic Dentistry

Quality Dentistry
in a Friendly Environment

© 2008 Sugar Land Magazine

Family and Cosmetic Dentistry Family and Cosmetic Dentistry Family and Cosmetic Dentistry

17320 W Grand Parkway S Ste B
Sugar Land, TX 77479
P: 832.595.2505
www.RiverParkDentalWeb.com

Sugar Land Notoriety

- In 2006, CNN/Money Magazine ranked Sugar Land third on its list of 100 Best Cities to Live in the United States
- CQ Press ranked it the Fifth Safest City in the United States in 2007
- In 2008, Forbes.com selected Sugar Land as one of three Houston-area Top Suburbs to Live Well.



The first school of Sugar Land was built in 1918 for Sugar factory workers kids



CQ Press ranked Sugar Land the Fifth Safest City in the United States in 2007

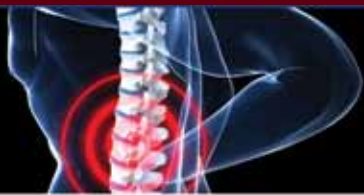


Sugar Land City Hall is located in Sugar Land Town Square

Re-live Sugar Land's History
Walking tour of old Sugar Land and Imperial Sugar are offered on the first Saturday of each month. For more information, visit sugarlandtx.gov.



Parks throughout Sugar Land help to maintain its old town charm



ADVANCED INTERVENTIONAL PAIN CONSULTANTS

1327 Lake Point Parkway, Ste. 520 Sugar Land, Texas 77478 Phone 713.590.5470 www.modulatepain.com

Acute and chronic pain management by qualified specialists in the area of pain medicine.

- DIAGNOSTIC AND THERAPEUTIC PAIN MANAGEMENT
- ADVANCED INTERVENTIONAL TREATMENTS
- COMPLETE INDIVIDUALIZED EVALUATIONS



JAIME ROBLEDO, M.D.

Board Certified by ABA in Pain Medicine
 Graduate of Baylor College of Medicine
 University of Washington Medical Center

Active Member of:
 International Spine Intervention Society
 American Pain Society
 American Academy of Pain Management
 American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians



© 2009 Sugar Land Magazine