

THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION

CURRENTS

Q2/2008

A GOOD STEP

BREC and a pioneering developer will build trails that could spark a network across Baton Rouge



NEW KEY, OLD LOCK

A new public agency could put thousands of properties back into commerce

BARTON AWARDS / CHILDREN'S MUSEUM / ANIMATION FESTIVAL / FOUNDATION ASSETS RISE



2

On the cover
Bill Palmer of BREC
and Richard Carmouche of
Carmouche Construction
photographed by
Tim Mueller.

14

BARTON AWARDS

Questions for the award
winners

COVER STORY

18

A GOOD STEP

Building trails across
Baton Rouge

26

**BATON ROUGE
CITY STATS**

Indicators project will help
guide Foundation

28

“I AM...”

Gaines winner visits
EBR Lab Academy

Baton Rouge Area Foundation



36



40



48



58

32

NEW KEY, OLD LOCK

A redevelopment authority launches to speed up rebuilding neighborhoods

36

ART AHEAD

The Kennedy Center and Lafayette's arts organizations are designing an arts program for Louisiana public schools

40

THAT'S NOT ALL FOLKS

Growing animation festival could foster new tech industry

48

HAPPY NOTES

Tipitina's co-op makes musicians sing

58

JOHN WILDER

Redeveloper

3

DEPARTMENTS

- 04 From the Chair
- 06 Lead In
- 14 On the Ground
- 28 OnSite
- 44 What's Next?

- 48 Granted
- 52 Northshore
- 54 The Corridor
- 58 Coda



How quickly a city can change.

It was the late 1990s, and the Old State Capitol was noisy with ideas for reinventing downtown Baton Rouge. Listening to hundreds of visions from residents, architect Andres Duany delivered Plan Baton Rouge, a blueprint for re-

viving the heart of the city.

Today, downtown Baton Rouge is noisy with life.

After the sun goes down and the offices turn dark, new lights flicker in downtown. Musicians

within the last decade to fund \$70 million in improvements to parks across the parish.

In coming weeks, City Park will reopen after a nearly \$5 million transformation. The old tennis courts have been replaced. The decaying playground has been scrapped for shiny swings, slides, sit and spins and climbable structures. The park has water fountains for runners, a labyrinth for people who want to be mindful, a promenade and trails for walking and even a park for playful dogs.

Anxious to use the park, people have broken the rules, ignored the construction tape to let their children swing and slide. Tennis enthusiasts have even climbed the fence to hit balls on courts that don't yet have nets.

As in the transformative past decade, whether BREC's trail network—and other improvements—are accomplished depends on all of us.

4

and actors perform on the Manship Theatre stage. Restaurants serve people who are busy in conversations. Music is played at clubs. People walk the streets just to look at other people.

When Saturday arrives, the Red Stick Farmers Market draws people who relish food grown by area farmers. Ten years ago, this crowd—both here and around the nation—was at the leading edge of a food movement. Now they have a name; they are “locavores.”

This energy for life is not contained to downtown Baton Rouge. Witness, for instance, the revival of City Park, thanks to taxpayers who agreed

Next to City Park, a Baton Rouge Area Foundation project is bringing back Old South Baton Rouge, which had been in decline for decades. In April, the first resident set up a home in RiverSouth, a neighborhood within Old South Baton Rouge funded by an \$18.6 million federal grant. More houses are on the way, and developers are snapping up and building on Nicholson Drive and Highland Road, the main neighborhood thoroughfares.

Beyond downtown and its surroundings, BREC is starting a project that could substantially improve the quality of life. The parks system is pre-

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Christel C. Slaughter Ph.D., Chair
John G. Davies, President & CEO
Thomas L. Frazer, Vice Chair
Alice D. Greer, Secretary
Candace E. Wright, Treasurer
John W. Barton Sr., Chair Emeritus
Thomas H. Turner, Past Chair
Lee Michael Berg
Warren O. Birkett Jr.
Donald H. Daigle
Yolanda J. Dixon
G. Lee Griffin
C. Kris Kirkpatrick
Richard F. Manship
C. Brent McCoy
Matthew G. McKay
Jacqueline D. Vines
Leonard C. Wyatt

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is a community foundation that takes advantage of opportunities to improve the quality of life in the capital region. We do so by providing two essential functions. One, the Foundation connects philanthropists with capable nonprofits to make sure the needs of our communities are met. For example, our donors support the Shaw Center for the Arts and buy eyeglasses for needy children. Two, the Foundation invests in and manages pivotal projects to improve the region. Our Plan Baton Rouge initiative spearheaded the downtown revitalization plan and now is working to revive Old South Baton Rouge. For more information, contact Mukul Verma at mverma@braf.org.

Currents is published six times a year by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, 402 N. Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802. If you would like to be added to our distribution list, please contact us at (225) 387-6126 or email the Foundation at mverma@braf.org.

paring to build trails along creeks from Siegen Lane to Bluebonnet Boulevard. Part of a pathways project, the trail is actually a linear park. It will have flowers, trees and benches – and maybe ice cream vendors.

Trails are more than a place for walking, jogging or riding a bike. Like a vibrant downtown or an active park, trails serve many other purposes.

Trails let us move about town, providing an alternative to clogged roads and \$3.50 per gallon gas. They offer a place for us to exercise, breathe fresh air and enjoy the lush surroundings of Baton Rouge and its 11-month growing season. Trails let us build community.

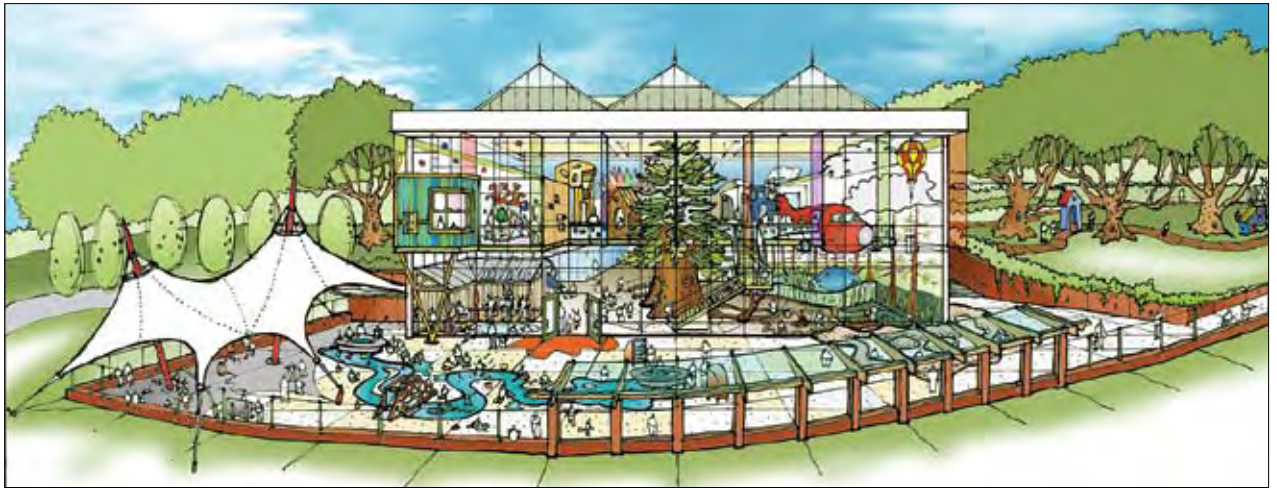
Our cover story features BREC's path project. That's because the initiative not only marks a decade of transformation for Baton Rouge, but also a promise for the next 10 years and more. With a big assist from residents, BREC could expand the trail network across the parish—and beyond.

As in the transformative past decade, whether that trail network—and other improvements—are accomplished depends on all of us. If we work in concert, we can declare in 10 years, "How quickly a state can change."

Thank you,



Christel C. Slaughter, Ph.D.



Children's museum set >>

It might make you want to be a child again.

In three years, kids in the Baton Rouge region should have a children's museum, a place to learn about the world through play. "Play is one of the most profound ways children learn," says Reb Haizlip, whose firm designed the museum. "It's serious business."

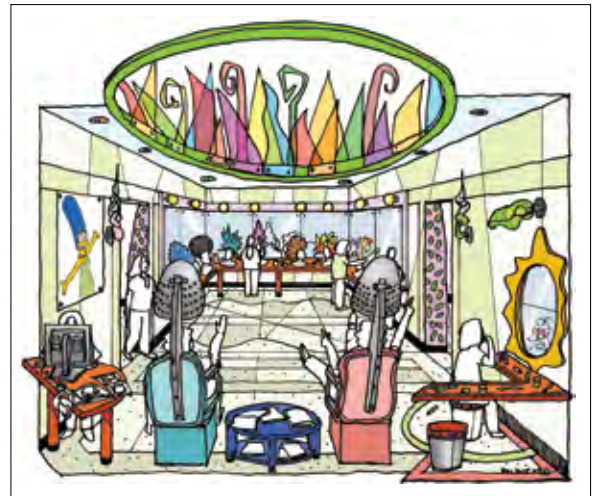
Located in City Park, on Dalrymple Drive near the I-10 ramps, the Knock Knock Children's Museum should begin taking form later this year. Organizers estimate it will cost \$15 million to build. They are on their way to raising the money, needing \$5 million from contributors to draw \$5 million committed by the state.

Kelli Stevens, chairman of Knock Knock, will launch the capital campaign soon after a strategic meeting and con-

struction costs are tallied.

Haizlip, of Haizlip Studios, says the museum concept was based on community input. Because of the sloping landscape, Knock Knock will be two stories and set into the hill. The centerpiece will be a two-story fabricated live oak tree, which children will be able to safely climb.

The museum is intended for children up to 8 years old. It will have a café where children can cook, a replica of the Mississippi River bridge that can be tinkered with, a working art studio, a room where kids can work on cars, another in which they can learn about the river by maneuver-



The Knock Knock Children's Museum will be set into a City Park hill on Dalrymple Drive. Children will learn about the world through play. Organizers hope to begin construction this year.

ing a play barge.

"When it gets built, it's going to be a such a gift for our children," said Stevens.

More about the museum is at <http://knockknockmuseum.org>.

InCourage outcomes >>

Following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Foundation launched a mental health initiative known as InCourage. The program, designed with the assistance of the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, provided free counseling to adults who were impacted by the storms and living or working in the Baton Rouge area.

This year, the Foundation completed its role in InCourage, turning the program over to Family Services of Greater Baton Rouge for continuation. Through January, 201 people had enrolled in the program with 82 completing it. For those who completed the program, the prevalence of severe distress decreased from 62% to 12%—this data represents observable improvement in the daily lives of those who were impacted by Katrina and Rita.

Moving forward, researchers are using what they learned in Baton Rouge to create a roadmap for others to use if disasters affect their communities. •

**Foundation assets rise >>**

Last year was another banner one for the Foundation. Thanks to generous donors, assets continued to rise and the Foundation provided nearly \$23 million in grants and contracts to benefit the region and select spots around the world.

The Foundation reported its work and financial performance at an annual meeting of members in March. New directors were also chosen then by the members. They are Donald H. Daigle, vice president of Exxon Engineering; G. Lee Griffin, retired as chairman of Bank One Louisiana; C. Kris Kirkpatrick, founder of Long Law Firm; Leonard C. Wyatt, Whitney Bank retail manager for the Baton Rouge market; and Matthew G. McKay, co-owner of All Star Automotive.

Foundation assets rose 5.2% to an estimated \$568 million at year-end 2007. That number doesn't include changes in the Foundation's real estate portfolio, which was not closed at the time of the meeting.

The real estate is held in a supporting organization, the Wilbur Marvin Foundation.

The real estate is managed by Commercial Properties Realty Trust.

The Foundation made 2,831 grants in 2007 totaling \$18.8 million, down from \$33.8 million in 2006, a year when Hurricane Katrina relief sharply increased the number of grants and total awarded.

The Foundation makes grants to nonprofits that work in the region, and some donors support projects around the world, including in Mexico

Foundation assets rose 5.2% to an estimated \$568 million at year-end 2007.

and Burkina Faso, Africa. Plus, the Wilbur Marvin Foundation provides grants in Puerto Rico, where the late Wilbur Marvin, who bequeathed his real estate business to the Foundation, had property and a residence.

Membership revenues jumped to \$450,090 in 2007, up from about \$400,000 the year before. Memberships help pay for the work of the Foundation, which includes managing grants and overseeing projects, such as assisting in rebuilding downtown and Old South Baton Rouge. •

Going up: OneEleven >>

In a few months, people will be residing in one of the most coveted addresses in Baton Rouge. OneEleven, the Foundation's apartment and office combination on Third Street, is set to open by September, weather not delaying construction.

In March, construction workers finished the foundation and started erecting the steel structure, which rises four stories on land next to the Shaw Center and the Roux House restaurant. With the building's structure in place, construction will begin to speed up.

The project will have 12 apartments, ranging from 736-square-foot, one-bedroom units to one 1,180-square-foot, two-bedroom unit. Units will have balconies and terraces with a view of the Shaw Center and the future downtown square on North Boulevard. Rents have not been decided.

Below the units will be 5,000 square feet of office space. Across a small walk that connects to the Shaw Center will be Stroube's Chophouse, a restaurant operated by the owner of Capital City Grill, which has been a hit in downtown.

Construction for the Stroube's space begins soon; the restau-



By fall, the 12 apartments and 5,000 square feet of office space will be available at OneEleven. Ultimately, profits will benefit the Shaw Center.

rant should open by the end of the year, says Michael Lang of Commercial Properties Realty Trust, the Foundation's real estate manager.

Ultimately, profits from the projects will be used to support the Shaw Center. •

Foundations give in record numbers >>

The largest foundations in the nation combined to increase giving to \$19.1 billion in 2006, a 16.4% increase over the year before, reports the Foundation Center.

The annual survey showed the sharp increase was partly driven by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which boosted its giving because of a multi-billion dollar gift from investor Warren Buffett. The Gates Foundation also fueled a rise in health care giving, a primary goal that includes the treatment and eradication of malaria. •

A robust stock market in 2006 caused a rise in giving by foundations, the New York group's survey showed. The market was strong again in 2007, until it gave back roughly 33% of its gain in the final months of the year.

The Foundation Center surveyed 1,300 nonprofits to com-

...the sharp increase was partly driven by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

pile results. In total, the largest foundations made 140,484 grants in 2006, up 7.3%. Health care groups got the most money (\$4.4 billion), followed by education (\$4.3 billion). •

Hammerin' Hank returns >>

Last time Hank Saurage led Community Fund for the Arts, donors gave about \$750,000 to the arts fundraiser. "He holds the record to date," says Derek Gordon, executive director of the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge. "He's back for a second time at bat."



Saurage is catching the campaign on an upward trajectory after a few flat years. CFA raised \$550,000 last year, up \$100,000 over the year before. The goal this year is \$700,000.

"In order to continue to attract new businesses and support their recruitment and retention of the best and brightest employees from across the country, our community must work together to support and sustain a high-quality cultural environment that provides excellence, variety and affordability to all audiences," says Saurage, who owns a commercial real estate firm.

CFA makes grants to The Arts Council, Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre, Baton Rouge Gallery, Baton Rouge Little Theater, Baton Rouge Symphony, The DeBose Festival and National Piano Competition, The Foundation for Historical Louisiana, Friends of Magnolia

Art in Public Places

>> The Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge is crafting rules that could lead to funding for its art in public places initiative.

"It's hard to do anything when you don't have any money," says Derek Gordon, executive director of the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge. "We are trying to find a source of funding."

The project may ask the city to devote 1% of public construction spending to art, mirroring a state program that installed art in new state buildings. Governments across the country use percent for arts programs to buy, install and maintain art in public places.

Gordon started the project last year by gathering community leaders to discuss the idea and to provide a means to let art bloom in more public places. One group of board members is researching percent for arts programs, while another is looking at policies and procedures for public art, such as how to solicit and review art.

The effort is beginning to produce results. This winter, 40 LSU art and architecture students walked around downtown to catalog public art and to look for places to install more. Their research will be used to produce a walking tour of downtown and Capitol Park public art, and will help the arts council decide how to proceed with new installations of sculptures, murals and more. Brochures for the walking tour should be completed by summer. •



Children look at a mural by artists Charles Barbier, Clark Derbes and Hunter Roth painted on the construction wall at the Shaw Center for the Arts.

Mound Plantation, Louisiana Art and Science Museum, Louisiana Sinfonietta, Of Moving Colors, Playmakers of Baton Rouge, Swine Palace Productions and WRKF. •

What goes where

>> Codes, zoning and land development regulations may not sound like sexy stuff, but in post-Katrina/Rita Louisiana, communities across the state are buzzing about these topics.

"At CPEX, we frequently get calls from community leaders asking for examples of 'good codes' that can help guide them as they develop land-use regulations," explains Camille Manning-Broome, principal planner at Center for Planning Excellence, a nonprofit providing land planning across Louisiana after the storms. "We also hear from people who are concerned that their communities are creating regulations by simply cutting and past-

“We want to provide Louisiana communities with a good foundation for developing their codes and laws.”

—CAMILLE MANNING-BROOME, CPEX

ing from outdated codes.”

Now, thanks to the efforts of CPEX, the phone calls and confusion may soon be a thing of the past. The Louisiana Land Use Toolkit, a set of well-designed sample codes and zoning guidelines, is being created to provide community leaders with helpful templates on which to model their local codes and ordinances.

“Zoning laws are found in virtually every municipality in the United States, affecting land use, lot size, building heights, density, setbacks and other aspects of property use,” says Manning-Broome. “We want to provide Louisiana communities with a good foundation for developing their codes and laws.”

Creating model codes for community development was one of the top priorities identified through the Louisiana Speaks regional planning process. According to the feedback obtained via Louisiana Speaks, model development and zoning codes for safe, walkable communities were seen as fundamental tools needed to enable communities to grow smarter. A key intent of the project is to tailor these codes to the conditions of Louisiana, addressing reinvestment in existing com-

munities and development in coastal environments in order to achieve more sustainable growth patterns.

Funding for the project was primarily provided by Louisiana Economic Development. Additional funding, secured with the help of U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, comes from the Environmental Protection Agency’s Smart Growth Division and is meant to help implement the tool in at least one community that is ready for plan implementation.

Manning-Broome said CPEX recognized early on that there is no “one-size-fits-all approach” to code writing, so they have embarked on an extensive, statewide outreach process to gather input on development issues and concerns. Working in conjunction with existing regional planning commissions and Louisiana Economic Development, CPEX has heard from planners, zoning administrators, utility directors, commissioners, mayors and members of various agencies around the state.

The ultimate goal of

the Louisiana Land Use project is to create a model code toolkit for local jurisdictions that assists sustainable development; results in a variety of codes that can be used in rural, suburban or urban areas; reflects the principles of Smart Growth; is easy and affordable to administer and implement in areas with limited local resources; and consists of clear, concise, user-friendly regulatory material.

“We anticipate having a model code available for implementation by 2009. At that time, we hope to test this out in one or two communities,” said Manning-Broome. “We will be looking for communities that have comprehensive plans, and that have not undergone extreme zoning rewrites in the past five years.” •



Work the plan >> The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan and a special government task force agree: The time has come for an Office of State Planning in Louisiana. Again.

Louisiana Speaks, the long-term planning initiative of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, was created in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita as more than 27,000 Louisianans expressed their visions for recovery and rebuilding through the planning process. The result was the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan, an unprecedented document that sets forth a list of more than 100 action items that are crucial to the state's future growth and development. At the top of this list was the creation of an Office of State Planning for Louisiana.

In February, this high-priority goal moved closer to realization when a task force charged with studying and making recommendations on the creation of a comprehensive planning office released its report to the Louisiana Legislature. Among the report's recommendations were:

The state planning office should be located within the executive branch and include oversight by a planning commission.

The office should serve as a central repository for data and plans; provide technical support, including monitoring of local plan implementation and providing education and information about best practices; administer incentive and program funding

to assist local governments and coordinate state planning efforts.

The LRA should serve as an interim location for the housing and development of the Office of State Planning, with the LRA conducting a statewide capacity assessment and adjusting its staffing and budget to perform additional planning implementation activities.

The Louisiana Legislature established the task force during the 2007 Regular Session. During the process of studying the planning office issue, the task

opment in South Louisiana and an Office of State Planning will help us ensure these priorities are addressed," said Krista



LOUISIANA SPEAKS

Our Voice. Our Plan. Our Future.

A LONG-TERM COMMUNITY PLANNING INITIATIVE OF THE LRA

force discovered that Louisiana once had an Office of State Planning that was housed within the Division of Administration. The statute that established that defunct planning office still exists and a few of the functions it described are now carried out by the Division of Administration's Office of Planning and Budget.

"The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan sets priorities for land use, transportation, community growth and economic devel-

Goodin, the Center for Planning Excellence's principal planner for Louisiana Speaks. "Knowing that the legal precedent for such a critical agency has already been set puts us on solid footing as we move forward." •

11

Shifting Focus >> In January, the Community Advancement Fund Committee held its final meeting. The Fund, a competitive grantmaking pool comprised of more than 30 unrestricted funds, has been used over the past ten years to address current needs in our community. At the meeting, committee members selected 14 nonprofit organizations for recommendation to the Foundation's board of directors for grants totaling nearly \$200,000. Combined with unrestricted funds issued following Katrina and Rita, CAF has issued hundreds of grants totaling more than \$18 million in the past decade.

Organizations recommended for funding in January include the Arts Council of Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Green Association, Baton Rouge Speech & Hearing, Big Buddy, BREC Foundation, Capital Area Alliance for the Homeless, City Year Louisiana, DOC-DHL Inc., Greater Baton Rouge Literacy Coalition, Health Care Centers in Schools, Julius Freyhan Foundation, Louisiana Justice Coalition, Refined by Fire Ministries and United Methodist HOPE Ministries.

Moving forward, the funds previously dedicated to CAF will be directed by the Foundation's board of directors to address needs in the community through special projects and civic leadership initiatives, such as the I-10/12 Corridor Initiative and the Baton Rouge indicators project—CityStats.

Committee members who served in 2007 are Alice D. Greer (chair), Yolanda J. Dixon, Edward G. Francis, Tommy Hodson, Dan D. Holliday III, Cornelius A. "Connie" Lewis, Patrick Mockler, Laura Poche and Suzanne L. Turner. •

Encore! Encore! >>

Brothers of the Knight, a sold-out musical partly funded by the donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, played to eight sold-out crowds at the Baton Rouge Community College theater. The Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge estimates 4,000 people attended the shows in April.

Broadway and TV star and producer Debbie Allen put on the show, using local dance talent in important roles. Derek Gordon, executive director of the Arts Council of Baton Rouge, says he will try to secure more funds to get Allen back into town for another production. •



Debbie Allen (*above*) performing the role of Sunday in the original 1998 production at the Kennedy Center. Debbie's daughter, Vivian Nixon (*right*), reprised the role in the Arts Council production.





**FARMERS
MARKET**

BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA - PROJECT OF BREADA

MAY is Garden Month at the Farmers Market

May 3 Master Gardeners—Growing Spring Plants

May 10 Garden Gifts for Mom

May 17 Fresh from the Market—Cooking with Herbs

May 24 Container Garden Tips

May 31 Butterfly Extravaganza

Dr. Gary Ross & Butterfly Gardening

When you spend \$20 or more on plants in May, you will be entered for a weekly “Get Growing” prize. Winners need not be present to win.

ONTHEGROUND

MAIN STREET

MARKET



Borrowing from the Proust interview, we asked three winners of the **John. W. Barton Excellence in Nonprofit Management Awards** a few questions. The winners, who received \$10,000 each at the Foundation's annual meeting, were generous enough to answer them.

>> by MUKUL VERMA/photos by TIM MUELLER

<< COPPER ALVAREZ

Executive Director *Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREADA), which runs Red Stick Farmers Market and the Main Street Market*

What do you love most about Louisiana?

Of course it has to be the food and the people who live in Louisiana. When I first moved to Louisiana years ago, I learned to drink coffee with chicory, and there's still nothing better than that first cup of coffee in the morning.

What is your idea of earthly happiness?

Digging in the dirt on a beautiful spring day.

Who are your heroes in real life?

The men and women who fight for freedom for this country, especially today's young people who are serving their country in Iraq.

Who would you have liked to be?

Someone tall and thin.

Other than America, in what country would you like to live and why?

Definitely Italy, where the pace is slower and a meal can last for hours. No matter where you are in Italy, there's always a place to people watch or beautiful scenery to see.

What natural gift would you most like to possess?

Something artistic—to sing, or paint!

15

CHRISTOPHER GESKE vv

Executive Director *Livingston Youth and Family Counseling Center*

What do you love most about Louisiana?

What I love most about Louisiana is its unique culture, Southern hospitality, the season of spring, its resiliency and the caring of its people for each other.

What is your idea of earthly happiness?

Freedom from fear. We must have a genuine curiosity and the desire to understand and accept the different experiences of others without bias or hatred. We must be able to see the humanity we all share.

Who are your heroes in real life?

My real life heroes are my son Brandon and my wife Nicole.

Who would you have liked to be?

I want to continue my journey of self-discovery, to learn from my mistakes and to experience the joy of my accomplishments. It would have been interesting to be Sigmund Freud for awhile.

Other than America, in what country would you like to live and why?

Austria would be my country of choice after the United States because of its history and natural beauty.

What natural gift would you most like to possess?

I would like to possess the ability to write great fiction like Ernest Hemingway or F. Scott Fitzgerald.





BARRY MEYER ^^

Executive Director *The Arc Baton Rouge*

What do you love most about Louisiana?

The way in which the rich and diverse cultural, social and historical influences blend and permeate all aspects of life in Louisiana.

What is your idea of earthly happiness?

The feeling that comes from making a difference in the quality of life of those you love as well as the greater community by doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Who are your heroes in real life?

My father, for the lessons he taught and the example he gave. Thomas Jefferson, for his role in drafting the Declaration of Independence and his visionary leadership. Abraham Lincoln, for his integrity, virtue and humble leadership in the most

trying of times.

Who would you have liked to be?

Leonardo da Vinci.

Other than America, in what country would you like to live and why?

Italy for its rich historical, cultural, scientific and philosophical palette and abundance of both natural and man-made scenic beauty.

What natural gift would you most like to possess?

Artistic expression. •

17

A Good Step

A DEVELOPER AND BREC JOIN TO CREATE A WALKABLE BAYOU, STARTING A POSSIBLE TRANSFORMATION OF IGNORED WATERWAYS INTO AMENITIES

>> by **MUKUL VERMA**

Engineers look at in-town bayous as waterways to be controlled. Where they see water, they see flooding danger. Better to move rain quickly, they were taught, away from buildings for proper dumping in distant rivers.

“The mantra in traditional engineering was to collect, conduct and dispose,” says Dana Brown of Brown and Danos. As a landscape architect, she wished it was different. But she holds only a little grudge against engineers because she was taught from the same books.

The result: Waterways have been turned into cement canals, making them unsightly—and steamy—conduits dividing the city, particularly older parts of Baton Rouge. For instance, golfers hit across cement canals—loosely, they are called water hazards—at Webb Park Golf Course.

Cement canals are more than scars on the landscape. The drainage ditches actually cause flooding in some spots, where too much water rushes to become overflowing pools. What’s more, water moved too rapidly creates arid land, which requires irrigation from city supplies.

18





19

REDEVELOPING NATURE

The waterways of Baton Rouge too often appear neglected. Richard Carmouche's remaking of creeks that divide his Grove project behind the Mall of Louisiana could begin changing that perception.

Carmouche is aiming to widen the channel at the bottom of Ward's and Dawson creeks and install small dams to create pools for fish. Planted on the lower banks will be native, aquatic vegetation. The vegetation will do double duty—look good, including sweeps of seasonal color, and filter the water. The upper embankment will be mostly native trees.

At the top of the creeks, BREC plans a 12-foot trail for walking, jogging and bike riding.

"It's the first project of its kind in Baton Rouge," says William A. Reich of Reich Associates, among landscape firms working for Carmouche. "Some of the projects we proposed years ago were never built for fear that they would bring people in backyards and result in crime. But now people are seeing different projects around the country and realizing they are an amenity."

Carmouche is an early mover. He's also the first developer to build a traditional neighborhood development in the Baton Rouge region.



BREC's Bill Palmer, left, and Richard Carmouche

But suggesting this alternative to buttoned-up engineers might get you marked a fool, a nut, or worse, an environmentalist.

Yet, in Baton Rouge, there appears to be a welcome crack in the decades-long dogma. Developer Richard Carmouche is a witness; he believes the new thinking was sparked from the

Baton Rouge Area Chamber's canvass last year of Portland.

Before that idea-shopping trip to Oregon, Carmouche had banged for several years into a Baton Rouge Department of Public Works unwilling to consider a green plan for the creeks running through his 100-acre Grove project along I-10 between Bluebonnet Boulevard and Siegen Lane. After the trip, DPW readily approved his plan for creating a navigable waterway, which will be stocked with fish, native plants and even areas with flowers to lure butterflies.

Upon Carmouche has been bestowed a second dose of good karma. BREC, already in the midst of a cheered \$70 million parks upgrade, unveiled a trail initiative in 2007. Earlier this year, the parks system chose to partner with Carmouche for the first trail in a new program.

BREC is in conversations with doctors, hospitals and trail enthusiasts about expanding the first segment beyond the Carmouche project to the LSU Rural Life Museum, which is part of the 450-acre Burden Research Center operated by the LSU Agricultural Center. If it happens, the first trail could run from Siegen Lane to Essen Lane.

When they are not using cement to form ditches, engineers are molding dirt to reach the same end.

The engineering solution spoils precious waterways, contend landscape architects. Their alternative is envisioning bayous and creeks as natural water features and engineering them appropriately. Instead of decanting water into distant rivers, channels could move rain slowly, let it feed native flowers and plants along the way, clean the earth of pollutants, drip through the soil into deep aquifers.

In dreams, BREC employees envision a vast trail network. They see you launch a canoe in a Baton Rouge bayou and row all the way to Lake Maurepas. They see you running, walking or biking for miles and miles across the parish—and beyond, if you have the stamina.

BUT WHY?

Justification for a network of trails and navigable waterways comes from many directions. First, people really like trails. Residents pegged trails as the most desired amenity in the Imagine Your Parks plan, BREC's blueprint for enhancing community greenspace. In Atlanta, an established trails foundation says 85% of people there desire more trails.

What's more, homebuyers in 2002 told the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders that trails



Located behind the Mall of Louisiana, The Grove project by Richard Carmouche would include homes, offices, retail and hotels. BREC and Carmouche have agreed to build a linear park—a trail on the waterways—through the project.

BREC, already in the midst of a cheered \$70 million parks upgrade, unveiled a trail initiative in 2007.

were the second most important community amenity out of 18 survey choices.

When people demand, developers follow. Carmouche will use the trails-and-bayou combination to promote The Grove, a mix of proposed condos, shops and offices on 100 acres.

Trails are so desirable that houses next to them

trade at higher prices. Homes on a Seattle trail were selling for 6% more than surrounding areas, that city's planning agency found. Other surveys support higher market values, and a parks expert says homes on parks sell for 10% more than on surrounding streets. In turn, those homes generate more property taxes to offset the cost of building and maintaining the public amenities.

Trails also boost the economy, luring the increasing numbers of workers seeking a high quality of life alongside a handsome salary and solid benefits. They provide a means of transit across cities, easing traffic congestion. They are avenues for meeting people, for building communities. Trails pull people to exercise, necessary in a country where heart disease is a top killer.

And public trails and waterways are democratic; all people have access to them.



Houston's Buffalo Bayou Partnership has created parks and trails that meander throughout the city.

HOUSTON'S WATERWORLD

With its trails project, BREC is joining a national trend. St. Tammany Parish has turned a former rail line into a pathway connecting several cities with the lakefront. That trail is part of a national movement to turn abandoned railbeds into trails.

Meanwhile, just four hours from Baton Rouge is a water-and-trail system created from a neglected bayou. Over two decades, a Houston nonprofit has followed a master plan to raise \$48 million for reclaiming Buffalo Bayou, which snakes through the nation's fourth-largest city.

Along the water, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership has built a 10-mile linear park. On this park are three miles of trails, pedestrian bridges, benches, art, native landscaping and canoe launches. The bayou's Sesquicentennial Park, one of several, has picnic areas, walking paths, art, promenades and pedestrian bridges. Mighty Tidy, a special 21-foot boat, each day skims the waterway of the refuse created by urban life.

A popular attraction on the bayou is renting a canoe, rowing through a city of millions, floating under the congested 610 loop. On the bayou, boaters see rich neighborhoods like River Oaks and Memorial Park and they see the homeless fishing near interstates. They can dock for lunch at restaurants.

Under construction are 10 miles of trail on both sides of Buffalo Bayou. On tap is the Buffalo Bend Nature Park, a proposed area of wetlands, wildlife preservation areas and hiking trails for the underserved, industrialized and dense East End.

As in Houston, creeks and bayous are plentiful in the Baton Rouge region, hidden among vast green-spaces. You can catch a glimpse of Ward's Creek in Baton Rouge while speeding—or stuck—on I-10 between Siegen and Essen lanes. The creek connects to the Comite River in distant North Baton Rouge.

Bayou Duplantier peeks from Stanford Avenue at



PHOTOS COURTESY REICH ASSOCIATES



BREC wants to run its first trail from near Siegen Lane to Bluebonnet Boulevard, connecting apartments, a school, neighborhoods, the new Grove project and Perkins Rowe. If agreements and funding are secured, a second segment would continue the trail along Ward's Creek from Bluebonnet to the Rural Life Museum on Essen Lane.

City Lakes before disappearing into thick trees, visible again near Pennington Biomedical Research Center and beyond. If you wander inside this urban jungle, as kids do, you will see patches of yellow and white flowers, ducks and egrets, lakes thick with frogs making a racket.

A FIRST STEP

It's not a reach to imagine a trail network along some of these bayous and creeks, as well as pathways within parks and across the region. To begin creating trails that link parks and waterways, BREC last year committed \$4 million from its annual capital outlay funds and from the special tax for the Imagine Your Parks initiative.

Realizing it needed to gin up support, BREC Superintendent Bill Palmer recruited a successful trails advocate to launch the pathways. In came

Ed McBrayer, executive director of the Atlanta Path Foundation. On a lecture tour of the region, McBrayer relayed how his nonprofit built more than 112 miles of trails in Atlanta in just over a decade.

From his visit, advice emerged. Make sure the first trail, said McBrayer, is beautiful and is built where it will get heavy use. Following those rules will create a trail that shows people the possibilities of a network, making them want more trails. Trails, he added, should be built for sharing by walkers, joggers, bike riders, parents with babies in strollers. The first path should also provide an alternative to conventional roads.

By those stipulations, BREC has picked the appropriate location for the first trail.

Originally limited to the Carmouche property, the trail has already been expanded since BREC announced it earlier this year. One endpoint will

be behind Siegen Lane Marketplace, where it will be available to hundreds of residents living in the Tuscany Village apartments.

Joggers on the trail would run under the Siegen Lane overpass, past St. George Church and School and the neighborhoods of Morning Glen and Audubon Terrace before entering Carmouche's Grove. There, they could take a path along Ward's Creek that ends near I-10, or choose one along Dawson Creek that ends near the Rave Theater.

BREC is negotiating to expand the trail. Ted Jack, BREC planning director, says developer Tommy Spinosa has agreed to host the path at Perkins Rowe, but reaching there from the mall would require crossing Swaggart Ministries' property. The ministry wants the path, but needs to clear litigation before signing on. "Swaggart is a wild card," said Jack.

In recent months, Dr. Jack Frusha, a vascular surgeon, State Sen. Bill Cassidy, also a doctor, and others have begun discussions with BREC to continue the trail from Bluebonnet to Essen Lane, where it would link to LSU Rural Life Museum and Burden Research Center. "Anything is possible," says Frusha.

BREC has funding for the original segment, which costs about \$300,000 a mile, but has not budgeted for the stretch from Bluebonnet to Essen. Frusha believes the funding can come from private donations or the hospitals that would be on the trail.

It's no hype that the BREC project is advancing quickly. BREC's Jack is meeting with DPW and landowners on final agreements before beginning construction, hopefully, this year. "So far, all the landowners are for it," he says.

Particularly enthusiastic is Carmouche, who had already overcome neighborhood opposition to get city-parish approval for the first Baton Rouge traditional neighborhood development, a mix of homes, offices and shops under construction as Willow Grove on Perkins Road near Bluebonnet.

To begin building The Grove across from Willow Grove, Carmouche already was moving dirt. With the new BREC alliance and approval by DPW, he can use the dirt to create the waterway. The creek is being widened at the bottom to create a lake that looks like a stream, a pool for the fish to thrive. The banks will have native plants; there will be areas with flowers to draw butterflies.

“Make sure the first trail is beautiful and is built where it will get heavy use.”

—ED MCBRAYER

BREC will build more than a trail to complement The Grove's creeks. Jack calls it a linear park, with a 12-foot trail as a centerpiece. "There will be places to sit and enjoy the views and people will move through some wooded areas and some urban areas." Jack expects restaurants and others on the trail to offer services that include food, refreshments and ice cream.

"There will be a lot of people using this trail."

And those people will want more, beginning a transformation that could create many paths for a walk not spoiled. •

a LIGHT *on the levee*

SHAW CENTER FOR THE ARTS GALA to benefit



Manship Theatre



*Experience the Arts...
Five Floors of Excitement!*

Presented by the Manship Family
Douglas L. Manship
Richard F. Manship
David C. Manship
Dina Manship Planche

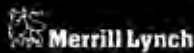
Thursday, May 29th at 7 PM

GOVERNOR & MRS. BOBBY JINDAL, HONORARY CHAIRPERSONS

www.ShawCenterGala.com or 225.389.7171

Food and beverages provided by Bonefish Grill,
Carrabba's Italian Grill, Fleming's Prime Steakhouse,
Outback Steakhouse and Marcello's Wine Warehouse

THE
ADVOCATE



Manship Theatre

Girls Night: *The Musical*

May 8-25

Non-stop musical laugh-out-loud comedy features feel-good favorites like "I Will Survive," "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," and "Man I Feel Like a Woman."

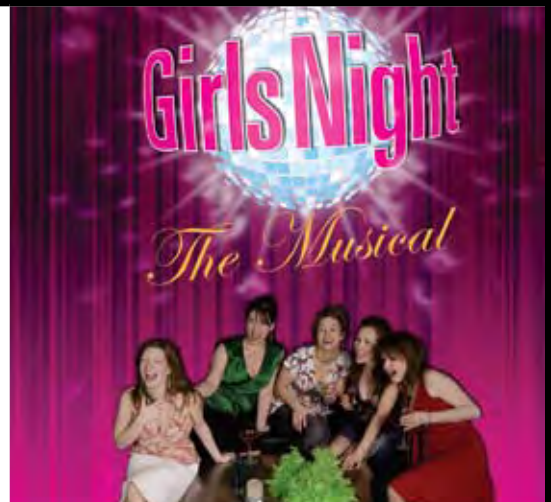
In association with Pal Productions

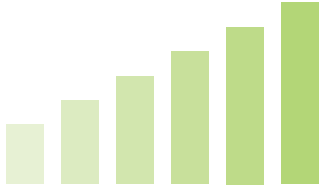
Tom Rush with Casey Kelly & Duke Bardwell

June 13

With healthy doses of both folk and blues influences, his compositions are still lauded for their poignant, undeniable lyrics.

TICKETS 344.0334 OR www.manshiptheatre.org





BATON ROUGE CITYSTATS

----- Indicators for tracking our quality of life

INDICATORS PROJECT WILL HELP GUIDE
FOUNDATION, PARISH >> by **MUKUL VERMA**

There are no hanging chads about this issue: About 100 people at the first indicators project meeting agreed that Mayor Kip Holden's suits improve the quality of life in Baton Rouge.

Otherwise, discussing the quality of life in the state capital can spark fighting words. One side, with its glass half full, will declare mouth-watering food, Tiger Stadium celebrations and a unique culture are among reasons Baton Rouge is a better place to live than most. Countering their optimism will be residents waving high crime rates, a struggling public education system, high poverty rates and more.

A project by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation will attempt to mediate this dispute. Not only will Baton Rouge CityStats measure the quality of life in the parish, it will, more importantly, be the underpinning to improve lives of people who live and work in the region.

CityStats was launched in March with open public meetings that continue through May. It joins a growing number of initiatives measuring quality of life in communities around the world. Commonly,

they are known as indicators projects, for they use statistics to gauge crime, education, arts, the environment and other categories that fall under the quality of life banner.

In essence, indicators projects are roadmaps to improvement, telling communities where they are, how far they've come and where they need to go.

The Foundation began researching indicators projects in 2007. We discovered that indicators would benefit our donors, providing them with the knowledge to make greater impacts with their contributions. We also learned that indicators could benefit the entire community, arming local government, the chamber, businesses and nonprofits with the knowledge to act on behalf of the well-being of residents.

There was an indicators project in Baton Rouge earlier in the decade. Funded partly by the Foundation, that project was led by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber's leadership group. The latest indicators project will build on the first one, with a goal of taking on community projects to solve social problems.

Indicator efforts have improved some commu-

nities. One operated by Jacksonville Community Council for three decades has had a remarkable impact on the Florida city. It has saved the city twice from bankruptcy, fostered a downtown turnaround and reduced the local teen pregnancy rate when the national rate was rising.

Noticing the success in Jacksonville, the Foundation chose to hire the Jacksonville Community Council to launch CityStats here. At open meetings that build upon each other, JCCI's Ben Warner is guiding the public conversation, helping residents define quality of life, then using the definition to choose indicators.

Ultimately, BR CityStats will provide a loop for improvement. Indicators will show what's right and wrong; projects will be chosen to fix the wrongs; subsequent indicators will tell whether the projects resulted in improvements.

At the first meeting, held at BREC's headquarters on Florida Boulevard in March, residents gathered to define quality of life for Baton Rouge. What they

BATON ROUGE CITYSTATS

What: A project to measure the quality of life in Baton Rouge

Why: The project will provide a roadmap for community improvement.

When: The first indicators report and website will be released early next year. The report will be produced each year to measure what's going right and what is not.

Where: Now on the web at BRCityStats.org

liked about the city—the things they wished would be preserved—is the food, the culture, the ease with which

friends are made, the lush surroundings. To them, what needed improvement—and are threats to the quality of life—included the public education system, worsening traffic, too much crime.

By the end of the May 13 meeting, participants will have worked with JCCI to choose the indicators. The Foundation has contracted with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber to gather data for the indicators and conduct a supporting survey. Early next year, the Foundation will produce the first CityStats report and a companion website for the annual project.

"It's not just an annual gathering of data that's going to sit on a shelf," John Spain, Foundation executive vice president, told the people at the first meeting. "What we intend to do is engage citizens in the region, respond to the data and make decisions collectively about what we want our community to be in the future." •

ONSITE



28



“I am...”

GAINES WINNER VISITS EBR LAB ACADEMY

>> by **NATHAN SELF**/photos by **LORI WASELCHUK**

“Who are you?” asks Olympia Vernon, winner of the inaugural Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. It’s a brisk January morning and the ninth grade students at East Baton Rouge Laboratory Academy seemed perplexed at first, uncertain at how to interpret the question, unsure of what to make of the fiery young woman now confronting them.

Noticing their hesitation, Vernon recounts a story from years ago—when she was substitute teaching a class much like this one.

“I was going around the room—like I am now—asking each student, ‘What do you want to be?’ And some of them, like you all, wanted to be firemen, doctors, football players... But one student—when it was her turn to answer—said nothing, instead staring back at me. I asked her what was wrong, and she replied, ‘You’re not supposed to ask us that.’ I was stunned, stopped by the force of this girl’s authority. She was firm, ‘you’re not supposed to ask us that;’ so I asked her what I was supposed to ask. She said, ‘You’re supposed to ask

what we are, who we are now.”

So Vernon continues, “Who are you?”

The students still appear nervous, so Vernon, standing beside a row of desks, instructs them, “Say, ‘my name is...’ and then say, ‘I am...’”

The first student, hesitant at first, starts, “I am funny.”

Then another, “I am, um...Smart?”

“Say it with a period at the end,” she instructs the young man, “I am SMART.”

“I am SMART.”

Vernon continues with the students, posing the question to each of them, encouraging them in their ambitions. She stops to talk with each child, making sure that they feel involved—helping them understand who they are, how they define themselves. She listens to them, asks them follow-up questions, gives them her email address and offers to stay in touch.

She repeats this three more times, until she has talked with each and every student at East Baton Rouge Laboratory Academy. The time flies, each group of 25 openly chattering about



The Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence was launched by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and underwritten by donors of the Foundation to honor Ernest Gaines and inspire a new generation of African-American writers. The award recognizes an African-American author who has published a full-length work of fiction during the previous calendar year.

Twenty-nine works of fiction from across the country published in 2006 were accepted for judging in the spring of 2007. Visit www.ErnestJGainesAward.org for more information.

Olympia Vernon, the inaugural winner, has published three novels: *Eden* (2002), *Logic* (2004) and *A Killing In This Town* (2006). *Eden* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won the 2004 Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award from The American Academy of Arts and Letters. Ms. Vernon received a bachelor of arts in criminal justice from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1999 and earned a master of fine arts in creative writing from Louisiana State University in 2002. She is currently the Hallie Ford Chair in Writing at Willamette University in Salem, Ore. •

30

their ambitions and dreams by the end of their 30-minute session.

She speaks about racism and opportunity, about making the most of each and every day, about taking ownership of your attitude, your actions, your future.

She leaves them with a final lesson: "I want you to know who you are. I want you to live it. I want you to be the person that you know you are, some-

one who can achieve their goals—someone who can reach their dreams. And when you know it, when you live it, people will respond to you. They will know it, too."

The girl who first interrupted Vernon, she was a dancer. •



RIVER CITY JAZZ MASTERS

Swing into Spring with river city jazz masters

The Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge and the River City Jazz Coalition present



NNENNA FREELON

Thursday, May 1
7:00 p.m. & 9:00 p.m.

This six-time Grammy nominee has performed with a veritable who's who in jazz from Ray Charles and Ellis Marsalis to Al Jarreau and George Benson. A gift to lovers

of great vocal jazz in the tradition of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Billie Holiday! **USA Today** boasts "Freelon makes each song...personal."

TICKETS at www.manshiptheatre.org/225.344.0334
ARTS COUNCIL INFO www.artsbr.org/225.344.8558

Special thanks to the River City Jazz Masters Series Sponsors

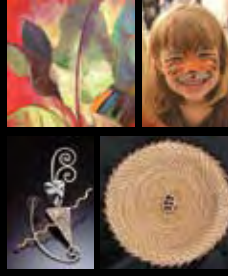


The River City Jazz Coalition thanks:

Capital One, JP Morgan Chase, Laura and Clark Boyce, Entergy, The John and Virginia Noland Fund, The McMains Foundation, The Josef Sternberg Memorial Fund, and Turner Industries, C.J. Blache and Sherri McConnell, Leo and Gwendolyn Hamilton, Tim and Stacia Hardy, Cornelius and Karen Lewis, Dr. Albert and Roberta Sam, and Dr. Greg Ward, and the Charles Lamar Family Foundation Manship Theatre Subsidy Grant.

Fest For All

EXPERIENCE THE ARTS FIRST HAND

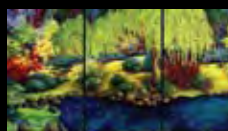


Baton Rouge's Premier
Art & Music Festival

Saturday, May 3
10 am to 7:30 pm

Sunday, May 4
Noon to 6:30 pm

Downtown
Baton Rouge
North Blvd.



Purchase fine crafts and works of art from over 80 artists

Music including the best of Blues, Roots, Jazz, and more

Performing Arts & Children's Village
Street Performers & Art Demos

Great Food & Drink

FREE & OPEN TO ALL

Performance times & details:
www.artsbr.org

A BATON ROUGE TRADITION SINCE 1973

Special thanks to FestForAll 2008 Sponsors



Irene W. & C.B. Pennington Foundation
Burns & Co. Realtors Capital One Express
Personnel Services Belle of Baton Rouge

ARTISTS: Painting: Carol Hallock, Jewelry: Kathy & Marianne Brennan, Basket: Diane Lewis, Musicians: Pine Leaf Boys, Triptych Painting: Dawn Kinney Martin, Musician: Henry Gray



Presented by the
Arts Council of
Greater Baton Rouge

225.344.8558
www.artsbr.org



The gas station on Highland and Terrace is among more than 4,000 adjudicated and blighted East Baton Rouge properties. A new public agency will, as Mayor Kip Holden says, try to turn the liabilities into assets.

New Key, Old Lock

A REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY LAUNCHES TO SPEED UP REBUILDING NEIGHBORHOODS >> by **MAGGIE HEYN RICHARDSON**

32

When it comes to urban renewal, cleaning up messy properties is only part of the problem. Messy titles are what can really stymie a neighborhood's progress.

Case in point: While working to help plan and redevelop Old South Baton Rouge, the nonprofit Center for Planning Excellence has experienced just how tedious it is to buy, clean up and resell blighted lots.

On one target street, says CPEX Community Planner Mark Goodson, a prime, but neglected, parcel won't be useful until it is remediated from its past life as a gas station. Meanwhile, the owner of another lot, aware of the new revitalization effort, demands three times his neglected property's ap-

praised value. Finally, three other abandoned properties have been adjudicated by the city because of delinquent taxes. To purchase them and gain clear title, CPEX must reach back 150 years to the last recorded sale and track down heirs nationwide.

"That's a great microcosm for how complicated things can get," said Goodson, who is contracted to work for the Foundation's revival of OSBR project.

And it's not isolated. East Baton Rouge Parish has more than 4,000 adjudicated properties alone. Many are dilapidated structures that draw crime and drug activity and depress a neighborhood's value and livability. Often, turning them around has cost more than the property's value.

Now the capital city has a new arrow in its quiver.

The East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority, created by the Louisiana Legislature in 2007, is a public entity charged with removing the impediments that have kept neighborhoods from thriving. The new body will help improve public welfare and increase housing and economic development by reclaiming dilapidated structures.

“We think it’s quite necessary for one entity to be totally focused on the issue,” says Walter Monsour, chief administrative officer to East Baton Rouge Parish Mayor-President Kip Holden. “The Redevelopment Authority is much more conducive to eliminating blight and creating true economic development.”

A five-member board of commissioners approved by the Metropolitan Council provides oversight. Three members are appointed by the mayor-president, one by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber and one by the Foundation. The three entities were instrumental in researching, designing and implementing the authority, says Foundation Executive Vice President John Spain.

“It’s a partnership,” he says. “The goal is the same for all of us, to put properties back into commerce.”

Part of the inspiration for establishing the body came from the 2007 Baton Rouge Area Chamber workshop in Portland, Ore., where local leaders studied that city’s equivalent agency, the Portland Development Commission. The 50-year-old entity, equipped with 200 staff members and a \$250 million budget, has focused both on reclaiming dying neighborhoods as well as sparking major municipal projects and civic spaces.

DETAILS: REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority was created last year by the Legislature and then enabled by the Baton Rouge Metro Council. It’s now in the launching phase, securing funding and beginning operations.

What it can do: The main objective of the authority is urban renewal. The authority will be able to focus on clearing clouded titles so houses and shops can be built to create vibrant neighborhoods. The authority plans to work with the city-parish to quickly put adjudicated properties back into commerce.

Governance: The authority will be governed by five members—three appointed by the mayor, one each by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. The first members are:

Bill Jenkins—LSU chancellor and former university president; mayor’s appointee.

Van Mayhall—Partner in Breazeale, Sachse and Wilson law firm; chamber’s appointee.

John B. Noland—Co-owner of All Star Automotive, community activist, former chairman of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. He’s the Foundation’s appointee.

Huel Perkins—Retired as a top LSU administrator and professor emeritus of humanities; mayor’s appointee.

Susan Turner—retired LSU professor of landscape architecture, community activist; mayor’s appointee.

33

“From a redevelopment perspective, nothing of any substance happened in Portland without the direct involvement of the redevelopment authority,” says All Star Automotive owner John Noland, a former Foundation chairman and its appointee to the EBR authority. “In fact, in other cities across the country where significant urban renewal has occurred, there was a redevelopment authority present.”

Noland was keenly interested in better neighborhood revitalization strategies for Baton Rouge. A longtime supporter of the city’s community development corporations, he had watched neighborhood leaders wither under the onerous process of tracking down past owners in order to gain clear ti-

tle on adjudicated properties. CDCs achieved good work, but it should have been easier, he said.

“Lot-by-lot is not enough,” said Noland. “We needed to institutionalize revitalization.”

Noland says the redevelopment authority’s initial work will be in laying the groundwork for the future. The body will take inventory of parish-wide issues, study best practices and advocate for improving existing state laws. He adds it will tread lightly in neighborhoods where too many promises have been made.

“We don’t want this to be some clumsy, lumbering elephant,” Noland says. “We’re here with soft hands and great patience.” •

THE FIRST MEETING

At its first meeting in April, the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority picked officers and heard the rules of holding public office. John Noland was chosen chair, Van Mayhall was chosen vice chair, Huel Perkins was picked as secretary and landscape architect Susan Turner was chosen the treasurer. The fifth board member is William Jenkins.

What will the authority do? That’s for the board to decide in coming months. It will have the ability to take over adjudicated property and package and resell it for redevelopment, a potential source of income for reviving neighborhoods.

Emory University’s Frank Alexander, a redevelopment expert hired by the Foundation as an initial guide, told the board that Baton Rouge had chosen the best model in the nation, for it was built on the successes of similar authorities around the country.

Other authorities have managed to move ne-

glected properties back into commerce and even taken on substantial civic projects through their bonding authorities.

The authority board set the stage for starting work. Through Mayor Kip Holden, who attended the meeting to trigger the authority, it requested the Metro Council stop selling adjudicated properties until it gets bearings. The authority could end up with some or all of the 4,000 pieces of adjudicated city-parish properties.

The board also requested Gwen Hamilton, who runs the Foundation’s project to reclaim Old South Baton Rouge, and Boo Thomas and Rachel DiResto of the Center for Planning Excellence speak at the next board meeting about redevelopment efforts. Noland, who represents the Foundation on the board, asked for advice from the trio, a means to get around the “dumb tax” that is paid when new groups get going.

—MUKUL VERMA



Gwen Hamilton is among the believers.

Working with people who live in Old South Baton Rouge, she has led the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's project to revive the neighborhood between downtown and LSU—and Old South Baton Rouge is breathing again. With new homes replacing tired housing projects. With children studying at the new Head Start center and reading at the Carver Branch Library. With developers taking chances on a neighborhood once given up for gone.

Gwen's work is paid for by another set of believers—members of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. Their generosity lets the Foundation spark the creation of experimental public schools, celebrate literature and the arts, and put a shine on Old South Baton Rouge.

Join the believers.

Become a member by calling Helen Fisher at 225.387.6126 or visiting BRAf.org.
Memberships start at \$100.

*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*



<< Second graders at the Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts, a magnet elementary, must learn a musical instrument. Because teaching arts has proven to improve test scores, all schools in Louisiana could include an arts curriculum. The Lafayette Parish School System and the Kennedy Center have teamed up to begin an arts program that could be adopted by other school systems.

Art Ahead

THE KENNEDY CENTER AND LAFAYETTE'S ARTS ORGANIZATIONS ARE DESIGNING AN ARTS PROGRAM FOR LOUISIANA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

>> by **MARY TUTWILER**/photos by **LORI WASELCHUK**

Sandy Labry was sitting in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., at a February 2008 meeting of the nation's Partners in Education when Kennedy Center President Michael Kaiser singled her out. Kaiser explained that in his last three years as director he intended to focus on working with one community and leveraging the resources of the Kennedy Center to provide a meaningful arts experience for every child. Then he announced that Lafayette had been selected as the partner.

Labry, who represents the Lafayette Parish School System as a Kennedy Center team member, was surprised by the announcement. "We didn't know he was going to make public the project we were working on," she says.

In 2007, the Louisiana Legislature passed Louisiana Act 175 to bring visual and performing arts into every classroom in Louisiana by 2012. Working with the Kennedy Center, Lafayette's arts

community hopes to develop a working model for the state to adopt in implementing the new law.

During last year's legislative session, Baton Rouge Sen. Sharon Broome authored legislation requiring the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop and implement an arts curriculum in the public schools. Broome worked closely with Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu, who has pledged to integrate eroding arts programs back into education. "Unlike other states, every child in Louisiana doesn't have that opportunity for arts education, which compelled us to create the legislation and champion its passage," says Pam Breaux, an assistant secretary within the state Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.

"We want to put music and the arts back in schools," Breaux says. "Research tells us that when children are exposed to the arts, dropout rates go down, test scores go up, and science skills improve. And so it's important for education because it ig-

37



Kindergartners at the Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts dance on a recent day. They also take music and drama each week.

nites creative thinking and critical thinking, and it makes better students.”

Breaux says statistics indicate that when education is infused with the arts, there’s an overall increase in academic performance for students from all socio-economic backgrounds. Studies show the arts can help students develop crucial problem solving and critical thinking skills. “Students exposed to the arts for three hours per week outperform their peers on the SAT,” Breaux says. “Four years of arts education yield 59-plus points higher on the verbal portion and 44-plus points higher on the math portion of the test.” Breaux also notes that art in education also tends to reduce dropout rates, deter delinquent behavior, increase aptitude in reading and math and promote better behavior.

Already under way, the ambitious Lafayette endeavor stretches out over five years. This year is devoted to writing curriculum guides, next year to training the teachers, and the following year to piloting the program in selected schools. By 2010 a statewide implementation of the curriculum will

begin in all public schools.

Once the arts act passed last spring, Kaiser and his team from Washington came to Acadiana. “The Kennedy Center is the nation’s center for the performing arts,” explains Ramien Pierre, education department administrator for the center. “Michael wanted to do something that is not only good work but very practical. So at the invitation of the lieutenant governor, we looked at where in Louisiana we might do a successful project, and we’ve had the partnership with the Lafayette Parish schools, the arts council and the university for 14 years. There are other partnerships in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, but the Lafayette partnership is one of the longest we’ve ever had where the original team members are still there. We thought, if it’s going to work any place, it’s going to work in Lafayette.”

Since 1993, Labry, along with the Acadiana Arts Council’s Rene Roberts and UL Lafayette’s Hector Lasala, has been traveling to Washington and learning cutting-edge arts-in-education strategies.



Second graders at the arts school work on projects in their visual arts class.

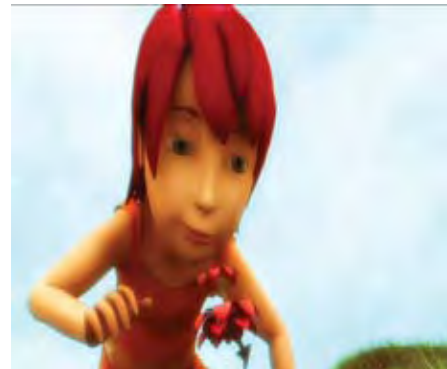
The team has developed programs in Lafayette, among which is an artists-in-residence program that partners artists with teachers to bring innovative learning experiences to students by coordinating arts activities with classroom lessons. In 2004 the team received the Governor's Arts Award for its work in arts education. "What we've been doing with the Kennedy Center for the past 14 years has really been working up to this," Roberts says.

The first step in the plan is to catalogue what each of Lafayette's arts organizations is doing for arts education. Along with the AAC, groups like PASA, the Acadiana Symphony, Cité Des Arts, Chorale Acadienne, Lafayette Ballet, Acting Up and the UL Art Museum all have programs that intersect with the public school system. But there's no central clearinghouse for providing arts education in Lafayette Parish's schools. To solve this problem, the Kennedy Center has established what it calls an arts audit and is asking Lafayette residents to participate. Pierre says the purpose is to figure out what is actually going on in schools with arts education and what people think is going on.

"Then the fun begins," says Pierre. "The university has volunteered to crunch the numbers from the audit to make sense of all the data. Once we have a sense of what's really going on, it becomes a planning process, and we know ultimately what has to happen in terms of coverage, by the 2010-2011 school year."

The real work begins after determining Lafayette's needs for quality arts education, Pierre says. "We're relying on local expertise on how to get people and organizations to work together," he says. "We've intentionally tried not to get ideas down on paper yet. We want to look open-mindedly at the data as it comes in. We're committed to go forward into the darkness."

Breaux notes that the state's CRT office will closely monitor Lafayette's progress. "The Kennedy Center sees this as a national model," she says. "We are certainly looking at this as a model for community engagement in arts and education. Our eyes are wide open. We'll be very interested in sharing the good work that will come out of Lafayette with other communities in Louisiana." •



That's not all folks

GROWING ANIMATION FESTIVAL COULD FOSTER NEW
TECH INDUSTRY >> by **SARA BONGIORNI**

Mickey isn't the only game in his Florida town.

With a considerable assist from the rising University of Central Florida, Orlando's economy has added the creation of digital entertainment to an economic base of tourism centered around DisneyWorld.

EA Tiburon, a division of the world leader in video games responsible for Madden NFL and other bestsellers, is located in Orlando. To feed talent to EA and others, the university has created the Florida Interactive Training Academy, a graduate video game design school offering an accredited master's degree in interactive entertainment.

Louisiana has a budding animation festival that could partner with LSU to create an economic driver for the region.

Supported by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, LSU and the city-parish, the Red Stick International Animation Festival expanded to more than 4,000 participants from around the world last year, up

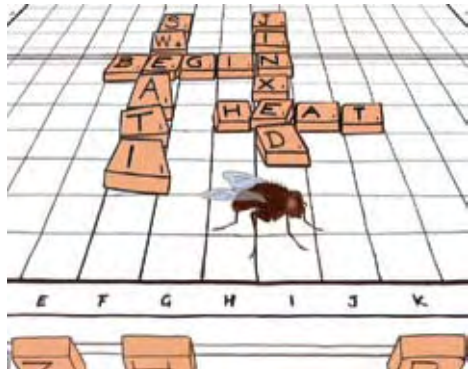
from 1,000 in 2005, the year of inception.

Organizers are attempting to parlay the early success into a new economy for the Baton Rouge region. They are trumpeting the connections between creativity and technology—and how those forces can come together to drive a homegrown, digital-media industry in Baton Rouge.

"The idea is to look at digital media as an economic-development engine for Baton Rouge and the state as a whole," says Stephen David Beck, director of the Lab for Creative Arts & Technologies at LSU.

The festival is part of an ongoing, wide-ranging effort to establish Baton Rouge as a good place for the digital media sector. The effort includes state tax credits for digital media companies and an expansion of the digital media curriculum at LSU, which will add six faculty members in sound, music and related interdisciplinary fields over the next two years, Beck says.

The festival is the most visible element of the ef-



fort, and a handy way to attract the attention of out-of-town speakers and attendees to the region's industry-friendly posture.

Just as important, it gives locals the chance to visualize how powerful technology and creativity can come together to create a thriving sector

for the city. "We want to get people in this city interested in this industry," says Beck.

Adds festival director Stacey Simmons: "If we want to develop a workforce here, we need to hit kids while they are young and get them interested in everything from anatomy to mathematics and computing. A key part of doing the festival is to get people thinking about how to creatively make a living."

ABOUT THE EVENT

What: Red Stick International Animation Festival

What: The festival includes movies and games, lectures by industry insiders, a forum for aspiring animators to pitch their ideas to executives and workshops to showcase animation know-how and knowledge.

When: Each year in April

Where: On the web at RedStickFestival.org

THE OTHER L.A.

The festival's roots lie in two places thousands of miles from Baton Rouge: Los Angeles and England.

In spring 2003, festival founders Beck and Simmons met in L.A. with a DreamWorks executive who mentioned the power of the com-

puters used to create the animated film "Shrek." It struck Beck, who heads the Lab for Creative Arts & Technologies, part of the LSU Center for Computation & Technology, that the university's supercomputing power was greater than that used to make the movie.

Back home in Baton Rouge, Beck and Simmons, who is also director of the year-old Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium, searched for

a way to connect the powerful technology at the Center for Computation & Technology with the creativity at work in animation.

Simmons, a Louisiana native who spent many years working as a television and film producer in L.A., said it wasn't long before the idea of a festival emerged. "I guess that was natural, being from Louisiana," Simmons says.

The trouble was, existing animation festivals in the U.S. were focused mostly on fun. Nothing wrong with that, Simmons notes, but what she and Beck hoped for was something that also would bring together animators, directors, artists and others from the creative business of animation that could help drive a local animation industry.

"We couldn't find an American festival that did all that," Simmons says. "So we went to England."

In England they found Animex, which began as a two-day series of lectures at the University of Teesside eight years ago and has grown into a week-long computer games and animation festival in and around the town of Middlesbrough in northern England. Like Red Stick, Animex was founded on the idea of using the festival to build a new sector of the local economy. The festival has done that, as video-game start-ups and other tech firms have taken root in an area that in the past lost many young people to bigger cities with larger, creative industries.

A NEAR MISS

The Red Stick festival might have died, or at least sputtered, after its promising start in 2005. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Simmons and Beck were ready to pull the plug on the festival as state and city leaders grappled with the urgent humanitarian needs of the disaster.

Instead, Red Stick got new momentum from the city and the Foundation, which matched \$50,000 from the city to ensure that the festival didn't miss a year.

The festival went on as planned, drawing 158 animated-film entries from 28 countries in 2006. In 2007, the number of entries passed the 200 mark, with submissions from 30 countries around the world.

Another kind of momentum emerged from the 2007 festival. Last summer, the Foundation, the city-parish, LSU and the Baton Rouge Area Chamber joined together to create the Baton Rouge Area Digital Industries Consortium. As its director, Simmons produces the festival and also works to attract new and existing animation firms to the area.

Simmons points to the region's handful of digital media firms, including nationally competitive Digital FX, as evidence that what she once believed to be true—that you had to leave the region for work in creative media—is no longer the case. She hopes this month's Red Stick festival convinces more local creative types that is the case.

"But you can come just for fun, too," she adds. •

The Red Stick Animation Festival is funded by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber and the city-parish. Each of the partners provided \$100,000 this year to put on the festival. A goal of the festival is to spark the creation of the digital entertainment industry.

Hear Hear!

“A cutting-edge
regional plan ...”

—The Congress for the
New Urbanism Charter Award



The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan is being cheered around the world. Crafted with input from land-planning experts and more than 27,000 of our state’s residents, this plan to guide the rebuilding of South Louisiana recently received the prestigious **Charter Award from the Congress for the New Urbanism**.

While we appreciate this honor, it’s you we’d like to thank. Without the support of Louisiana citizens, this groundbreaking effort could never have happened.

Now, we ask that you help us as we work to turn the Plan into action.
Find out more at LouisianaSpeaks.org.

LOUISIANA SPEAKS
Our Voice. Our Plan. Our Future.

A LONG-TERM COMMUNITY PLANNING INITIATIVE OF THE LRA

How I wonder...?

Stars and the moon often spark the first wonder in little kids. That romance between children and infinity has been dimmed in urban areas by too many lights obscuring the heavens.

Working to get the stars back in our eyes is the International Dark-Sky Association, a nonprofit that advocates against light pollution.

The organization isn't impractical. It doesn't want lights turned out at night. Instead, its pitch is for sensible lighting, such as directing outdoor lights down to the street and providing lighting only where it's necessary. The organization, with 11,000 members, certifies lighting and provides a list of approved lights on its website.

The nonprofit also provides learning materials on its site. Check it out at DarkSky.org. •

Zoom Zoom Zoom!

With gasoline prices headed over \$4 per gallon in the U.S., the gold rush is on: Innovators are betting on new technologies to make automobiles more efficient. A radical idea comes from Zero Pollution Motors, which has backing from Tata Motors, an Indian-based conglomerate and one of the world's largest companies.

Zero Pollution is building the air car, which uses air under extreme pressure to power pistons. Owners will plug in the car to compress air stored in a tank. The car runs on compressed air at low speeds, and uses gasoline to compress air for higher speeds. According to reports, the car will travel 848 miles on eight gallons of gas, which, if you do the math, equals 106 miles per gallon.

The car is tiny and light, which won't sit well with many American drivers. But its cost—under \$18,000 at introduction in 2010—and the price of operating it might gain converts if gasoline prices keep climbing. •



44

Let there be LEDs

LEDs began as beady, red lights blinking from toys and electronic gear. They were an exceptional replacement for standard monitoring lights; LEDs used little power and usually outlasted the life of the gadget.

Researchers have advanced LED lighting. LEDs are now available for the home, a mix of yellow and red bulbs creating white light for domestic use for half to 90% of the energy use of traditional bulbs. They also use less energy than fluorescents, the bulbs that have become more common because they use less electricity.

LEDs are used as bulbs in traffic lights in Baton Rouge and across the U.S., chipping away the cost of government services. The next logical step would be replacing streetlights with LEDs. Some local govern-

ments are experimenting with them, but others are being stopped by energy companies, who argue that LEDs are not ready for wide use. Government officials claim the energy companies don't want to deploy LEDs because they would lose revenue.

The U. S. Department of Energy projects widespread LED use could cut the nation's electricity use 10% by 2025, enough to delay the need for 40 1,000-megawatt power plants.

LEDs for the home are pricey. The fixtures run about \$125, and the bulbs cost \$60 apiece. But the lights burn for 50,000 hours, about 20 years—enough time to cover the cost. And they are good for the environment. •

Googling crime

You can track crimes in many Utah cities on Google maps. The misdeeds are available quickly and in detail at CrimeReports.com.

The site is adding more cities across the country, hoping to add hundreds of local police jurisdictions by the end of the year.

Quite a feat considering local police often resist wide-open public scrutiny. That's because crime rates—not wholly the fault of cops—reflect poorly on the sitting politicians who appoint police chiefs.

Jim Whisenant, CEO of CrimeReports.com, had to convince Utah state and local police jurisdictions that informing the public about crimes would produce safer communities, while also helping police do their jobs better. He has talked many jurisdictions into making the information quickly accessible. It's already public but was too difficult to access before the web. But he hasn't talked Salt Lake City, the largest Utah city, into going along.

So what's available at CrimeReports.com? Mashed with Google maps, crimes are made available by location within 24 hours. Crimes are tagged by burglaries, thefts, murders and so on. Clicking on a tag provides more crime details, and people can get email alerts when crimes happen in their neighborhood.

Less than a year old, the website has been a hit. "People love it. We make the crime data relevant by

making it quickly accessible the next day, by making it local," said Whisenant. Without promotion, the site has 25,000 people signed up to be alerted by email of local crime.

By knowing of crimes around them, the people can protect themselves, says Whisenant. His theory is that residents act to protect themselves when they know about crime around them. If a CrimeReports.com user notices a string of car break-ins in his neighborhood, he might protect his car by adding outdoor lighting, says Whisenant.

"It's a quick way to let the people know and make decisions about their safety."

The site lets police monitor crimes in surrounding jurisdictions, acting on patterns to protect people and nab miscreants.

Whisenant is just getting started. He sees the site tying in video cameras from businesses and homes and letting people upload crime videos, putting a version of CrimeStoppers on the web. There is also thought of linking newspaper articles about crimes to reveal even more to residents.

"There are plenty of people in every community who care about crime; their appetite for information is not saturated yet. There are a lot of directions we can go."•



Homeless meter

Denver has found a novel way to raise awareness of its focus on ending homelessness and reducing panhandling.

The city has partnered with nonprofits to refurbish parking meters into donation meters for Road Home, its project to end homelessness within a decade. Denver is adding 50 more meters to the original 36 in downtown. It expects to raise more than \$100,000 through the project this year, while also promoting the program.

The meters were placed in areas populated by panhandlers. Panhandling has declined and donations to the meter are directed to programs to help the homeless.

The project's partners include the city, Leadership Denver, the Downtown Denver Partnership and the Mile High United Way.

45

Burn, baby, burn

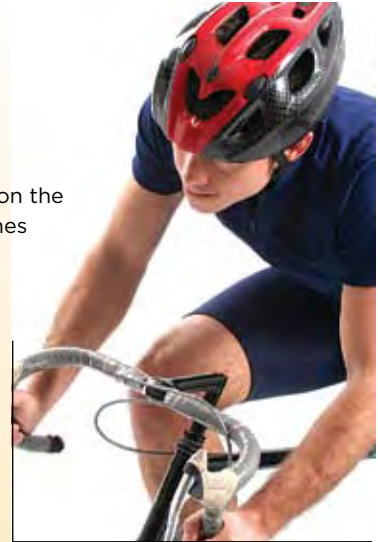
Pennington Biomedical Research Center, the shining research center on the hill, continues to produce information that benefits people and sometimes amuses us as well.

Researcher Conrad Earnest has calculated that riders in the Tour de France consume more than 20 million calories just to stay in the race. That equates to 72,000 cheeseburgers.

"Each day, they put out more energy than it takes to run a marathon. So the 20-stage tour is like 20 marathons in a row, and to gain the necessary energy, each rider needs to eat the equivalent of 25 cheeseburgers a day to keep from losing too much weight, which ultimately hurts performance," the researcher says.

Earnest is a rider. He spoke to the riders on the tour before the event started.

The research shows each rider will consume an average of 119,000 calories during the race. "Each rider is generating about 250-350 watts per minute," Earnest said, "That's about one-and-a-half million total watts per rider so far" and enough power to run iPods, TVs and radios of 1 million people lining the course each day. •



Green neighborhoods

With developers putting up green houses, it was inevitable entire communities would be created with the environment in mind.

The LEED certification, the desirable "green is good" mark for real estate, is now in a pilot program for neighborhoods. The U.S. Green Building Council and partners want to begin formal LEED certification for neighborhood developments in 2009.

The rating system encourages developers to build communities based on Smart Growth and New Urbanist principles. The goal is to encourage projects that reduce vehicle miles traveled and in which



jobs and services are accessible by foot or public transit. The certification also promotes more efficient energy use and water use.

The pilot has 238 projects in 29 states and six countries. One of them is the Global Green Holy Cross Project, a Ninth Ward redevelopment championed by Brad Pitt.

The council can expect hundreds, even thousands, of communities to apply for LEED certification. It's inevitable, for so many large developments follow the patterns set by the New Urbanists. •

Magic bus

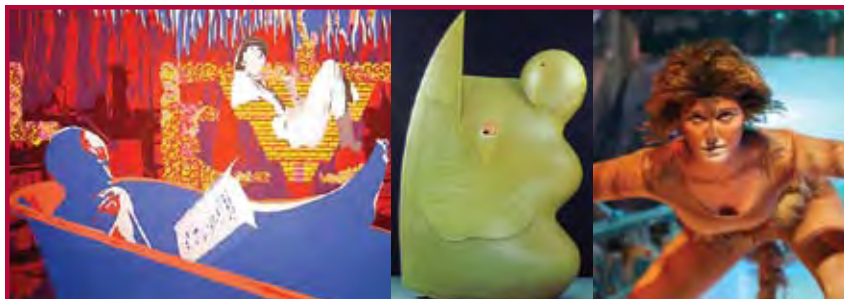
Stuck in traffic in Baton Rouge? Be envious of bus riders in cities that are determined to show amenities will make people dump their cars for mass transit.

In the Atlanta area, the DeKalb and Fulton county bus systems offer television on the bus. Riders can view TV programs that are pre-loaded each morning and updated several times a day, reports *Governing* magazine.

The Utah Transit Agency has installed wireless on express commuter buses between Provo and Salt Lake City for \$5,000 per vehicle, letting riders check email, read news and scan blogs on the 45-mile route.

Some bus systems send alerts to BlackBerry and other PDA devices that keep people updated on bus schedules and trouble on the lines. Buses now have reclining seats and cupholders. Bus rapid transit—dedicated lanes with green lights for buses—are growing across the nation to speed travel.

With gasoline expected to top \$4 per gallon this summer and traffic getting worse, bus operators expect an increase in ridership, particularly on buses decked out like a first-class seat on plane—without the free booze or the privacy curtain. •



Imagine Something Amazing

Contribute to the CFA and Assist These Member Organizations:

Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge • Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre • Baton Rouge Gallery – center for contemporary art • Baton Rouge Little Theater • Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra • DeBose Fine Arts Festival & National Piano Competition • The Foundation for Historical Louisiana • Friends of Magnolia Mound Plantation • Louisiana Art & Science Museum • Louisiana Sinfonietta • Of Moving Colors Productions • Playmakers of Baton Rouge • Swine Palace Productions • WRKF – FM 89.3

Imagine a community that offers world-class visual and performing arts to delight residents and visitors alike. Imagine a community where young and old can explore the arts and learn about their history and culture. Imagine a community with access to National Public Radio and festivals of the arts. All this and more than you can imagine is possible through the Community Fund for the Arts.

Administered by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge.

CFA COMMUNITY FUND FOR THE ARTS

The Community Fund for the Arts
427 Laurel Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70801

To contribute call 225.344.8558 or go on-line www.brcfa.org

A special thank you from the CFA to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation

GRANTED



Musician John Gray of the Michael Foster Project records tracks using computer equipment at Tipitina's Foundation co-op on Government Street near Baton Rouge High School.



Happy notes

TIPITINA'S CO-OP MAKES MUSICIANS SING

>> by **NATHAN SELF**/photos by **TIM MUELLER**

I heard about the Tipitina's Foundation's plan to open a music co-op in Baton Rouge in November. Knowing that I had fronted a Memphis band named DeadLuck and had performed at the Red Stick Farmers Market on Saturdays, Gerri Hobdy, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's director of partnership relations, invited me to attend a meeting with Todd Souvignier, co-op coordinator for Tipitina's Foundation.

We met Todd in late November at the co-op's future location: 2600 Government Street—next to the former BeBop Music Shop. He told us that the Tipitina's Foundation had just secured the location and began reviewing the plans for the Baton Rouge co-op program.

"The offer—to musicians, filmmakers and other artists—is really quite simple," said Todd. "We ask those people, 'if you could give yourself a raise and do so by having better tools, some help with the tools, a pleasant and fully-equipped place to work, plus interaction with others who are engaged in the same pursuits, would you give it a shot?'"

At the co-op offices, tools are plentiful. Members can use Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Suite; Macintosh computers with Pro Tools, Final Cut Pro, Garageband and Reason; as well as high-speed Internet, phones, fax machines, scanners, printers and other office equipment. The co-op offers educational and training resources, access to free legal services and referrals to a host of other services, programs and opportunities. Membership is open to professional and aspiring musicians and artists

49

of all ages, and costs \$10 per month.

“More than 1,200 Louisiana cultural workers have already said ‘yes’ to that proposition,” Todd continued, “and by using the co-op, they have improved their quality of life. Among other things, our latest economic impact survey shows that our members averaged a 9% increase in their music and media-related income from 2005 to 2006. Furthermore, 91% of the members who increased their music and media income attributed that increase to their co-op participation.”

That evening, I joined the co-op online. As a weekend musician, I was eager for the co-op to open, certain that I could make use of the services and access it provides. As I glanced over their website, I suddenly became secretly jealous of folks in New Orleans, Alexandria and Shreveport who were already making this program a success—and a national model.

A few weeks later, Gerri worked with Derek Gordon of the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge to set up a meeting to introduce the Tipitina’s Music Office Co-Op to other area non-profits. Representatives from LSU School of Music, Southern University, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Big Buddy, the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation, Mid City Redevelopment Alliance, the Louisiana Department of Economic Development and the Manship Theatre attended.

Todd also introduced Lori Finta—a local documentary filmmaker and video editor—as the new Baton Rouge co-op manager, and explained that the premise of the program is to give locals the tools they need to develop their music, film and other cultural products.

Afterward, the community gallery in the Arts Council’s building buzzed with talk of collaboration and possible future projects. The plan, Todd said, was to launch the new program quietly in the spring, then to have a grand opening celebration.

Finally—in early March—Lori emailed me to say

Donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation gave \$15,000 in seed funding to assist in launching the Tipitina’s Foundation co-op in Baton Rouge. What’s more, Commercial Properties Realty Trust, which manages the Foundation’s real estate assets, provided furniture to outfit the co-op, and the Foundation partnered with the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge on an opening reception for the music co-op.

that the co-op was now open.

The next week, I burned a CD of songs I’d been working on at home—mostly acoustic rock—and headed to the co-op. My goal was to try out some of the software, especially the now famed Pro Tools—the industry standard for recording. When I arrived, Lori welcomed me and I signed in. She showed me around the facility and we chatted about the new program. The word had spread already, and a few people busily clicked away on several workstations.

Soon, I too was staring into a computer screen, blaring my headphones and tinkering with various volume and EQ levels, then test driving some of the many special effects and reverbs available through Pro Tools. Quickly, three hours passed. Bleary eyed, I burned a CD of the work I’d done and wished Lori well as I headed out.

Ultimately, I was impressed with the power of the tools available through the co-op. The program allows everyday people access to some of the best mixing and mastering software available—commercial products that would cost individual musicians thousands of dollars to purchase on their own. On top of that, the co-op gives local musicians and others a place to gather, network and develop new skills that can help improve their lives—and it’s already contributing to the cultural economy across the state.

The Baton Rouge co-op is open Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. You can join in person or online at <http://musicofficecoop.com>. •

ABOUT TIPITINA'S FOUNDATION

Launched in 1997, the Tipitina's Foundation is a nonprofit with the mission of supporting Louisiana's irreplaceable music community and preserving the state's unique musical cultures. The foundation works to support childhood music education, the professional development of adult musicians and the increased profile and visibility of Louisiana music as a cultural, educational and economic resource.

The Foundation, which originates from the Tipitina's music venue, focuses its efforts on four programs:

Instruments A Comin' purchases musical instruments for school band programs. To date the Tipitina's Foundation has provided more than \$1.3 million in new, high-quality band instruments for 39 schools—benefiting more than 1,500 students each school year.

Tipitina's Music Office Co-op is a network of tech access centers providing business development and job skills training for local musicians, filmmakers and other digital media professionals. The New Orleans, Shreveport, Alexandria and Baton Rouge co-ops serve more than 1,200 members statewide.

Tipitina's Internship Program is a mentoring program that teaches all aspects of the music industry to motivated music students. Since

its launch in 2003, more than 90 interns have completed the program and gone on to further their academic, music and production careers at schools such as Juilliard School, Brown University, Clive Davis Department of Recorded Music at Tisch School of the Arts/NYU, Full Sail and the Berklee College of Music in Boston.



Before moving to Baton Rouge with her daughter, Lori Finta—Baton Rouge co-op manager—worked as a producer, director and video editor in Memphis, Tenn.

Sunday Music Workshops offer students the opportunity to play with and learn from world-class musicians including featured artists Stanton Moore, Johnny Vidacovich, Kirk Joseph and Theresa Anderson. •

51



LANO's Beachhead

NONPROFIT SUPPORT GROUP ADVANCES TO
NORTHSHORE >> by **NATHAN SELF**/photo by **LORI WASELCHUK**

52

In the spring of 2006, the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations began working in the Northshore region, completing a survey and conducting focus groups to determine the needs of nonprofits serving St. Tammany, Washington, Tangipahoa and St. Helena parishes.

As part of that work, LANO also created a regional advisory committee and worked with the St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce and United Way to engage nonprofits in recovery planning and to enhance social services to ensure families have access to the resources they need. By

actively engaging the community while they entered the area, LANO has built a strong base of support in the region.

Now, through a grant from the Northshore Community Foundation's Hurricane Impact Fund, LANO has extended its services in the Northshore area. LANO hopes to help local nonprofits collaborate more strategically and effectively and is providing both group training and one-on-one technical assistance. To help the region regain its footing, LANO is also helping nonprofits strengthen their grant writing and program devel-

opment skills. The result, they hope, will be more innovative, fully-funded programs to serve the region.

As part of the grant, LANO's Northshore Director of Capacity Building, Laurie Panzeca, has been working out of the Northshore Foundation's offices in Mandeville to provide training and technical assistance to help build capacity among nonprofits since August 2007.

"There has been a great response to LANO's presence on the Northshore," says Panzeca. "Nonprofits here were glad that LANO recognized the importance of having a Northshore field office and put the resources into adding a staff person for this region. Even though LANO is a statewide organization, historically, the impression has been that its focus is Baton Rouge. Local nonprofits are happy to have both the support and resources of a local LANO office."

So far, LANO has provided technical assistance to 70 organizations through proposal application clinics, accounting for 136 hours of direct assistance. Additionally, 26 organizations received technical assistance beyond the application clinics. That includes activities such as fundraising assistance, grant writing, nonprofit start up, board governance and responsibilities and strategic planning.

LANO has also offered 20 excellence training sessions, with 344 total attendees. Topics for training sessions have included succession and strategic planning, funding, the fundamentals of grantwriting, volunteerism, board governance and Louisiana standards of excellence for nonprofits. These workshops are helping nonprofits function more effectively, so that they can serve the region better than ever before.

Furthermore, LANO granted five conference scholarships to Northshore nonprofits so they could attend LANO's tenth annual conference. The conference is designed to offer inspiration, ideas and information, as well as opportunities to net-

ABOUT LANO: The Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations is a statewide network of nonprofits, foundations, corporations and individuals. With more than 1,000 members and branch offices in Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, New Orleans, Shreveport and the Northshore, LANO's mission is to strengthen, promote and build the capacity of Louisiana's nonprofit sector through education, advocacy and member services. LANO was founded by the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) after a lengthy planning process. In 1999, LANO separately incorporated and received its 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS.

work at the largest annual gathering of Louisiana's nonprofits and foundations. This year's conference also featured skill-building sessions and panel discussions on fund development, public relations and marketing, human resources and risk management, social enterprise, board leadership and development and public policy and advocacy.

Northshore nonprofits interested in further LANO assistance can contact Panzeca, Northshore director of capacity building, at laurie@lano.org or (985) 630-5873. •

THECORRIDOR SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA/LAFAYETTE/BATON ROUGE/NORTHSHORE



54



New Calcasieu

LAKE CHARLES, PARISH GUIDE GROWTH

>> by **MUKUL VERMA**/photos by **LORI WASELCHUK**

The sense of promise in Lori Marinovich's voice is unmistakable. At a quick clip, the executive director of the Lake Charles downtown authority talks up the future of the city center, how there are projects ready to make the area alive again.

The enthusiasm has testimony: In a nation that jerks against taxes, the people of Lake Charles have agreed to pay millions more to the local government, which will use the money to improve the infrastructure, including sprucing up the downtown area to stir up a market for restaurants, shops and other businesses.

Step back from downtown and you will see this repeated. Across the parish anchored by Lake Charles, the people have been gathering to offer their version of a future Calcasieu Parish.

Louisiana is buzzing with such plans, thanks to people wishing to seize chances after Katrina and Rita to build better and stronger communities. There is the Louisiana Speaks plan for all of South Louisiana, as well as community plans and the downtown plan for Lake Charles. All of them were led by the Center for Planning Excellence, which sprouted from Plan Baton Rouge, a Foundation

55



Downtown Lake Charles has big parking lots along the waterfront and very little to do.

Downtown Lake Charles seems to be following Baton Rouge’s pattern. For the west Louisiana city, architect Andres Duany, as he did for Baton Rouge, created a framework for redevelopment of the downtown. That blueprint was formed after Hurricane Rita and was paid for by the LRA Support Foundation—a creation of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to assist in rebuilding after the hurricanes.

project to spark the revival of Baton Rouge’s downtown and the communities between LSU and downtown collectively known as Old South Baton Rouge.

Down the interstates from Baton Rouge, New Orleans and the parishes across the Northshore have fashioned land plans or are working on them. West Feliciana, Pointe Coupée and other parishes are in the midst of land plans as well.

All of the plans are built from the ground up, from the residents gathering together to decide what they want for their neighborhoods and communities.

Not all of the plans will become real. Lack of political resolve will kill some of them. But others, like the plan for Baton Rouge’s downtown, are bound to mold new downtowns, cities, even parishes.

Over a decade, the Plan Baton Rouge blueprint for downtown Baton Rouge has ignited redevelopment. Just now, more than \$300 million in investments are under way in downtown, building on hundreds of millions of dollars in investments that have fixed up buildings, opened up restaurants, created a nightlife in downtown.

Based partly on Duany’s plan, Lake Charles residents in late 2006 agreed to pay taxes to float a \$90 million bond issue with \$18 million earmarked for downtown projects. Taking another step, residents approved a referendum in May 2007 to permit commercial development on

“The plan will clearly define how we want to grow...”

—MICHAEL J. LAUER

public land, lifting prospects for downtown property owned by the city. Just this spring, the council approved the first phase of the downtown plan.

Lake Charles is building on the quick progress. A California real estate developer has been selected to handle riverfront development. Plus, market research is under way to demonstrate the demand for downtown life, and the Duany plan

is being fine-tuned, says Marinovich. “We had to scale the plan; then we had some big issues come up, such as how do we interface with the interstate.”

The plan will start with projects to spark downtown. Improving the streetscape and the lakefront promenade are among them. Other projects include new gateways to downtown, expanded parks and turning civic center parking lots, which take up vast space on the lake, into hotels serving downtown.

Longer-term projects include the \$16.5 million America’s Wetland Discovery Center and a \$31 million harbor development.

“I think they are very enthused,” said Marinovich of Lake Charles residents.

While Lake Charles works on its downtown, the people of Calcasieu are planning the rest of the parish. Gathering people at public meetings to dream up what they want their parish to become was the launching point for Vision Calcasieu.

“We are using the meeting as a starting point for not only envisioning what we want to become, but also to discuss how we want to get there and what we need to avoid in the process,” says Michael J. Lauer of Planning Works, lead on the Vision Calcasieu project.

At community meetings, people gather around maps of the parish. In those groups, they become land planners, deciding where they want to build, what they want to preserve, how they want to connect the areas and much more. All those choices are reported to the wider group, followed by



A plan envisions an active Lake Charles waterfront with shops, restaurants, housing and hotels.

knowledgeable planners folding them into a coherent land-use plan.

“The plan will clearly define how we want to grow, where we want to grow, how we want to pay for it, and the specific tasks that we need to pursue to encourage the kind of private investments necessary to bring about change,” says Lauer.

“Lake Charles has heavy industry and the port, as well as really wonderful natural amenities that we need to account for as we move forward with the plan,” adds Lauer. “The amenities include the waterfront and the lake, and the bayous and the natural resources that are spectacular for eco-tourism. The area has not capitalized on it as well as it could.”

Community meetings have created a sense of ownership, giving the plan a chance to survive beyond one election cycle. Plans will move forward if the parish moves fast to write projects into budgets.

“Without money, it’s just a dust collector,” says Lauer. •

John Wilder

REDEVELOPER

TIM MUELLER

A man must have something to do after retirement. Or he will nag his wife. Or disappear into depression. Or worse, go more than a bit mad.

Retired 10 years ago—actually offered early retirement along with others in a downsizing, a fact that hacks him off a bit—John Wilder canoed on lost waterways where motored boats were forbidden.

But he couldn't row all day, so Wilder started a business to redevelop housing. Not just any housing, but hangdog houses next to WBRZ-TV's offices in a pocket Old South Baton Rouge neighborhood. Wilder Properties now owns 27 units—21 on two streets in Magnolia Place, which has a sign thanking residents for keeping their neighborhood clean.

There are many investors in Old South Baton Rouge. Some are negligent owners. Wilder is not one of them; he's no slumlord. He's fixing up properties to make them livable, even putting balconies

on units so, he says, people can sit in the shade and sip a cold brew after work.

One complex is fenced. "That way you can put the kids out and they won't get away," he quips.

Wilder came upon this two-street neighborhood between LSU and downtown and thought it should be made into a nice place for people who can't afford middle-class comfort or upper-income luxury.

He shows off a fourplex that's being converted by employees who live in Old South Baton Rouge. The units will have wood floors, modest kitchens and a luxury by the area's standards—a washer and dryer so tenants don't have to spend meager incomes and scant leisure time at a washateria.

He rents the livable housing for modest prices, \$250, \$300 per month, the cost of a post-college starter suit.

Why? "It's somewhere between a calling and recognizing an opportunity. I can't tell which one."

—Mukul Verma



Introducing an uplifting alternative to the present— **GiveNorthshore gift cards.**

Buy GiveNorthshore cards and give them to nonprofits in St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Washington and St. Helena parishes. They can redeem them for money to do good works in your community.

Or buy and give the cards to a friend, family or colleague; let them support their favorite Northshore charities.

You can buy gift cards at GiveNorthshore.com They won't be re-gifted. They're good.



Northshore Community Foundation
635 Lafitte Street, Unit A Mandeville, Louisiana 70448 (985) 624-7160



Hilton Capitol Center



Youth Oasis



Shaw Center for the Arts

Our donors have...Planned a new Baton Rouge downtown...Funded a safehouse for runaway children... Partnered to build the Shaw Center for the Arts...

They believe \$200 million over four decades to improve lives is a start...That more good must be done...Cities need smarter planning to make traffic flow...Children need more schools that think differently...Hearts need more live jazz.

Join our donors to create the next great place.

If you don't do it, who will?

Find out how to open a charitable fund by calling
Jake Holinga at 225.387.6126.

*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Baton Rouge, LA
Permit 485