

# CURRENTS

Q4 | 2007

## ERNEST J. GAINES

*An interview and a new book award  
in his honor*

## MR. ED'S WILD RIDE

*Overcoming opposition  
to build happy trails*

## PLAY TO LEARN

*Baton Rouge is getting a  
children's museum*

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Opéra Louisiane, general director

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is a community foundation providing two essential functions for the capital region. The Foundation connects philanthropists with capable nonprofits to make sure the needs of our communities are met. The Foundation also invests in and manages pivotal projects to improve the region. Our Plan Baton Rouge initiative spearheaded the downtown revitalization plan. For more, contact Mukul Verma at [mverma@braf.org](mailto:mverma@braf.org).

## FROM THE CHAIR



**G**reetings friends,  
On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, I am pleased to announce that renowned, Austin-based marketing firm GSD&M is making headway on the development of an identity and underlying authentic purpose for the I-10/12 Corridor. The strategy is to separate the Corridor—which runs from Slidell, through

Baton Rouge and Lafayette, to Lake Charles—as a defined economic region for the state.

The idea, first presented as part of the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan, has already gained traction. Leaders from across the region are lining up to participate in the planning sessions, and the publisher of the *Business Report* has announced plans for a new publication dedicated to the corridor: *10/12, The Gulf South Business Corridor*.

Now, GSD&M is conducting interviews and online workshops with leadership groups from throughout the corridor. This work will help the firm create several scenarios to present to regional leaders who will then select the message that defines the corridor in the most dynamic and powerful way. By presenting that image to the rest of the nation and world, we will position the Corridor as a vital, vibrant region for business.

This work is central to stabilizing both the state's economy and the various local economies as we continue to recover from Katrina and Rita. Much of that work relates back to the principles put forth by Jim Collins, noted business expert and lecturer, in his book *Good to Great*.

Today I'd like to share some of his ideas with you, so you can more fully understand the context for both the I-10/12 Corridor project and the

preparation of the Foundation's next, 5-year strategic plan.

Collins often refers to three basic tenets that make companies great. First, he says, do only those things that you can be best at in the world. Second, do only those things that you can be passionate about. And finally, do things that make simple economic sense.

Organizations that use these principles to guide their activities, Collins says, are on the way to developing a strategy and vision that they can be truly successful at implementing. In fact, Collins points out, some of the greatest startup companies and entrepreneurs begin to develop their core purpose by first identifying their passions—rather than looking to market indicators or other statistics that might reveal profit-taking opportunities.

So let's look at our core purpose for a moment: Our mission is to enhance the quality of life available to residents of Louisiana's capital region. Is that something we can be best at in the world? I think it is—because we have local expertise—because we can furnish insights on the status of this community beyond those any outsider could—because we have tremendous leadership on our board and staff—people who are capable of making change happen.

Our work is exciting, and the people involved are brimming with passion. It's work that's easy to get wrapped up in—it's work that's more rewarding than getting a paycheck or tax break. It's work with real value—human value. When we have success, real people in our community, real parents and children get to live better. They are better educated, live safer lives and have increased access to quality services like basic health care.

We can be the best. We are passionate. But initially, Collins' third point—do things that make simple economic sense—seems out of place in

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our field since we don't seek a monetary profit. However, to continue our work from year to year, it's important to remember what drives our financial engine. And that's probably the most difficult question for nonprofits because you can't buy and sell philanthropy on store shelves. It's something that people support, largely, on faith.

Our work is made possible by gifts—generous support from members of the community who share our vision. And it's our reputation that keeps us going. It's our legacy in the community that convinces people to support our work. When our fund donors and members support our work, they are trusting us to deliver a better community, an improved quality of life for our neighbors.

Why do they trust us? Because we've demonstrated—time and time again—that we can turn our passion for the community into results like the Shaw Center for the Arts, the Old South Baton Rouge Revitalization Project and the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan. Our capital—our engine, in these terms, is our reputation, our legacy.

That's one reason we focus so much on sharing our results with you through *Currents* and other media. When you see what we're doing—what we're accomplishing in the community, then you can also see what else needs to be done to make our community even better—that's where we're headed.

In his work, Collins also says that great organizations measure success relative to their mission. For us, that means asking whether or not our community has improved, whether or not the quality of life in the region is more equitable than before. I can tell you, without hesitation, that the Foundation has indeed been successful. And you can see the results all across town—the results are in plain sight.

They are the accomplishments of the generations who came before us, the legacies of the

Foundation's 12 founders who believed in our ability to achieve tangible social benefits. They are the legacies of our first fund donors, who gave to the community without the benefit of seeing previous results. We are building on their commitment, their faith in our ability to make a difference.

Sadly, we have lost many of our great leaders over the past year—leaders who made our community better, leaders who fostered our Foundation's ability to create change and positively affect individual lives throughout the capital region. I am reminded that we stand on their shoulders, we reach for the dreams they inspired. We benefit from the community they built.

And now, as we prepare to plan for the next stage of our growth, we must remember that we also hold the next generation. They will stand on our shoulders and finish the work that we've started. So we have to lift them up, guide them so that they can achieve the future for Louisiana that we each would like to see.

Best wishes this holiday season,



Christel C. Slaughter, Ph.D.



## Boost for Old South BR

A plan to revive Old South Baton Rouge is in place. Now some resources for implementing it are as well.

NeighborWorks America, a federally-chartered nonprofit, is providing a \$675,000 grant

to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to help rebuild OSBR, the community between downtown and LSU. On top of that, a financial arm of NeighborWorks is likely to provide a line of credit for rebuilding the community.

“This grant will help OSBR take a big step towards becoming a place where people want to invest again,” says Mark Goodson, planner with the Center for Planning Excellence, a Foundation offshoot.

The NeighborWorks grant also will accelerate the existing efforts in OSBR. There, the federal government is spending \$18.6 million to build

126 housing units and the Foundation has provided a strategic plan and assisted in launching the Neighborhood Partnership Board. What’s more, just before word of the NeighborWorks grant, the state created the East Baton Rouge Parish Redevelopment Authority, which will allow for quicker movement of abandoned properties to market.

The bulk of the NeighborWorks grant will be used to begin redeveloping eight areas that are key to fostering more economic recovery in OSBR, says Goodson.

Among the key uses for \$600,000 of the grant will be clearing clouded property titles, permitting the assembling of parcels that can be packaged and sold for redevelopment, says Goodson. That will overcome a big hurdle for OSBR, which has hundreds of properties with no known heirs.

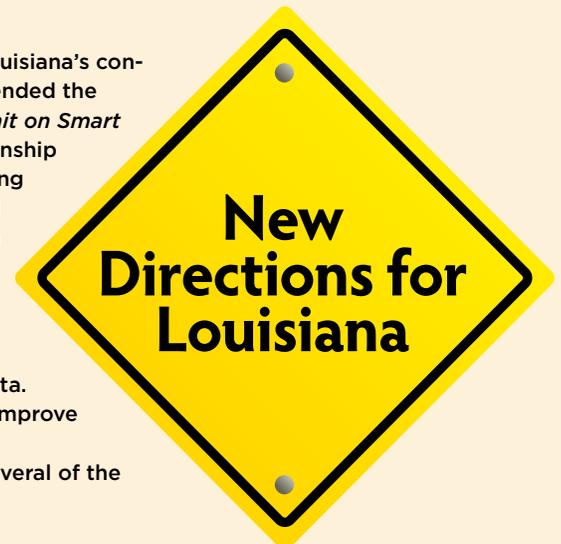
Another \$50,000 of the grant will build capacity for the Neighborhood Partnership Board and \$25,000 will be used for training people who will guide prospective homebuyers. •

## Get Smart and Grow

Mayors and parish officials from across the state and members of Louisiana’s congressional delegation were among the more than 450 people who attended the Center for Planning Excellence’s *New Directions for Louisiana: A Summit on Smart Growth in Louisiana* on Aug. 21 and 22. The conference, held at the Manship Theatre, was designed to share the most innovative ideas in the planning world with the residents and leaders of Louisiana. Presenters included Mayor-President Melvin “Kip” Holden, U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu, Don Chen—founder and Executive Director of Smart Growth America, Steve Oubre of Architects Southwest, and many, many others.

CPEX, a planning offshoot of the Foundation, coordinated the creation of the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan and is working throughout the region as communities continue to recover from Katrina and Rita. The summit was part of their ongoing mission to raise awareness and improve state and local planning.

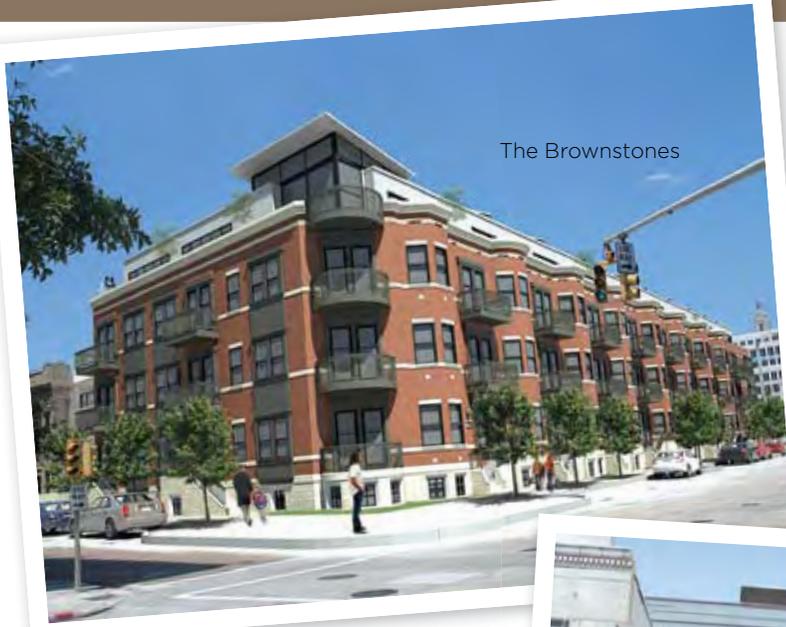
For more information about the event—including digital copies of several of the presentations—visit [www.planingexcellence.org](http://www.planingexcellence.org). •



CALCULUS

\$19  
million

Local and state sales taxes generated annually by Audubon Nature Institute, which operates the Audubon Zoo, Aquarium of the Americas and other New Orleans attractions. Audubon is working with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and other partners on a plan for a Baton Rouge eco-tourist attraction in downtown.



The Brownstones

One Eleven Third >>

# Live down- town

Downtown's difficult climb back to relevancy has been impressive but unfinished. Restaurants, nightclubs and businesses have returned, but there are too few places for people to live, residents being necessary to bring life around the clock and lure grocers and other retailers.

Commercial Properties Realty Trust is set to put a bit of balance in the equation. In August, the company unveiled plans for two projects that include housing.

Commercial Properties, manager of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's real estate portfolio, will build more than 70 apartments on Fifth and Laurel Streets in a project called Brownstones, for the four-story building will resemble the popular urban architectural housing style of Northeastern cities. The development should be open by early 2009. It will include offices and retail space. Apartments are tentatively priced from \$1,300 to \$1,900.



The Bogan Fire Station on Laurel could be incorporated into the Brownstones project, with the classic fire engines displayed in a glass space connecting the apartments to the station. The Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, now located in the fire station, would move to the second Commercial Properties project announced in the third quarter.

That second project is under construction along the Third Street entrance of the Shaw Center for the Arts. The building will have 12 apartments and 5,000 square feet for potential use by the Arts Council.

Commercial Properties also is renovating the former Stroube's building into a space for Rick Volland, who owns Capital City Grill, a successful restaurant in the Shaw Center. Volland will open a steak and seafood restaurant with outdoor dining and entertainment on the second floor. •

## Donors start Jazz Series

Appropriately, New Orleans, a city with rhythm topped with a jangle of beautiful noise, is the birthplace of Jazz. In its musical orbit, Baton Rouge has decided to preserve and enhance this American art form.

Jazz enthusiasts that include Leo Hamilton, C.J. Blache, Bill Grimes, Connie Lewis and Zia the Cat have established a fund at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to underwrite Jazz concerts and education. "It's really about building a regular home for Jazz here in Baton Rouge," says Derek Gordon, CEO of the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge.

The Council is working in concert with the new group, River City Jazz Coalition, on the project. "We want people to become more familiar with the artists who are out there, the styles of Jazz, and build a strong awareness for Jazz and present live Jazz in Baton Rouge."

The coalition started last month with its River City Jazz Masters series at the Manship Theatre, when Branford Marsalis played saxophone Sept. 21 to a sold-out crowd. In October, Pancho Sanchez, leader of the popular Latin Jazz band that bears his name, plays congas. In February, Jazz pianist Kenny Barron and his band play at the theater. In May, Nnenna Freelon sings in the tradition of Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday. Each artist will perform twice an evening, a means to make tickets more affordable and to provide more seats to reach a wider audience.

Gordon also envisions some performers offering master classes to students, including letting students watch and participate in sound checks.

"With the increase in population from New Orleans and with the region becoming more cosmopolitan, there is an expectation that we will be able to continue offering performers who are known on a world stage," said Gordon. •



## A mint on their pillow

After being open just a year, the Hilton Capitol Center in Baton Rouge, an asset of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, ranked No. 8 for customer service among the 242 full-service hotels flying the brand's flag in the U.S. The Hilton Capitol Center ranked No. 14 overall in categories that include guest loyalty, service and problem-free stays. The survey is sent to all guests after they stay in one of the hotels. The hotel was the shuttered Capitol House before a \$70 million renovation resulted in a reopening Aug. 30, 2006. The hotel is recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the Historical Hotels of America. •



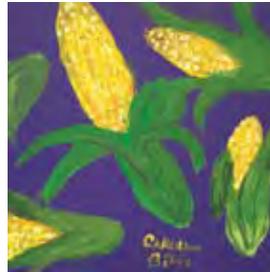
## Road Wage

Disconnected neighborhoods causing choke points, backlogs in road construction and lack of investment in mass transit are among the reasons Americans are wasting their lives stuck in traffic. Congestion drained \$78 billion from the U.S. economy in the form of 4.2 billion lost hours and 2.9 billion gallons of wasted fuel, reports the Texas Transportation Institute in its 2007 Urban Mobility Report.

The report, based on 2005 data, says congestion causes the average peak period traveler to spend an extra 38 hours of travel time and consume an additional 26 gallons of fuel, amounting to a cost of \$710 per American traveler.

The report recommends adding transit and road capacity, getting as much as possible from existing infrastructure, relieving chokepoints, changing usage patterns, providing mobility choices, diversifying the development patterns. And finally, the report says motorists should not have unrealistic expectations, which is code for learn to live with the traffic. •

# Art market



Jane Collins had her eye on the tables painted by children for the Main Street Market since she heard they would eventually be auctioned. In August, the former dean of LSU's college of arts and sciences snapped up two of the tables in an online auction. "The cows table will be given to a very special child for her first birthday," says Collins. "The other I will keep on my patio. I just bought two iron chairs I'm going to use with it."

The online auction of 46 tables generated \$21,366. With underwriting by Chase, Turner Industries and city-parish government, the event generated \$46,366 for the Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance, which runs the market and the Red Stick Farmers Market.

They have been replaced with new tables, also painted by student artists. BREADA expects to auction the current tables in 2009. •



## Design ordinance to go

Zoning began for a good reason. Decades ago, it kept pig sties and other offensive industrial uses away from houses. But a good idea, in the hands of zealous rulemakers, went too far. Zoning codes now prohibit common sense uses, such as an apartment above a professional office or a mix of housing in a neighborhood.

The exaggerated separation of uses has created generic neighborhoods, added to sprawl and increased our reliance on automobiles. Some cities have countered with new zoning codes that allow a mix of uses, making it easier for developers to build traditional neighborhood developments that mix shops, apartments, houses and offices.

Wanting to make it easier for all communities across Louisiana to replace outdated zoning codes, the Center for Planning Excellence is creating a model development ordinance with rules that are flexible enough to let residents rebuild communities.

Louisiana would become the first state with a model development ordinance. Because part of the project is being funded by the Environmental Protection Agency, the ordinance could be deployed to other states wishing to follow Louisiana's lead.

Not only would the ordinance make it easier to build TNDs in the city, it also would let rural communities design working towns while preserving the countryside from development that can't be sustained because infrastructure is lacking.

"The ordinance will be generic but meaningful," says Camille Manning-Broome, CPEX planner.

Parishes, cities and towns across Louisiana could tailor the ordinance to fit their communities.

The project is partly being underwritten by the Louisiana Department of Economic Development.

Meanwhile, CPEX is in line for \$2 million in federal funding, thanks to U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu. The funding will let CPEX continue to expand its land planning services to Louisiana parishes. •

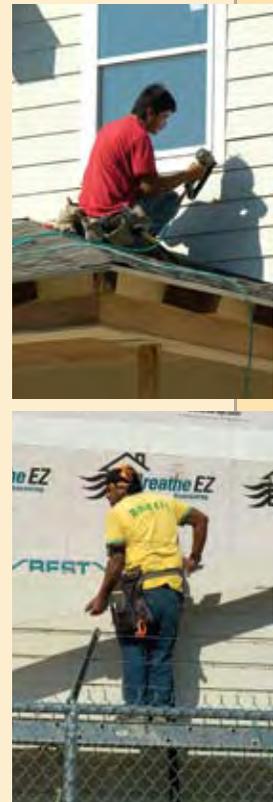
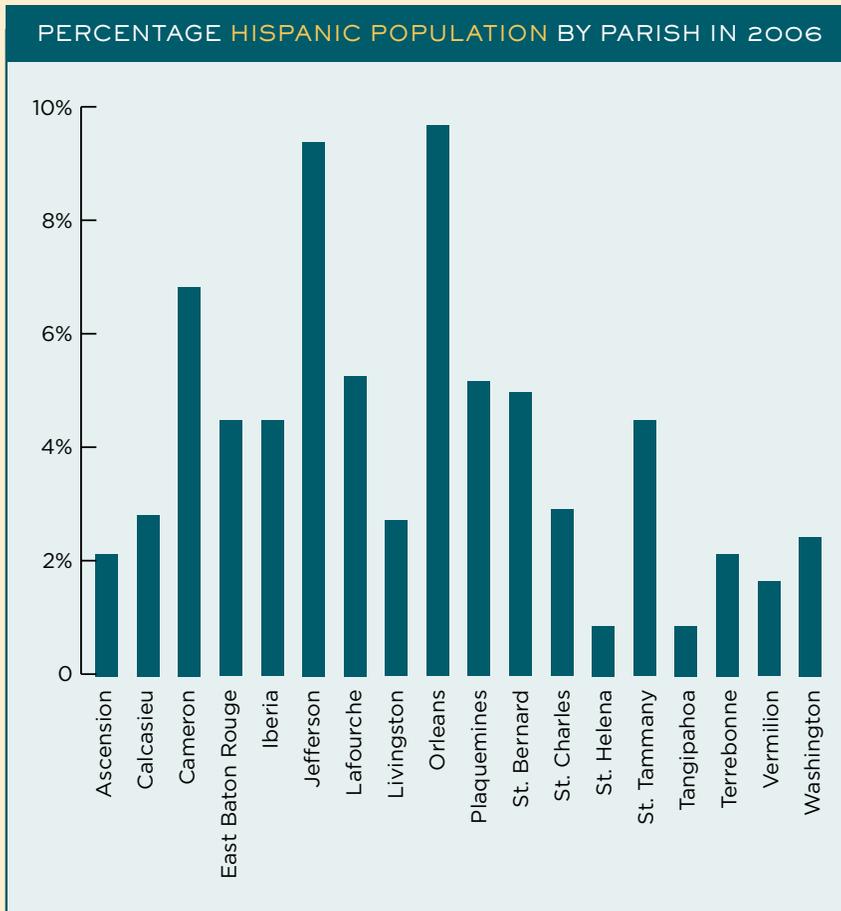
# Vamos al Norte

No doubt the Hispanic population has grown in South Louisiana. The evidence is on grocery shelves, in the rise of Latin American markets and in the makeup of construction crews. But how the Hispanic population is affecting South Louisiana communities is uncertain.

Generally, charities report a rise in use of services by the Hispanic population, but not by enough to stretch services. School systems in the region don't report by ethnic groups, but most of the Hispanic workers in the area either have no families or families back home.

The Hispanic population of South Louisiana has soared, but it remains relatively small compared to the total population, particularly in the Baton Rouge region. For instance, the Hispanic population nearly doubled in East Baton Rouge to 16,222 over two years ending in December 2006, but the ethnic group represented just 4.6% of the total population.

Hispanics make up a more sizable group in Orleans (9.9%) and Jefferson parishes (9.6%), where they have played an important role in rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina.



Population estimates are from surveys conducted July to December 2006.

SOURCE: LOUISIANA PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE



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*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

# FOR OUR MEMBERS

## Agency Funds

**W**ith the rise in complexity of the investment markets, more nonprofits are choosing Agency Funds of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to manage their money.

The Foundation now manages nearly \$40 million in assets for nonprofits under 60 Agency Funds. By choosing to start an Agency Fund, the nonprofits are relieved of the burden of managing their investments, freeing them to focus on what they do best: programs for the community.

Agency Funds are among several types of funds available at the Foundation. Others are the Donor Advised Funds, Field of Interest Funds

and Unrestricted Funds, all featured in earlier issues of Currents. Unlike the other funds, Agency Funds are considered both assets and liabilities on the Foundation's books. The reason: Nonprofits keep control of the Agency Funds they invest with the Foundation.

standing investment companies. Their performance is regularly monitored by the investment subcommittee, which reports to the full board.

So how are the funds doing so far? The return was 12.7% in 2006, 10.9% over three years and 8.8% over five years. Since the inception nearly a decade ago, the return has been 8.3%.

### Other fund types:

**Donor Advised Funds** are the most popular funds. Donors recommend grants to charitable organizations from funds they have created. As with all funds, the Foundation handles all the paperwork.

**Field of Interest Funds** are dedicated to an area, such as education or health care. An example: The Academic Distinction Fund provides grants to teachers who spend their own money to buy school supplies. The ADF has given more than \$2.4 million to teachers and has more than \$4.6 million in an endowment.

**Scholarships** provide grants for tuition, room and board for college students.

The Foundation manages the paperwork and follow-up for people who start a scholarship.

**Unrestricted Funds** permit the Foundation to pay for emerging opportunities in the community. Fund donors place no restrictions on how the money is used to benefit the community; the Foundation's board ultimately makes that decision. The flexibility of these funds has been the underpinning of some of the Foundation's biggest projects, such as partnering to build the Shaw Center for the Arts. •

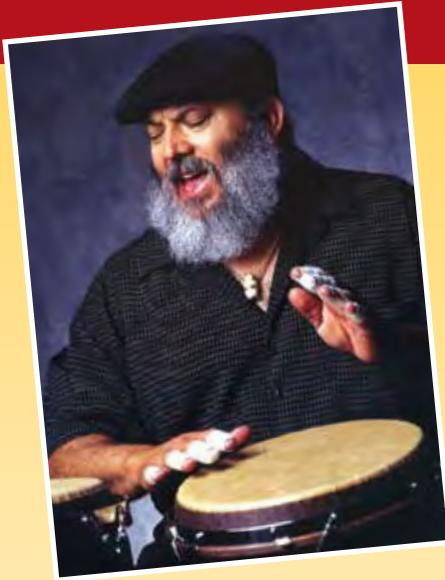
### ANNUALIZED INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE FOR PERIODS ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2006

1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	Since Inception 12/31/97
12.70%	10.90%	8.80%	8.30%

and Unrestricted Funds, all featured in earlier issues of Currents. Unlike the other funds, Agency Funds are considered both assets and liabilities on the Foundation's books. The reason: Nonprofits keep control of the Agency Funds they invest with the Foundation.

The Foundation is conservative with the money it manages for nonprofits. For one, the funds are overseen by a subcommittee of the Foundation's veteran board. Also, the eight members of the investment subcommittee serve for many years on the panel, allowing them to rely on experience to choose wisely when the market is uncertain.

The funds are managed by a variety of long-



# RIVER CITY JAZZ MASTERS



## Poncho Sanchez

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25  
AT 7:00 P.M. & 9:00 P.M.

The leader of the most popular Latin Jazz group in the world today! A Grammy Award winner in 2000 for Best Latin Jazz Album, his congas and seasoned ensemble will pay homage to the glories of a half century tradition that was born when Afro-Cuban rhythms merged with bebop.

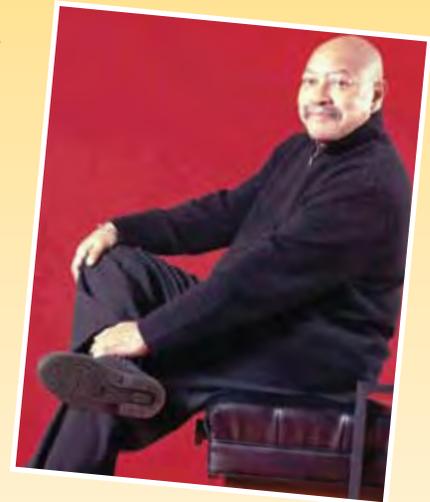


*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

## Kenny Barron Trio

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28  
AT 7:00 P.M. & 9:00 P.M.

Hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as "One of the top Jazz Pianists in the world!" His seven Grammy nominations and more than 40 recordings make this one evening that is not to be missed!



## Nnenna Freelon

THURSDAY, MAY 1  
AT 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!

This performance is funded in part by a grant from the Southern Arts Federation in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and The Louisiana Division of the Arts. Additional support provided by The Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation.



The River City Jazz Masters Series is presented by the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge in collaboration with the River City Jazz Coalition.

[www.artsbr.org](http://www.artsbr.org)

The River City Jazz Coalition would like to thank the following contributors:

Capital One, 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

## ON THE GROUND

David Zielinski and his new school, East Baton Rouge Laboratory School, were featured as a cover story in the third quarter issue of *Currents*. To read that story, visit [BRAf.org](http://BRAf.org) and click on "News."

Principal David Zielinski talks with freshman Farron Robinson in the hallway of the East Baton Rouge Lab School.



BY MUKUL VERMA | PHOTOS BY LORI WASELCHUK

# Choice School

*Experimental school could spark more in Baton Rouge*

**L**ike so many boys, Farron Robinson wants to star in the NFL. Never mind the long odds of his dream, he's got a plan, and executing it requires a choice most children would avoid.

Without prodding, he enrolled at the East Baton Rouge Laboratory School, a new experimental public school that requires longer days of study and dedication to learning on weekends. "I wanted to meet new people and get away from

the old people, and all that mess," says Robinson.

But on a day during the first month of school, a tiny dose of his own mess catches Farron. Nine hours of sleep wasn't enough to avoid the post-lunch blues; he placed his head on a desk for a short snooze. For that momentary lapse of reason, Farron was sent into the hallway, where he was greeted by Principal David Zielinski.

Talking not lecturing, Zielinski got Farron back on track, as he does several times a day for some

of the other 100 students at the independent school housed in a wing of Istrouma High.

“Kids act up in school for a reason,” says Zielinski. “You have to figure out what that reason is.”

For Zielinski, coaxing Farron back to his schoolwork isn’t heavy lifting. Once a top administrator at Episcopal School, he’s had to deal with new and bigger issues in his latest job. There was the kid who chose to crawl inside a locker and with an assist from a friend, got stuck inside. An embarrassing 911 call was avoided, thanks to the handiwork of a custodian. There was coordinating longer school days at Baton Rouge Lab with the school system’s bus schedules. There are rules of the parish system that he didn’t have to deal with at Episcopal.

Moreover, Zielinski and staff have to overcome the difficult home lives of the children. Some of the children are shuttled between homes, while others live in group homes.

“I have to remind myself: If I’m frustrated, imagine how the students feel,” says Zielinski. “The kids are so positive despite the issues in their lives.”

This new school is like a Rube Goldberg contraption. The challenge of coordinating all the jangling parts has one benefit. “I’ve lost 15 pounds,” says Zielinski.

In the middle of a day, the school seems no different than any other. In classrooms, kids me-me their hands into the air when they know the answer to a question. Some gaze out windows. Others look away, secretly hoping the teacher doesn’t call on them.

Under a contract with the Baton Rouge school system, BR Lab has latitude to try new methods for teaching kids who have come from more difficult circumstances. It’s one of two new experimental schools in EBR, and its success could spur



**Top:** Rosanda White, *left*, helps classmate Ambri Brazile during a math class at Baton Rouge Lab School.

**Bottom:** Teacher Theresa Poulos helps a student with a math problem at the Baton Rouge Lab School. Poulos is a Teach for America teacher.

more experimental schools. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation established and seeded Advance Baton Rouge, which assisted in starting the experimental schools.

To get students up to pace, Baton Rouge Lab provides many opportunities, including study halls, longer school days and monthly field trips. The schoolchildren will venture as far as the Holocaust Museum in Houston.

Farron will probably be on that trip, as well as sojourns to the Louisiana Book Festival, a college visit and a swamp tour. And for those adventures and the ones on campus, Zielinski declares that he made a wise job switch.

“It’s a huge challenge, and I’m glad I did it.” •



Celia Stevens and Luke Gordon may soon find this public swingset replaced with the Knock Knock Children's Museum.

# Play to Learn

BY MUKUL VERMA

PHOTOS BY DENNISE RENO

## *Baton Rouge is getting a children's museum*

Children's museums generally don't offer contemplative art. They are indoor playgrounds that double as places of learning, using science exhibits and art stations to teach kids about the wonders of the universe. And they are all the rage, sprouting across the country by demand from families looking for something new to do.

Baton Rouge should have its own in about two years. Knock Knock Children's Museum is expected to open in 2009. The high-energy group behind the project was negotiating with BREC in September to build in City Park.

By mid-September, the group had raised about \$11 million, which included \$5 million from the state. "Mayor Kip Holden got \$5 million in state capital outlay for the children's museum, for which we will be eternally grateful," says Kelli Stevens. She's among an original group that researched and pushed the museum this decade;

now she's the Knock Knock board chair.

The museum is estimated to cost \$15 million. Stevens says Knock Knock will use a capital campaign to raise the rest of the funds. BREC is expected to help, providing the land for the museum and possibly funding some of the construction.

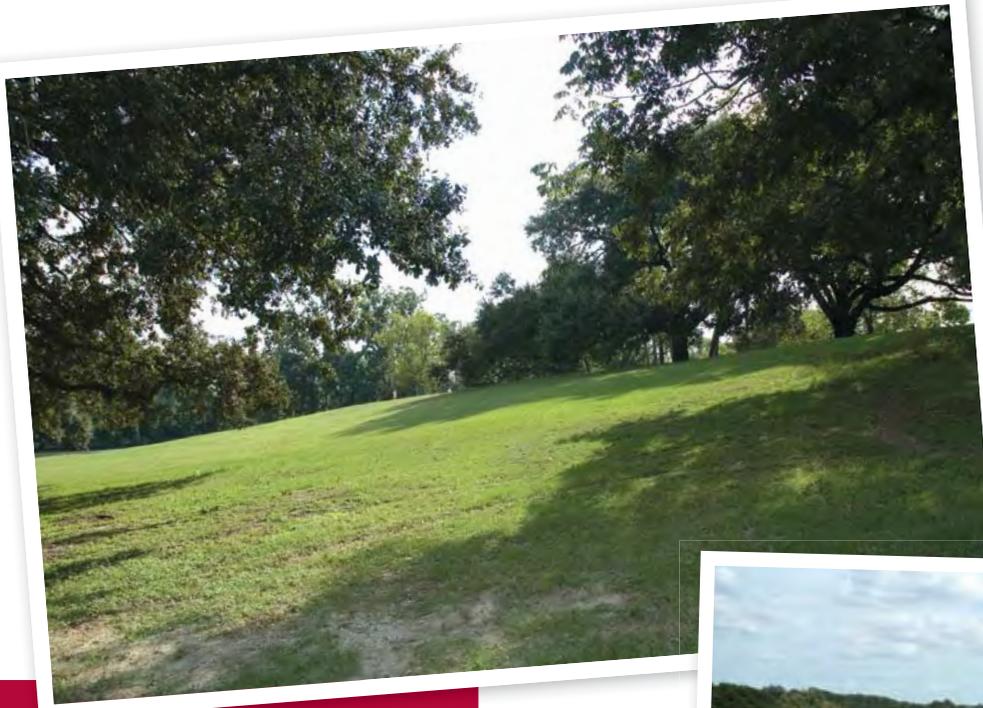
In its master plan for City Park, BREC had set aside acreage for a destination building as a future, unknown project. Knock Knock is likely to become that project. The land is on Dalrymple Drive, across from the golf course and next to the I-10 interchange.

The park site, says Stevens, is appropriate for several reasons. It has interstate access, is central to town and has land for outdoor features, such as the treehouses at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Gulfport.

The children's museum will add to the renovations in City Park. BREC is spending \$4.5 million

Emily Smith, Clarice Gordon and Kelli Stevens, executive committee members of the Knock Knock Children's Museum, at the site. Not pictured: Rebecca Nelson.





*Left:* This hill off Dalrymple between the I-10 on-ramp and Washington Street is expected to be the site of the new Knock Knock Children's Museum.

*Below:* The site's view down to Dalrymple.



## KNOCK KNOCK CHILDREN'S MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Kelli Stevens**, Chairperson

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*Above:* Bailey Stevens and Webster and Emma Gordon climb on the jungle gym at the site.

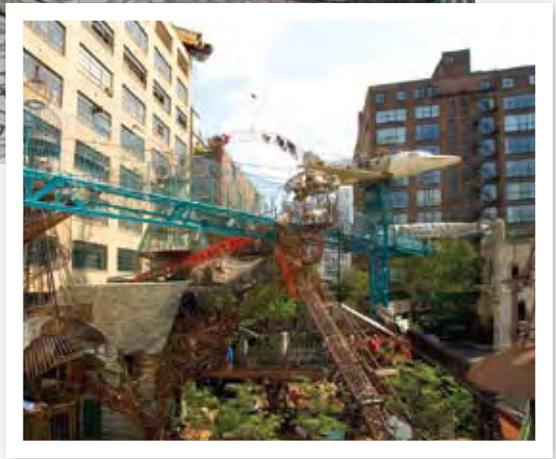
to improve the park with walking trails, a new tennis complex, a dog park, a playground, an interactive fountain and a labyrinth. With the children's museum and a golf course upgrade, City Park improvements would top \$20 million. Another phase could expand the art gallery and add boat rentals and a café on the lake.

Knock Knock has hired Haizlip Studio of Memphis, Tenn., for a design. The firm designed the Memphis Children's Museum and partnered on the award-winning planetarium in Baton Rouge.

Haizlip designers asked focus groups in September to dream up Baton Rouge's children's museum. The firm plans to deliver initial designs before year-end. •



COURTESY ST. LOUIS CITY MUSEUM



BY MUKUL VERMA

# Down the Rabbit Hole

*In St. Louis, a museum is not a museum*

**D**ive into a hole in the St. Louis City Museum, travel through the tunnels and you will emerge into a strange, new space. There, you may encounter an airplane converted into a giant toy, a performing circus, a shoelace making machine, monsters or a 52-foot sculpted bowhead whale.

It's called a museum, but the place defies a convenient label. Do label it fun. So much fun that the St. Louis City Museum has become a destination for downtown, even helping to spur the redevelopment of dozens of buildings into residential units in what was a flatlining industrial area.

The wonderland sprung from the mind of Bob Cassilly, a sculptor, successful real estate developer, entrepreneur and visionary who sees the world in an oblique way. While others look at abandoned cement factories as ugly, Cassilly sees them as the end of the Cambrian Period, when species died off by millions because their DNA didn't jibe with the hostile environment, akin to end of industrial businesses in St. Louis. >>



COURTESY ST. LOUIS CITY MUSEUM



**“You’ll be able to do all the things that were normally illegal...the things that kids used to sneak into a plant and do, looking for adventure.”**

—BOB CASSILLY

Building and 10-story warehouse. Callow won’t say how much was spent to build the museum, but the millions invested in it have provided a substantial return. Not only does the museum

“His plan was to install a work of art using items found, scavenged, and collected during the prior 20 years,” says Richard Callow, spokesman for City Museum. “His hope was people would find their shapes, textures, and colors as interesting as he did.”

Created by Cassilly and his crew, the museum opened in 1997 in an abandoned downtown complex that was the St. Louis Shoe

sustain itself, it also has become a spark for the region.

“The museum attracts visitors—and inquiries—from around the world,” says Callow. “The questions generally fall into two sorts: Could you show us how to do this, and whatever made you think of this?”

More than 600,000 kids and adults played at the City Museum last year, and 40% of them were tourists. The museum also has sparked redevelopment of downtown. “In the past ten years, other developers have completed, begun or planned the restoration of 60 historic buildings within three-quarters of a mile of the concrete whale in the museum’s lobby. “Those buildings are primarily residential,” says Callow.

Cassilly, 57, continues to add to the museum. “It is by no means finished,” says Callow. “Bob plans more of the same different things. In the



past six months, Bob has broken through a ceiling to add a fourth floor, installed a theater organ in the cave system, expanded the toddler and crafts areas, and created a new one-ring circus stage. Meanwhile, Bob and his crew are also working on a sister facility at a former cement plant eight miles north of the museum.”

That sister facility is now known as Cementland. Set to open in the next few years, Cementland is under construction in the empty hulk of a cement factory and its 54 acres. More than 182,000 truckloads of dirt have been used to build up the Mississippi River site. The park will have Cassilly’s animal sculptures, old machines grinding away, pools, waterfalls, a waterslide that descends through the building, and maybe a place for people to throw rocks from the roof because, as Cassilly says, ev-



erybody wants to throw rocks from a roof.

“You’ll be able to do all the things that were normally illegal, I suppose, do all the things that kids used to sneak into a plant and do, looking for adventure,” Cassilly said earlier in the decade, when he was dreaming up the rabbit hole for his latest adventure. •

BY C.E. RICHARD AND MARCIA GAUDET | PHOTOS BY TERRI FENSEL

# WORKING FROM HOME

*An Interview with Ernest J. Gaines*

“I think it's the greatest six acres of land on earth. I wouldn't exchange it for anything else in the world,” said Ernest J. Gaines, looking out the window from the office in his new home. “From here, I can look back at the church, and beyond the church to the trees back in the cemetery. You know, they've cut some of the sugarcane down, so I can see the trees in the cemetery back there now. I love this.”

Six years ago, Gaines and his wife, Dianne, began building a home on the same piece of False River plantation acreage where he grew up, in the heart of the place that has served as the principal setting for most of his

stories—a body of work that includes more than 10 books and earned him a nomination for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2004. “I picked cot-

ton exactly where I'm sitting now,” Gaines said.

After he retired as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Gaines moved back to Pointe Coupée Parish, outside Baton Rouge, and renewed his relationship with the same plot of oak-shaded earth that he and his family tilled for generations as sharecroppers. Gaines' relationship with the land now is a more equitable one; he doesn't have to wrestle cotton or corn from it the way so many of his forebearers did, pleading their survival from the dirt. He owns this land.

“So, yes, that definitely brings satisfaction,” he said. “To be able to have a little piece of this place where my folks worked for more than the last hundred years—and I know they never could've owned anything themselves.”

Still, in the course of any conversation with him, it quickly becomes apparent that he is no less bound to this place than those who came before him.

## **On the Land**

Earlier this year, Marcia Gaudet, from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, drove out to

## GAINES AWARD

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has started the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. The annual \$10,000 award promotes African American literature. The first winner will be announced in November and presented the award in a January celebration in Baton Rouge. For more information, visit [ErnestJGainesAward.org](http://ErnestJGainesAward.org).





visit Gaines at his home in Pointe Coupée. Along with colleagues Wiley Cash and Reggie Young, she is working on a book titled *This Louisiana Thing That Drives Me: The Legacy of Ernest J. Gaines*. Research for the book has given Gaudet a good excuse to visit the writer, who has been a dear friend since he first came to UL Lafayette in 1981. Mail still arrives at the university for Gaines, so this time Gaudet arrived at his home with a stack of letters. Among them was one from Wendell Berry.

Berry and Gaines have known each other since their days together in the creative writing workshop at Stanford nearly 50 years ago. Berry, who farms family land in Henry County, Ky., is the author of dozens of books, most of which address the theme of people's relationship to the land and their past. Gaudet asked Gaines about the letter he'd received from his friend. In it, Wendell Berry professes a greater kinship with Ernest Gaines' work than any other living writer's.

"I think its because we both knew the talk of old people," Berry's letter reads. "Old country people, in summer evenings." Later, Gaines caught himself laughing gently.

**Gaines:** Wendell gave a lecture at the Fellowship of Southern Writers in Chattanooga three or four months ago, and he used a little quote from my work, from *In My Father's House*, in his speech. But sometimes I think Wendell picks what he wants in my work. For example, in his speech he says that I—that the machine destroyed the people, and ran the people away from the land. Well, if you had to pick cotton eight hours a day, in hundred degree weather, you'd wish for a machine that could do this kind of work so you could do something else.

What happened was, yes, the machine did take their work, and the people did leave. And they went to the towns without any kind of skills that would be useful for working in the city. And so

many of them ended up in prison, in poverty, in prostitution and drugs. Much of this happened, yes. However, I think it's the result of not being prepared to go to these places. The machine had come in and destroyed these things, like working in the fields, but it had not prepared the people for something else to do. You see the same thing in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. The machines come in, put these people out of their houses and put them on the road, looking for something and not finding it.

So Wendell and I do share a love of the land, of course. He and I are good friends. But, you know, Wendell is still working with horses in his fields on his farm. Big horses. I never had a big horse. When I picked cotton, I had to put that sack on my shoulder and pull. And many, many days I suppose I wished for machines to do this kind of work.

### On the Writer's Education

As a writer, Gaines' relationship with his ancestral home near False River has been complicated and, at times, contradictory. "Fortunately for me, my folks took me away from here when I was 15 and put me in school in California," he remarked. "As I've said many times before, the two greatest moves I've made was on the day I left Louisiana in '48, and on the day I came back to Louisiana in '63."

Not unlike the children in *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines' early schooling took place in the plantation church, where an itinerant teacher would come to deliver lessons for a few months at a time, according to the seasons of planting and harvesting. Education beyond the eighth grade was not available to black students in Pointe Coupée Parish at that time. World War II had brought his stepfather to California, so, when they were able to, Gaines' parents brought him out west to join them. There, he would go

on to attend San Francisco State University and Stanford.

What brought him back to Louisiana in January 1963 was the news in fall 1962 that James Meredith had successfully challenged legal segregation in attending the University of Mississippi at Oxford; Meredith had won for himself the right to an equal education in his home state. Gaines took this as a sign that, perhaps, the South was beginning to offer black young people the kind of learning that he had left his home to find elsewhere. Then, too, he understood well that, as a writer, there was another kind of learning that he would only find back on False River.

**Gaines:** The young writer finds his education both in the library and in the people around him. I've talked about this in *Mozart and Leadbelly*: Mozart is a symbol for *form*, which you pick up in books of all kinds, in the library; and Leadbelly is a symbol of the *source* for my work. That is, I learned both from the books I studied at San Francisco State, at Stanford, as well as from the people here, on this plantation, during my days growing up, the first fifteen years of my life. And then, later, coming back here a couple times a year. I learned as much about writing here, by just being around those people and talking to them, listening to them, listening to the music.

The white writers' novels—because I only studied white writers in college, and then many libraries really only carried the work of white

**I learned as much about writing here, by just being around those people and talking to them, listening to them, listening to the music.**

## ERNEST J. GAINES

He was born January 15, 1933, at a plantation in Pointe Coupée Parish near New Roads, Louisiana, which is the Bayonne of all his fictional works. He is writer-in-residence emeritus at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In 1993 Gaines received the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship for his lifetime achievements. In 1996 he was named a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, one of France's highest decorations. In 2004, he was a nominee for the Nobel Prize for literature. He and his wife, Dianne, live in Oscar, La.

*A Lesson Before Dying* won the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, the most recent of numerous awards that Gaines has received. A Wallace Stegner fellow in 1957, a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts grant (1967), a Guggenheim fellow (1971) and a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation fellow (1993), Mr. Gaines has steadily been recognized for his achievement as a master of the novel and short story. In addition, one of his novels, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), has become an undisputed classic of twentieth-century American literature and was adapted as the popular, award-winning TV-movie starring Cicely Tyson.



writers at that time—I needed their form, their direction, in creating novels and short stories. But they couldn't give me the source I needed; that had to come from the people. I needed the Leadbellies. And I was constantly referring to the music, to the spirituals, to gospel, the blues, to jazz.

I remember, whenever I'd come back from San Francisco to Baton Rouge, I would always go to nightclubs with my uncles. On Sundays Baton Rouge was dry, so we had to leave town, go across the river to Port Allen to a joint, to drink and talk. Some of those places were pretty rough, and I saw some pretty rough things happen in them, which gave me a source for *Of Love and Dust*, as well as "Three Men" in my *Bloodline* stories. So this is a sort of education that you get as well. I experienced both the book—Mozart—and the source: Leadbelly. I needed both of them.

### On the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence

Gaines' formation as a writer also benefited from his receipt of several important literary awards, beginning with a fellowship in Stanford University's creative writing program in 1958 under Wallace Stegner. There, he joined other young writers whose work would likewise become widely read favorites, including Ken Kesey, Wendell Berry, Tillie Olsen, Larry McMurtry and Bill and Gloria Broder. "It was a wonderful class to be in at that time," Gaines remembered. "And there were many, many others through the years at Stanford. Stegner had that nose for picking out talent and bringing them there and giving them a year to work."

With no curricular requirements, that fellowship provided Gaines with several vital resources:



a stipend to live on, regular contact with other working writers, and the one luxury most coveted by all writers: time to work. Recognizing how important such literary awards have been in facilitating Gaines' career, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation established a \$10,000 prize in his honor, to be awarded annually to promising African American fiction writers.

**Gaines:** I know what it means to a young writer to receive these kinds of awards. I received an award by going Stanford, just one year after graduating from San Francisco State. And then, while I was at Stanford I started writing another novel, called *Catherine Carmier*, and I received the Jackson Award there in San Francisco for that. So, yes, I know what it means to receive those kinds of funds when you're starting out. It encourages you, and it helps you too when, as in my case, you don't have a lot of money to begin

with. Why, when I was there at Stanford, I would work eight hours a day. I'd get up in the morning, go to breakfast, work until noon, come back from lunch, work until dinner at night, and sometimes after dinner. It always helps when someone gives you that chance to write.

But also it encourages the young writer because he finds that someone is interested and feels he's doing something worthwhile. And that's what young writers really need. It tells a writer that he's doing something worthwhile. Of course, if somebody's going to be a writer, he's going to be a writer anyway, whether you tell him that or not. But it always helps, and I had that.

#### **On His Readers**

His success with novels like *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983) and *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993) has placed Ernest Gaines among America's

most highly-regarded living writers, here and abroad. Concentrated in a very particular part of Louisiana, his characters and settings strike readers as especially distinct, singular. And yet in Gaines' stories, the universal somehow manages to speak through the unique.

**Gaines:** My work has been translated into about twelve different languages—Japanese, Chinese, German, Russian, Slovene, Norwegian. How they understand anything I'm talking about, I don't know. But apparently they do. Readers from different parts of the world say, okay, yes, we recognize these characters, we believe in these characters.

But I don't know what's going to happen in the future, you know. I've met students who don't want to study dialect. Asian students I've met in San Jose, California, for example, who came out said, "Listen, my folks didn't send me here to study dialect. They sent me to learn to speak proper English grammar." I don't know how long we'll be communicating with those students.

### **On the Company He Keeps Nowadays**

Inevitably, the topic of any talk with Ernest Gaines will return again and again to his home on False River, just as he himself has throughout his work and his life. But it's not the place that has kept his imagination, and his readers', captivated through the years.

**Gaines:** Returning to it is the result of my love for my ancestors who worked much harder than I did, and who are buried about three-quarters of a mile from where I'm sitting right now. Knowing that their spirit is here, their bones are here, their dust is here—these are the kinds of things that give me great satisfaction. I mean, if it weren't for that fact, I don't think I would care anything for this part of Louisiana any more than any other

part of Louisiana, or the South, or the rest of the country.

So, owning this property, it's not necessarily for me. It's for them, and then for the living too; for my younger brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews. They can see this place and have pride in what I've done and in knowing what I've cared about.

I know that the old ones, the ones that are dead—I often sit on my back porch at night and think about how wonderful it would be if they were there sitting with me in rocking chairs and drinking coffee and talking. It's the sort of thing I think about often, because this is where they were, right here, my grandparents' grandparents. This is what makes me proud of the place.

If Auntie [Augusteen Jefferson] could sit here with me, or my stepfather who took me away from here, or my Uncle George, who used to take me to those old beat-up bars in Baton Rouge—if I could, I'd just buy him a good glass of Gentleman Jack, and we could sit here and talk. Oh, I wish I could do that. •



# OPÉRA LOUISIANE

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*The gala benefits Friends of LPB and the new Opéra Louisiane led by Robert Grayson.*

BY NATHAN SELF | PHOTOS BY LORI WASELCHUK

# Elder Care

*Two new programs assist seniors in Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupée*

**I**n the offices of HOPE Ministry of Pointe Coupée—located about an hour north of Baton Rouge in New Roads—Elaine Borskey is preparing to launch a new program, Care and Repair for the Elderly, with help from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

“Statistically,” she says, “about 20% of our parish’s residents live below the poverty line—including about 14% of our seniors. That’s more than 600 of our elders who struggle to afford even the most basic items—like meals and electricity. These are people who can’t afford to make basic repairs to their homes—people who could live better lives with just a little help. These are people who deserve better.”

Borskey is the new executive director of HOPE Ministry of Pointe Coupée, and her passion for helping others makes her an exciting addition to this important service organization. HOPE Ministry serves the residents of Pointe Coupée, providing utility and prescription assistance, temporary shelter for victims of fire and domestic violence, and an emergency food pantry for families in need. The nonprofit also works to provide uniforms for public elementary and middle school students.

In June, July and August, HOPE Ministry served more than 2,900 clients, referring many resi-

dents to other agencies for comprehensive case management.

“We’ve formed a lot of partnerships with other nonprofits and service agencies, so that we can make sure our residents get connected to the help they need,” says Borskey. “From eye exams and glasses to our Christmas toy drive, our goal is to provide local help for local needs. We want to help the people of Pointe Coupée thrive.”

Their newest program, Care and Repair for the Elderly, was funded by a \$105,573 grant from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation’s Community Advancement Fund. The program is designed to pay for minor home repairs to eligible low- and moderate-income elderly homeowners, as well as accessibility modifications for disabled homeowners.

For the project, HOPE Ministry of Pointe Coupée is collaborating with the Pointe Coupée Council on Aging, St. Mary Missionary Baptist Church, Pointe Coupée Parish Health Unit and the Louisiana Department of Social Services. Licensed contractors will work on about 50 homes, providing services such as painting, electrical repair or replacement, window/door repair, plumbing repair or replacement, gutter and walkway repair and installation of grab bars, railings and other accessibility devices to assist the elderly



## ON-SITE



Mary Bell Christopher of New Roads uses clothespins to block the sun, keeping her home from boiling because the air conditioner is broken. The 85-year-old could get help from H.O.P.E. Ministries of Pointe Coupée, which is providing minor home repair for the elderly.

and disabled.

“The program is bringing us closer to fulfilling our mission,” says Borskey, “Helping Other People Everyday.”

### Family Solutions

In Baton Rouge, Dr. Dennis Dillon’s group, Girls and Boys Town of Louisiana, is also supporting the needs of the elderly through a program that assists seniors who are raising grandchildren.

“The grandparents we serve are taking on some

very unique circumstances—they are parenting for a second time, trying to address the challenges facing a whole new generation of children, and dealing with their own age and health issues.” says Dillon. “They haven’t been parents for several years, decades in some cases, so we try to help them understand what’s out there and how to connect with the kids.”

Girls and Boys Town of Louisiana received \$94,427 from the Foundation’s Community Advancement Fund to support the program. Collaborating with Youth Oasis and Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, the program will serve East Baton Rouge Parish, providing family-based

services for grandparents raising grandchildren and other relatives.

In Louisiana alone, more than 67,000 grandparents have reported that they are responsible for grandchildren who live with them; many of these caregivers are unfamiliar with the range of support services available to them and the issues that face today’s youth. This program will serve 49 families.

“Many of these families struggle with poverty,” says Dillon, “so a big part of our program is to provide basic case management that will help connect these families to the things they need to be successful.”

Girls and Boys Town of Louisiana works in metro New Orleans, and East and West Baton Rouge parishes. Its parent network, which helps abused, neglected and severely at-risk children, is the nation’s largest privately-funded organization of its kind.

“For this program, our consultants work directly with the families—in their homes—for several hours a week. We help the grandparents develop effective parenting strategies and provide basic services such as transportation or assistance with household tasks. Basically, our role is to help relieve some of the pressure from these families so that they can function better,” says Dillon. •

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Community Advancement Fund is a pool of unrestricted funds that is governed by a board appointed committee and issues grants on a quarterly basis. Aimed at finding better ways to improve the quality of life in the capital region, CAF issued grants to Girls and Boys Town of Louisiana, Inc. and HOPE Ministry of Pointe Coupée on July 12, 2007 in a special topics round focused on collaborative efforts that support quality of life issues for the elderly in our region.



Emma Lee Wright, 79, takes care of her 13-year-old grandson, Darrius Wright, at her home in Old South Baton Rouge. They are participating in a program developed by the Girls and Boys Town of Louisiana to improve the quality of life for families in which grandparents are caring for grandchildren.

WHAT'S  
NEXT?

# Mr. Ed's Wild Ride

BY MUKUL VERMA

## ED MCBRAYER

Executive Director, Atlanta Path Foundation

**Who he is:** The Georgia Tech graduate started his career as an aeronautical engineer, then switched to homebuilding. In the early 1990s, with two buddies, he decided to start a path movement in Atlanta. Now he runs the foundation that builds paths around the region.

**A**n angry man haunts Ed McBrayer. Pamphlets in hand, the man appears at public meetings, warning the crowds that McBrayer will also ruin their lives.

McBrayer's evil intent: His organization builds paths for strolling and walking, connecting Atlanta and its vast suburbs with trails for commuting and exercising.

The head of the Atlanta Path Foundation estimates that the angry man is among 15% of the people who oppose paths. Among the vast majority, paths have become so popular that developers locate their projects around them and charge homebuyers a premium to be near the amenity.

McBrayer talked to *Currents* about the expanding trail movement, and about NIMBYs—the people who don't want the paths in their back yards—trying to stop trails.

### **The path movement in Atlanta got a life from the Olympics in 1996.**

The Olympics were an impetus. We thought, "Let's make hay while the sun is shining." We became an official Olympics project. Mainly, what it did was get us through the bureaucracy at City Hall. Along with other Olympic projects, it gave us a venue for public meetings.

### **How many miles do you now have?**

We are at 112 miles. The project list is getting longer rather than shorter. We don't have a finish line, the track keeps getting longer. There is always another group that wants us to do a project. It just amazes me how this has blossomed.

### **A reason for the blossoming?**

We got swept into the trail movement nationwide. The public now rates trails above every other amenity when considering what neighborhood or complex to move into. By far, trails are No. 1 above golf courses and swimming pools that developers typically offer the public for buy in, and that has been a key to our success over five or six years. Developers want maps of where we are going to build next and spurs from their projects to the trails.

### **How are you paying for the trails?**

We pride ourselves in 75% public-to-private ratio, though it normally runs around 70%. Corporations, individuals and phil-

TIM MUELLER

anthropic agencies have been supporters. The big foundations in town – the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation among them – have been supporters. Cox Communications is a big contributor, as is



LORI WASELCHUK

**They have the newspapers portraying me as the Anti-Christ for wanting to build a walking path.**

—ED MCBRAYER

Arthur Blank (owner of the Atlanta Falcons). ING asked its employees who they wanted to give to and we were No. 1; they gave us \$300,000.

**Yet there are people who don't want trails near their houses.**

We were just talking about it. We have had to call the police on some people who oppose the trails. People have walked out of \$1 million houses, including one noted attorney, and sabotaged our construction.

**How do you overcome NIMBYs?**

I don't think you ever overcome NIMBYs. What you have to do is talk to the leadership of a jurisdiction and count on them to have the backbone to stand up and say "the vast majority want to do this and we are going to do this and you must get out of the way." Still, a lot of elected officials are ruled by the 15% of people who are opposed. Some of those leaders I have no respect for, and they know it. They sometimes back projects, get federal funding but back down when the 15% who are vocal and in their face oppose the project. We have, by no means, been successful with all our projects. We generally prevail.

**Why do NIMBYs exist?**

I have editorial comments that a lot of people don't like to hear. NIMBYism is normally a class or race issue. NIMBYs will tell you a million other reasons they oppose a trail, but if you solve all the other things, it will come down for them to "we don't want those people near our house." It can be black people, or it can be lower-income people. That's what it boils down to.

We can prove to the NIMBYs that paths increase property values. We can have the police prove that paths decrease crime. We can show them paths will not destroy the bird population or ruin the water quality or that people won't park in their yards. They will still be against it. Eventually, they will come out and say we don't want people who we don't know behind our house or near our house. Usually, they are opposed because it's a race issue. One woman said her children will never play in their yard again; crap like that.

**Where is the greatest opposition?**

The nicer the neighborhood, the nastier it gets. I have a prominent attorney and a whole bunch of other people fighting a trail between their

North Atlanta neighborhoods. They have the newspapers portraying me as the Anti-Christ for wanting to build a walking path. I have brought heads of neighborhoods in which paths have worked to talk with them, and they practically threw them out.

### **Since you began in 1991, has the amount of opposition decreased?**

It's been slowly declining. But all you have to do is get a certain group that has an elected official's ear or knows how to hit the right buttons, like my funding sources, and a lot of damage is done. One person opposed to a path was the best friend of the head of the city works department of Atlanta. He had them measure the trail, they found a few discrepancies and he demanded that the trail be dug up and moved over. It doesn't take a giant number of people to kill a trail, just the right people on your case. I have a guy who follows me from neighborhood to neighborhood and shows up with a big stack of brochures and tells people how a trail has ruined his neighborhood.

### **How do you counter?**

With the benefits of trails. They increase property values. After a trail goes up, most people living nearby want a spur to their neighborhoods. On the Silver Comet trail, we have approved 26 connections from different neighborhoods, allowing them to build on the state's property for a link. I tell neighborhoods that people will be healthier, they will walk to their neighbors' house, the kids will learn to ride bikes and walk, grandmas will walk with their friends. On a trail, all the good things that are supposed to happen do happen. We have a Centers for Disease Control study on our trail that shows the health benefits.

## ED'S SHINING PATH

- >> Just like roads, paths are for transit. They reduce traffic and provide a place for people to exercise and have fun.
- >> Paths are not only for bikes. They are for walkers, joggers, people strolling with their babies, and for bikes.
- >> Paths reduce crime. The evidence shows paths next to people's houses reduce crime, not increase it. Police can patrol the paths. When more people are outside and keeping an eye on their neighborhoods, perpetrators are less likely to attempt crimes.
- >> Paths increase property values. Studies of parks have shown that people who live on active parks get a 15% premium for their houses.
- >> Paths are good for you. Walking, jogging and riding bikes improves health. A study by Pennington researcher Tim Church shows that just 70 minutes of moderate exercise per week improves fitness among the sedentary.

### **Where should a town like Baton Rouge start?**

You have to choose the first trail carefully. It must be located where it's used a lot and shows all the bells and whistles. You can't choose an ugly trail, or one that won't be used.

### **The trail movement appears to be spreading.**

I could have gotten hired by 20 different cities that want trails. Cities are waking up and deciding this is something they want to do. •

WHAT'S  
NEXT?



BY MUKUL VERMA | PHOTOS BY LORI WASELCHUK

# Happy Trails

*In St. Tammany, a road often traveled by foot, blades*

**T**here is more than one way to reach the cold beer on tap at Abita Brew Pub. Many people ditch their automobiles in favor of rollerblades, bikes and even their feet for a cold Turbodog or Andygator.

What makes this possible is the Tammany Trace, a nearly 30-mile trail that runs from Slidell to Mandeville, passing along the way St. Tammany towns of Covington and Abita Springs.

The Trace was a rail line. Abandoned by the rail companies, it has been converted to a path that has dramatically enhanced the quality of life, a success measured by how often it's used.

About 194,000 people were counted traveling the trail in 2006 - double the 94,000 in 2002, says Lisa Pratt Maddox, who oversees the Trace for the parish. The only down year was 2005, when Hurricane Katrina closed a section of the path.

The Tammany Trace is part of a national movement to convert rails to trails. Around the country, there are 1,409 open rail-trails traversing 13,505 miles. Another 1,206 rail-trail projects for a total of 14,178 miles are underway, says the

Rails to Trails Conservancy. In Louisiana, the only open trail is the Tammany Trace.

The 28-mile trace rolls by wetlands, wilderness, restaurants, shops, farmers markets and schools. In cities, it runs between people's backyards.

Funded by local, state and federal funds, the trail project began in the early 1990s. The abandoned train line was bought from a corporation for \$1.4 million, which, in hindsight, says Maddox, was "an excellent deal."

The first segment between Mandeville and Abita Springs opened in 1995. Three miles now are under construction to reach downtown Slidell. St. Tammany Parish pays for upkeep of the trace because, like any other road, it's a transportation artery.

There was some grumbling by protestors



Randal Ott pours syrup on a snow cone at the Kick Stand Cafe in Mandeville which is on the trail.

# WHAT'S NEXT?

## TRY, TRY AGAIN

Imagine riding a bike, walking or jogging along Bayou Duplantier from the Baton Rouge lakes all the way to Highland Road Park. That trail was part of a greenways plan in the 1990s, but the effort was shelved after a handful of locals sided against the project. Now, BREC is embarking on building paths, which, in surveys, rank as the No. 1 requested offering from parks systems. BREC has \$4 million to begin its path program, and the city-parish has set aside 3% of \$653 million from the Green Light plan for bike paths, sidewalks and beautification.

when the path was first proposed, says Maddox. "It was opposed by the kind of people who oppose everything." But the opposition melted after people realized that a pleasant path near their homes was an amenity that also provided a convenient means to get around town and between them.

"It's really an asset to the community and has improved real estate values," says Maddox. "People who love the Trace buy close to it. People in the real estate business use the Trace as a selling point."

Maddox couldn't say how much more a house on the trail costs, but independent research has shown that houses on parks sell for a 15% premium, and the higher property values spin off more than enough property taxes to pay for public

investment in the park. The trace

is used for more than recreation. People ride their bikes or walk to work via the trail, and children use it to get to school. Where possible, the trail is connected to schools and parks by paths.

The trace also has been a tourist attraction, and one business has aligned its fate with it. Sheila Goodson opened Kick Stand Café, a bike rental and restaurant business, on family land on the trace three years ago. "It's going well; the business is starting to mature," said Goodson.

Kick Stand, located in Mandeville, does well during spring and fall. "Spring and fall are bike rental time," says Goodson.

The renters come from the area, from the region and around the world. Before Katrina, bus tours from New Orleans would enliven her business, and she's hoping they return soon as the Crescent City limps back from devastation.

When the weather is pleasant, all 40 bikes are rented and the 50 seats in her restaurant are taken.

And the children and grown-ups line up for ice creams and snowballs. •



Guests eat lunch at the Kick Stand Café, above. Stacy, right, and her children Tony and Ava leave the Café, where they bought snow cones to cool off.



# WHAT'S NEXT?

India Rogers eats an ice cream cone at the Kick Stand Café, a stop on the Tammany Trace.

## Paper Batteries

Batteries have shrunk and become more efficient, but the underlying technology had not changed in decades. In August, researchers at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute unveiled a new power storage technology that has the potential to change how we live.

The battery is a combination of carbon nanotubes and cellulose, which essentially is paper. The nano-engineered battery is lightweight, ultra thin and completely flexible. It can be used in implantable medical devices, cars, and computers. The battery can even be charged by chemicals in sweat and blood, meaning it's a potential replacement of chemical batteries now used in pacemakers.

Because it's moldable, the paper battery could be fashioned into car doors or other car parts. And it keeps functioning under extreme temperatures.



Rensselaer researchers created the battery by infusing paper with aligned carbon nanotubes, which gives the device its black color. The nanotubes act as electrodes and allow the storage devices to conduct electricity.

The material required to create the paper batteries is inexpensive, but there is a hurdle: The researchers now must develop methods for mass production.

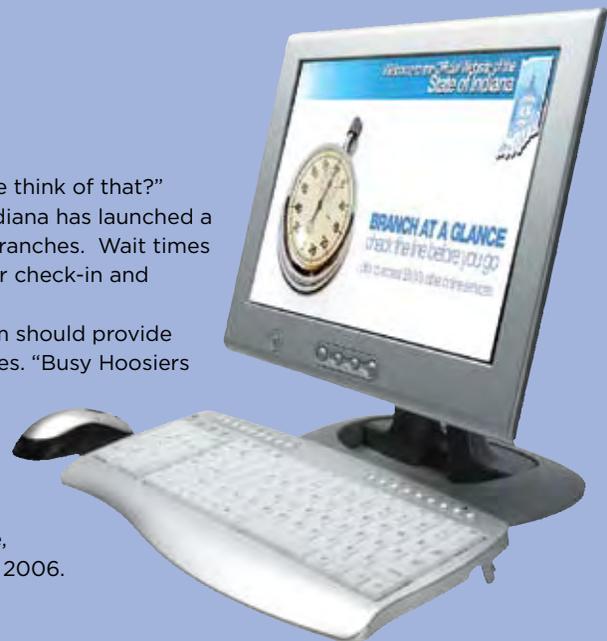
"When we get this technology down, we'll basically have the ability to print batteries..." says Pulickel M. Ajayan, among the Rensselaer researchers. "We see this as a technology that's just right for the current energy market, as well as the electronics industry, which is always looking for smaller, lighter power sources. Our device could make its way into any number of different applications." •

## Speedy License

In the category of a forehead-slapping "why didn't we think of that?" comes this item from the Hoosier state. The state of Indiana has launched a website that provides wait times at 140 motor vehicle branches. Wait times are calculated by measuring the time between customer check-in and transaction payment.

Besides providing better customer service, the system should provide better work flow for the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles. "Busy Hoosiers finally have a more reliable way to predict how much time to allow for a visit to their local license branch," Gov. Mitch Daniels said in a statement. "This adds a convenience factor that BMV customers want and deserve."

The BMV also tracks average license branch visit time, which was 20 minutes in July, down from 44 minutes in 2006. Check out the service at [www.in.gov/bmv/branches](http://www.in.gov/bmv/branches). •





## Gas, Food, Lodging

If that highway sign seems easier to read at night, it could be a new typeface. Some states across the nation are changing the typeface on interstate signs from Highway Gothic, the standard for 50 years, to Clearview, which is said to be easier to read, thereby potentially reducing the number of people getting lost and in accidents.

The new typeface was developed by Don Meeker, an environmental graphic designer, and James Montalbano, a type designer. Less space between letters make words more readable in Clearview, and a slight curve on the bottom edges of some letters leads the eyes across the script.

In August, 20 states had adopted the new font and were expected to switch signs over time. Louisiana is not among them. Mark Lambert, spokesman for the state Department of Transportation, says the new font is still considered experimental. Plus, the font must be purchased, and the state doesn't believe that buying a new font for highway signs is the best use of tax money right now. More on the new sign fonts is available at [clearviewhwy.com](http://clearviewhwy.com) •



## Scarlet Letter in Pink

Some economists believe incentives drive all people. Here's a negative incentive for the cops of Bangkok. Police who make mistakes – park in the wrong place, show up for work late, litter – must wear pink Hello Kitty armbands.

"This new twist is expected to make them feel guilt and shame and prevent them from repeating the offense, no matter how minor," Pongpat

Chayaphan, acting chief of the Crime Suppression Division in Bangkok, told the New York Times. "Kitty is a cute icon for young girls. It's not something macho police officers want covering their biceps."

The chief, who has trained with the American Secret Service, had tried warning officers about their foul-ups, but that didn't work. He followed that with tartan armbands, but the offending officers were taking the armbands home and keeping them as souvenirs—essentially stealing. •

## Tour de Paris

Bikes are good for the environment and the heart. Understanding that, Parisians have made the city's nascent bike rental program the most popular in the world. More than 1 million users have registered to rent bikes from Velib, which was launched in July.

Each day, thousands of people use the bikes to pedal to work, shop and play—and thereby reduce motor vehicle traffic. Velib, meaning "free bike," is a misnomer. There is a small rental fee. The bikes are free for half hour increments, but about \$1.35 for an entire day. Bikes don't have to be returned to the station where they were rented.

Velib will grow to about 20,000 bikes at 1,450 rental stations by year-end.

The program is being copied by Seoul and looked over



by other cities. But Seoul, like the Baton Rouge-area, has few bike lanes. Still, Seoul plans to establish 200 bike stations and 500 bikes to start the project. •

## Cells R Us

Need a new bladder? The Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine can grow one for you.

Seven children with replacement bladders made from their own cells are doing well after seven years, the institute recently reported. Like some other researchers, the institute is developing methods to grow other organs.

"This is one small step in our ability to go forward in replacing damaged tissues and organs," says Anthony Atala, the director of the institute who is now working to grow 20 different tissues and organs, including blood vessels and hearts, in the laboratory.

Atala had been working since 1990 to build bladders from patients' own cells and in 1999 implanted the first organ in a patient. His latest report discusses the long-term results with seven children who had the surgery. "We wanted to go slowly and carefully and make sure

we did it the right way," said Atala. "This is a small, limited experience, but it has enough follow-up to show us that tissue engineering is a viable tool that will allow us to tackle problems of similar magnitude."

The process for growing each patient's organ began with a biopsy to get samples of muscle cells and the cells that line the bladder walls. These cells were grown in a culture until there were enough cells to place onto a specially constructed biodegradable mold, or scaffold, shaped like a bladder. Seven or eight weeks after the biopsy, the engineered bladders were sutured to patients' original bladders during surgery. The scaffold was designed to degrade as the bladder tissue integrated with the body. Testing showed that the engineered bladders functioned as well as bladders that are repaired with intestine tissue, but with none of the ill effects. •



## Arts to Market

If art makes the economy go, then investing in artists makes sense. The leaders in Denver have started a program that provides microloans to artists. Artists can borrow up to \$20,000 from The Creative Enterprises Revolving Loan Fund to buy supplies and equipment, make changes to working spaces and for other uses that move their art to market.

Moreover, the program offers consulting help and workshops on running a business. The one-year-old CERLF gets its money from a community development block grant and a public-private partnership.

Microlending started in Bangladesh, where Grameen Bank provided small amounts to poor people not qualifying for bank loans. With success there, microlending spread around the world. Grameen Bank, along with its founder Muhammad Yunus, split the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

In Denver, the microlending program is run by Create Denver, an initiative of the Denver Office of Cultural Affairs. Create Denver supports, promotes and grows the creative sector, including independent artists, music, film, arts galleries and districts. •

# FOR THE HOLIDAYS....

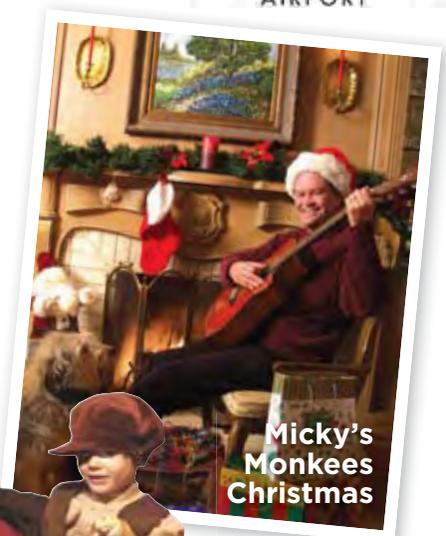


## Micky's Monkees Christmas

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24,  
3 AND 8 P.M. • \$40-\$60

*Just added!*

The fun-loving Micky Dolenz, lead singer of the Monkees, makes a holiday delivery of Christmas classics and Top 40 Monkees hits to kick off the season.



Micky's Monkees Christmas

## A Christmas Carol

In association with  
Playmakers of Baton Rouge



DEC. 14 TO DEC. 23 • \$15-\$35

A holiday encore—a new tradition for Baton Rouge.



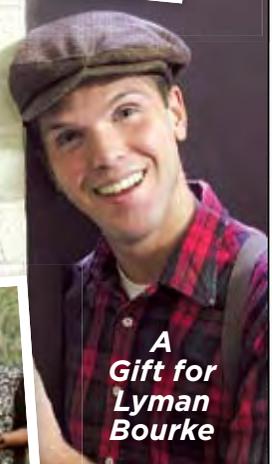
A Christmas Carol

## Jamie Wax's A Gift for Lyman Bourke

NOV. 30 TO DEC. 9  
\$20-\$35



Beloved holiday favorite of young and old alike! "Magical"—*The Advocate*



A Gift for Lyman Bourke

## BeauSoleil avec Michael Doucet

WED., DEC. 26, 8 P.M.  
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*Just added!*

The high-energy, award-winning "World's Greatest Cajun Band" returns to celebrate the spirit of the season Cajun style.



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*Gift certificates are available;  
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Tickets: 225.344.0334 or  
[www.manshiptheatre.org](http://www.manshiptheatre.org)

# Manship Theatre



BY MAGGIE HEYN RICHARDSON | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

## Life Support

*A program gives a hand up to former women prisoners*

**T**he thrift store on Nicholson Drive in Baton Rouge is filled with stories about murder and drug-dealing – and salvation.

Four women are at work, organizing earrings, sorting clothes and taking orders for upholstery services. Pam, 45, is tall, with a determined face, dark brown eyes and fashionable short hair. You can hear a South Louisiana lilt in her voice.

“By the grace of God I’m here,” she says. “I feel like my nightmare is over.”

At 27, Pam was sentenced to life in prison for carrying \$260 worth of heroin. After 18 years, the state pardon board granted her release. What tipped the scales in her favor was her acceptance into Connections for Life, a small residential pro-

gram in Baton Rouge that helps women start over after prison.

Now Pam is nearing the end of her one-year term with Connections, and life is looking good. She works at a restaurant and, like the other women in the program, volunteers at its revenue-generating thrift store and dreams of opening her own bakery. It’s been a long road. That much time in prison, she says, left her confused, angry and ill-equipped for everyday life.

“When I first got out I was scared to death to cross the street,” she says. “I didn’t know how to buy meats and fruits at the store.”

For several months, she has performed well at work and made close relationships with the



Cynthia, 65, released after 30 years in prison for murdering her husband

other residents.

“This program helps us 100 percent. It makes you want to have get-up-and-go and live a decent, clean life,” Pam says.

Community activist Myria André-Martin started

**“They save their own lives...but for many of them, it’s the first time anyone has told them ‘I love you. I care. I give a damn.’”**

—MYRIA ANDRÉ-MARTIN

Connections for Life in 2000, after being inspired by the work of Edwina Gateley, a Catholic laywoman who founded a home for recovering prostitutes in Chicago. Women leaving prison in Louisiana were in similar dire straights, says André-Martin.

“These are the women everyone has forgotten. It became my passion, and it still is.”

Connections for Life accepts no government funds, giving staff the latitude to accompany inmates before the state’s pardon and parole boards. Women at Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women clamor to get in. Some are rejected because they’re not ready to get their lives together, says André-Martin. Others are turned down because of space. The program can accommodate 13.

The rules are rigid and the requirements are stringent. Each woman must go to work, volunteer in the thrift store, attend Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous meetings and stay clean.

### Fresh Start

Most of Connections for Life’s residents are the product of generational poverty and drug abuse. André-Martin and incoming executive director Karen Stagg tell grim stories of women forced into child prostitution by their own mothers.

“By the time we see them, about 90% are addicts,” says André-Martin. When they get out, they usually have no place to go and no family support.

“I would have been homeless without Connections,” says Cynthia, 65, released from LCIW after 30 years in prison for murdering her husband. Her life sentence was later commuted when it was proved she was the victim of repeated spousal abuse. Today, she serves as Connections’

Donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation have given \$17,300 to Connections for Life and \$164,633 to Myriam’s House. Myriam’s House, which cares for the indigent, was started by the founder of Connections for Life.



residence manager and provides upholstery services from the thrift store.

Residents are given their own furnished efficiency in the program's Gardere Lane apartment building. With prison fresh on their minds, the experience is an emotional reclamation of personal freedom.

"I took pictures of everything, even the inside of the refrigerator and the ketchup in the door," says Cynthia. Another resident—used to eating on styrofoam—began crying when she heard a metal knife and fork clinking against a china plate at

Thanksgiving. Another flushed her toilet throughout the night, causing her neighbors to worry about her health. She said she did it because there was no one there to tell her to stop.

Within two weeks, André-Martin and Stagg have found each woman a job.

Program staff transport them to work, mandatory addiction counseling meetings, the grocery store, worship services and anywhere else they need to go. This eliminates their reliance on old friends or public transportation.

"That's where they'd run into dealers," said André-Martin.

### Streetwise

"My first year doing this, I got a Ph.D. in 'streetwise,'" André-Martin says, recalling a grocery shopping expedition in which a resident told her how easy it was to shoplift.

"I said, 'don't you dare do it.' I was standing right next to her and the next thing I knew she had all this stuff hidden."

The resident put the items back, and André-

Martin walked away more seasoned. Over the years, she has confronted drug dealers about coming near "her girls," even kicking in the door of one she thought was harboring a wayward resident. She's earned both their respect and a nickname. Dealers call her "Mary Clarence," the name of Whoopi Goldberg's character in the movie *Sister Act*.

### Myria's Midnight Raids

Cell phones and alcohol are prohibited among residents, and visitors are kept to a rigid minimum. What the women earn from jobs is held in a special account until they graduate. They must present a receipt for every single item they buy, no matter how small.

"I want to know where their money is going," says André-Martin.

André-Martin also conducts "midnight raids" and drug tests to remind the women the stakes are high.

If they falter, but come to the program's staff first, André-Martin allows them one second chance. If they're caught, they're dismissed unequivocally.

André Martin never hesitates because she says a lack of control would cause the program to implode. But the rare occasions when she must expel a resident affect her mightily.

"I stay up all night crying the night before I have to do it," she says, "and all night the next night praying for them. I love them and I worry about them."

It doesn't happen often. Seventy percent of the women complete the program.

"There is not a day that goes by that someone doesn't say how Miss Myria saved her life," says Stagg.

"They save their own lives," says André-Martin. "But for many of them, it's the first time anyone has told them 'I love you. I care. I give a damn.'" •



## THERE IS A SEASON

On the surface, they seem an odd couple. Myria André-Martin, 65, is a former professional bass fisher with a husky voice and the gait of a gym coach. Karen Stagg, 44, is a petite blond with painted toenails and her last job was vice president managing 75 people at Amedisys. Bound by a spiritual commitment, the two women are planning Connections for Life's future.

André-Martin's health is failing. It's hard for "Miss Myria's" family and friends to believe that. She was given six months to live in 1998 and has survived an implausible 11 aneurysms, five bypasses and two brain surgeries. But she says things are different now and she is grooming Stagg to take over as executive director.

"I'm a walking time bomb," she says, characteristically direct. "My memory is failing. I'm not the same."

It's hard to tell. She has total recall of anyone who's come through the program and complete command of its operations. But she is resolute in ensuring a seamless transition.

The two women met through mutual friend Rev. Chris Andrews of First United Methodist Church. As Karen sought counseling about spiritual fulfillment beyond her career, Myria told colleagues she was ready to pass the torch.

"The timing was remarkable," says Andrews. "Karen is a very capable person. I have no doubt she will continue Myria's ministry."

"She's caught on fast," André-Martin says.

Stagg talks about how the experience of working with former inmates is "uniquely, amazingly different," from anything she's experienced.

"You become very committed to these women and want to do everything you can to help them make it work." •

# Avon's Calling

*Foundation for cosmetics giant helps women's shelters*

**D**ale Ellen Standifer went to church on a Sunday in August 2005 only to discover there were just a few people in the pews. Said the priest, "the parishioners have all evacuated." So the executive director of Metro Center for Women and Children packed up her own family and headed for safety.

An eighteen hour drive later, she landed in Arkansas, where she watched her city and South Louisiana beaten down by Hurricane Katrina. When the storm passed, the levees broke, drowning the Crescent City and trapping thousands in the Superdome, the vast convention center and in the attics of their homes.

In the end, Standifer got good news. Because the shelters she ran were on high ground, they were spared from the flood, making storm repairs not too difficult. But the storm was not as kind to some of the women and their children who landed at the havens from physical abuse.

"The violence became primal," says Standifer.

"We saw things we had never seen. People had bite marks."

Stuck in a broken city and living in trailers, men who used to scream at their wives or girlfriends started beating them instead. "Men would take out the frustrations of living in a trailer or dealing with FEMA on women."

Even though half the population had disappeared, the workload was the same. "That tells you

something," said Standifer.

The evil was offset by good. Nonprofits and people wrote checks to shelters assisting abused women and children. The Avon Foundation gave \$25,000 to Standifer's nonprofit, which was among more than \$300,000 from the foundation to 16 shelters for abused women and children in Louisiana and Mississippi. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation's grant department manages the money given by the Avon Foundation, which is connected to the cosmetics company.

"It was so good to see people step up and help us," says Standifer.

Besides Avon, a group from Skidmore College and a volunteer contractor repaired her shelter. Kids sold home-baked cookies for \$6 in donations to the Metro Center for Women and Children. A man wrote a check for \$40,000.

Gail Gowland echoes Standifer's story. But the shelter run by Gowland in St. Bernard Parish was not spared by Katrina. "There was four inches of water – on the second floor," she says.

Not only did she get \$25,000 from Avon Foundation to assist in serving 450 women a year, Gowland also received \$100,000 from the CEO of CSX rail line and his wife, who works with abused women in Florida. She received an additional \$100,000 from the Mereaux Foundation. Gowland used the money to purchase two new buildings for a new shelter. In total, she raised \$750,000 to re-open the shelter.

"Thanks to generosity, we are in a much better place than before the storm," says Gowland. "We own the buildings and we have been able to increase our capacity and to provide more services than before." •

With money from Avon Foundation, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation provided more than \$300,000 in grants after Katrina to shelters for abused women and children across South Louisiana.

**"Thanks to generosity, we are in a much better place than before the storm..."**

# For thousands, Katrina is still churning.

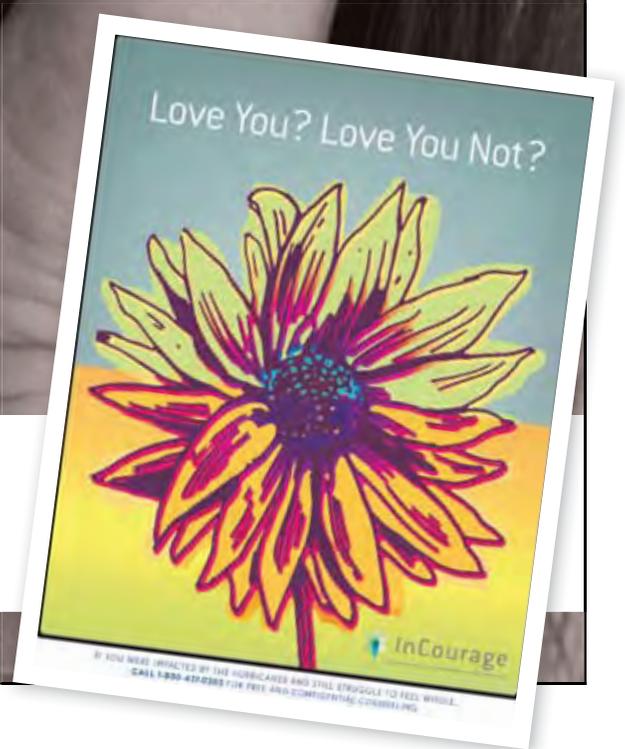
They toss at night in their beds. They are sad but don't know why. They move in a daze. You may be among them, suffering mental strain because Katrina won't go away. InCourage, a new program from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, can help. Call (225) 924-3900 or (800) 437-0303 for up to 10 free counseling sessions.

A new day awaits you.



## InCourage

A HEALING INITIATIVE BY THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION





Maura Donahue, chair of the Northshore Community Foundation, in front of a raised house in Mandeville.

BY NATHAN SELF | PHOTO BY MARIE CONSTANTIN

# Northshore Soars

*New Foundation awards grants, raises nearly \$10 million*

In a light rain, a work crew stacks cribbing around support-posts as they crank a lakefront home higher into the air. The house, like others in Mandeville's historic district, was washed out when Katrina pushed a 10-foot wave past Lake Ponchartrain's protective seawall and into the town's oldest neighborhoods. Soon, the house will reach its new perch—17-feet in the

air—but for now, it dangles above its old foundation, supported by jacks, piles of wooden blocks and wedges.

This is just one of Katrina's legacies in the Northshore: lakefront homes, offices, and restaurants lifted onto piers, stilted high above dry land—just in case the water washes back through during another storm.



For Susan Bonnett, president of the Northshore Community Foundation, the efforts are encouraging. “We’re coming back smarter—and saving some of our area’s most distinct and historic buildings. Our residents are listening to the new FEMA flood guidelines and learning how to minimize the risks native to living in Louisiana.”

Her organization, launched earlier this year with the help of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, serves St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, St. Helena, and Washington parishes, and is working on several projects that will help minimize risk and improve the quality of life available in the region. Those efforts include grants to nonprofit organizations serving the region, nonprofit capacity building, raising philanthropic awareness and several planning initiatives.

“As a new foundation,” commented Bonnett, “we have to be very strategic very quickly, so we can have the greatest impact possible on our community with the resources we have available.”

The strategy is working, and the Northshore’s endowment is growing as a result—a clear sign that the Foundation is solidifying its position as a valuable leader and resource in its community. Still in its infancy, the Foundation has 12 funds and is nearing \$10 million in total assets. Furthermore, the young Foundation’s membership program already has more than 40 members and has raised about \$35,000 in operating funds to help support its work.

Among the first to start a fund with the Foundation is Christwood Retirement Community in Covington. Steve Holzhalb, executive officer of Christwood, commented, “The Northshore Community Foundation allows us to support the community we serve while growing our endowment so that we’re able to address future needs. When we really looked at it, the decision was easy—it helps us and the greater community.”

“This is a generous community,” said Bonnett, “and our residents are committed to making it even better, so they’ve really responded quite enthusiastically to our mission. And that’s why we’re having some early success—because the community can see the heart behind our work.”

Prior to launching the Foundation, Bonnett conducted a feasibility study with more than 100 residents to make sure that the region would support the effort. In the interviews, the community’s leaders had one common request of the Foundation. “We asked participants what they thought would have the greatest impact on our region, and the response—by everyone we asked—was planning. We experienced a lot of overnight growth after Katrina, and now we’re moving on that issue,” says Bonnett.

To address the demand for planning, the Foundation worked with the Center for Planning Excellence and Tangipahoa Parish officials to define a planning process and select renowned planners Kendig-Keast Collaborative to cre-

**We want to elevate the conversation on philanthropy and inspire giving.**

—SUSAN BONNETT

## HURRICANE KATRINA IMPACT FUND: SECOND QUARTER GRANTS

**Big Brother/Big Sisters of Southeast Louisiana**, a prevention-based organization that facilitates relationships to provide positive role models for children, was awarded \$19,366.55 to purchase office equipment for its new satellite office in Slidell.

**K-Bar-B Youth Ranch/Broadway**, an organization that helps abused girls by providing a healthy environment, was awarded \$18,800 for the exterior repair of buildings, installation of a water chlorination system and repair of roadways on the K-Bar-B Youth Ranch facility grounds that were damaged during Katrina.

**New Beginnings Outreach Ministries**, a faith-based humanitarian ministry, was awarded \$20,000 for labor and equipment needed to repair nine homes and three vehicles damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

**St. Tammany Association for Retarded Citizens** provides services that enable and support individuals with disabilities. The group was awarded \$19,250 to repair or replace damaged driveways located at the Slidell Adult and Elderly Services Facilities.

**St. Tammany Hospital Foundation** was awarded \$7,200 for printing packets to be used in the reinstatement of the First Steps program through the Parenting Center. The First Steps program provides new parent education aimed at preventing child abuse.

**TARC** was awarded \$20,000 for the repair of a Katrina damaged play area for a childcare program in Hammond. TARC focuses on providing early intervention and childcare support services for children with developmental disabilities.

**Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans**, which promotes volunteerism and supports people and organizations in need, was awarded \$15,998.92 for field equipment to provide training and development of a peer mental health support program for first responders.

**Youth Service Bureau of St. Tammany** was awarded \$15,548 for the repair of a Katrina damaged building in Bogalusa. Youth Service Bureau of St. Tammany provides programs for at-risk youth and their families by providing early intervention programs.

ate a comprehensive plan for the area. The effort, funded by a grant from the Bush Clinton Katrina Fund, will help Tangipahoa Parish accommodate its new expansion and maintain its high quality of life. Additionally, the Northshore Community Foundation has set aside \$350,000 for planning efforts in other parts of the region.

The Foundation is also working with the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO) to help build local nonprofit capacity. LANO has received a \$75,000 grant to establish a Northshore office—housed within the Foundation's offices—and fund salary and program expenses. The new LANO Northshore satellite will provide essential services to help strengthen the nonprofit sector and offer an expansive slate of training covering a wide range of nonprofit topics. They will also provide one-on-one technical assistance to help nonprofit staff and board members and strengthen community organizations through outreach and training.

Finally, the Foundation has continued to issue grants to nonprofits that serve the region. In the second quarter of 2007, the Northshore Community Foundation issued nine grants totaling over \$211,000 from its Hurricane Katrina Impact Fund. To date, the Foundation has issued 13 grants from the fund, totaling nearly \$300,000. The fund, designed to aid the region's recovery, will issue more grants to nonprofits supporting the region in the near future.

Energized by the early successes, Bonnett continues to emphasize the Northshore Community Foundation's mission, "Our goal is to raise the profile of philanthropy and build partnerships that enhance the quality of life for residents in our region. We want to elevate the conversation on philanthropy and inspire giving—if we can do that, either to us or directly to other nonprofits, then we've accomplished our mission."

The Foundation is helping local residents create an even brighter future for their community because, like Bonnett says, "Everyone deserves a chance to make a difference." •

## Robert Grayson

*Opéra Louisiana, General Director*  
[operalouisiane.com](http://operalouisiane.com)

TIM MUELLER

**H**ow do you contain Robert Grayson's life within a handful of paragraphs, or even pages?

He went to Cal State-Long Beach to become a choral director but was discovered early to have talent for opera. His Viennese voice teacher declared, "You will sign up for opera." Grayson later sang with the New York City Opera and was mentored by Beverly Sills. He shuttled between jobs as professor and New York City tenor, dashing—in costume—after performances to catch cabs and redeye flights for the return to his day job at LSU.

Finally, the busy life had its toll, and Robert Grayson chose to be a full-time professor of voice at LSU, where he has taught for 22 years and now leads the voice program. But the world keeps spinning in welcome frenzy for Grayson, particularly because he's taken on a project that was affirmed in a dream.

Cue Rapid Eye Movement: Alone in a glass room, he looks over and sees a woman. She nods; he assumes it's his assistant, but for what purpose? Walking outside the building, he notices

a sign with a list of arts organizations that concludes with an opera group.

Below the list: Robert Grayson, executive director.

In less than a year, the dream has inspired the first opera company in Baton Rouge since the early 1980s, when one disappeared because of the oil bust. To Grayson, the new opera—Opéra Louisiana, started with opera enthusiasts—complements a rising metropolitan area.

Opéra Louisiana eventually will offer a gala with a superstar each year, two full-scale productions and abbreviated versions of operas for schoolchildren with digital-age attention spans. The first gala is in October; the first productions are next year.

"Five years from now, I think people will come from around the country to see Opéra Louisiana," says Grayson.

—MUKUL VERMA

Opéra Louisiana will  
hold its first gala Oct. 27.  
Visit [operalouisiane.com](http://operalouisiane.com).

**Partner to build the Shaw Center for the Arts** | Buy eyeglasses for needy children | Start City Year Louisiana to provide a service corps of young adults | Plan a new downtown | **Revive Old South Baton Rouge** | Turn the shuttered Capitol House into the sparkling Hilton | **Fund a program that provides a successful path for former women prisoners** | Collaborate to build a playground at Renaissance Park | **Provide land planning for cities after Hurricane Katrina** | Raise millions for the first comprehensive land plan for South Louisiana | **Work with St. Joseph's Academy and the Baton Rouge Computer Recycling Center to provide computers for kids in Cordoba, Mexico** | **Gather \$44 million for hurricane relief** | Give a hand to start a community foundation for the Northshore | Build a health clinic in Burkina Faso, Africa | Fund a safe house for runaway children | **Devise a new health care strategy for Louisiana** | Celebrate the work of Ernest J. Gaines with a literary award

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