

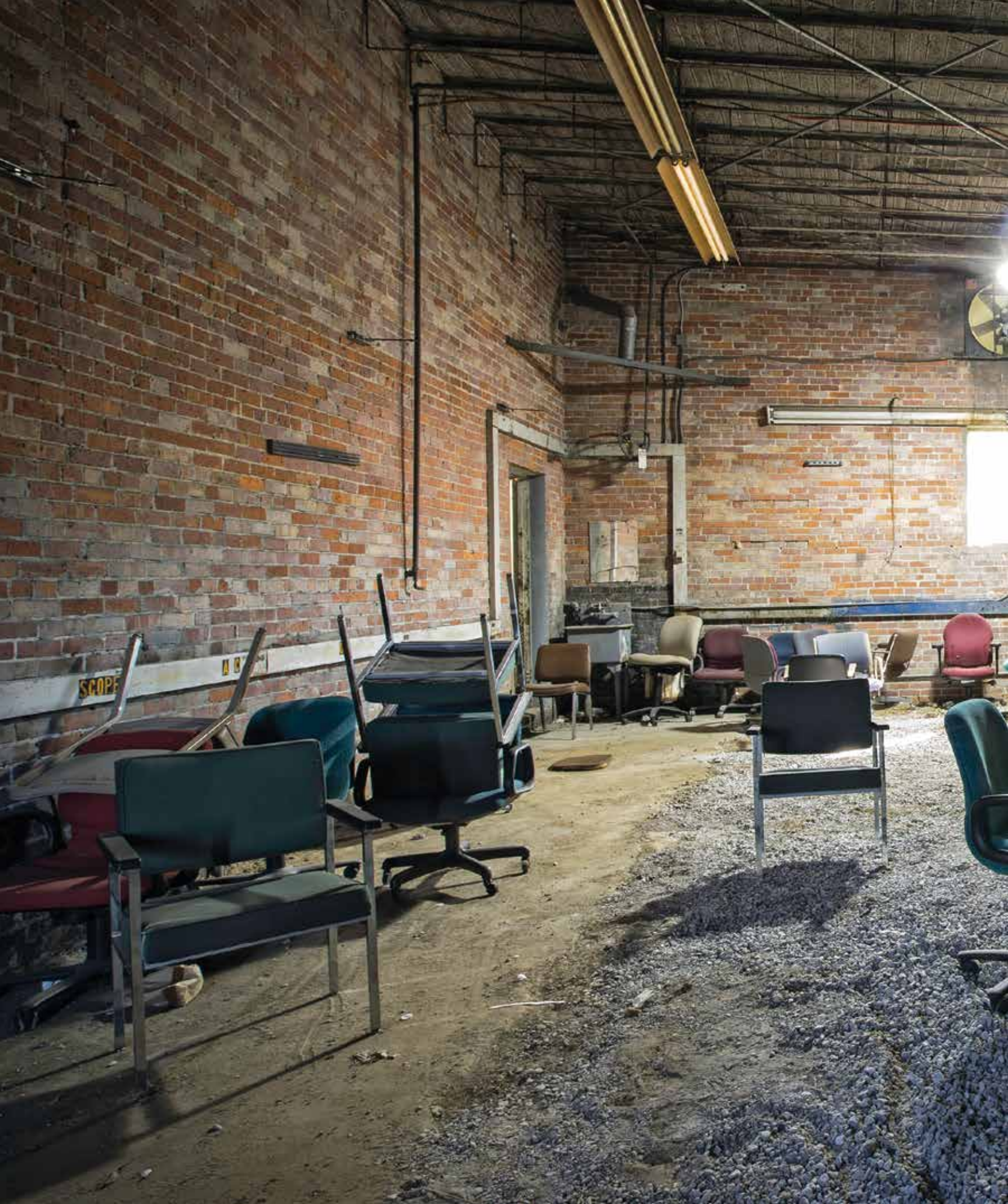
CURRENTS

fourth quarter twenty-fifteen • baton rouge area foundation



Shrine for science

*An iconic building will
repurpose the old city dock*





RDA readying Government Street site—story on page 14
Photo by Tim Mueller

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VOLUME NINE | NUMBER FOUR

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*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

LETTER



It's been nearly two decades since Stefanos Polyzoides came to Baton Rouge and challenged the city to question its own steadfast assumptions about

itself. As the first speaker at the Foundation's Marcia Kaplan Kantrow Lecture Series, the noted architect and city planner explained *New Urbanism*—an upstart movement that disputed decades of entrenched belief that the nation could only prosper by relentlessly expanding its cities further and further outward into the suburbs.

For many Americans, the unplanned city was the only place they'd ever known. Wherever an interstate off-ramp appeared or highway exit opened, subdivisions and strip malls mushroomed up in the countryside around it. In Baton Rouge, the I-10 generation had grown up believing that this is simply what cities do. This was growth. This was unstoppable.

By the time Stefanos Polyzoides came to deliver his message, however, many in Baton Rouge were already uneasy about what they saw happening around them. Even as their city sprawled ever outward, its core was hollowing and collapsing in on itself. Old neighborhoods, once well-established and secure in the heart of town, were now left behind, blighted and broken. Facing longer and longer commutes, workers realized that they were spending too much of their lives stuck in traffic instead of being at home in the company of their families.

The New Urbanism proposed by Polyzoides offered an alternative. He led his audience to envision a repopulated Baton Rouge where neighbors lived nearer to everything they needed, including each other; where not every aspect of daily life demanded an automobile and hours spent in stacked up traffic; where down-

By the time Stefanos Polyzoides came to deliver his message, however, many in Baton Rouge were already uneasy about what they saw happening around them.

town was a vibrant space, shared by all. This, Polyzoides said, is what prosperity could look like.

His vision of livable communities was a version of the good life that was immediately embraced in the small crowd that had gathered to listen to Polyzoides' lecture. His speech had nudged forward a notion that had begun growing here and, within a few years, New Urbanism was a movement rolling forward through Baton Rouge on its own momentum.

Plan Baton Rouge, underwritten by the Foundation, the city and the state, is an example. Hundreds of people attended community meetings to craft a strategy for reviving downtown. Of course, naysayers dismissed it all as wishful thinking. An editor of the local paper poked fun at the *charrettes*, a French term describing the design meetings where optimistic residents collaborated in imagining what their downtown could become.

We know how the story turned out. Downtown is alive again. The districts that surround downtown are again attracting investment and are redeveloping. Neighborhoods are being built according to the rules of Smart Growth, such as creating mixed-use communities where people can attend to their daily affairs by getting around on foot. Likewise, the EBR Planning Department is guided by FuturEBR, the new comprehensive plan for the parish that's based on the principles of well-planned

growth as a substitute for sprawl.

Much of the Foundation's current projects can be traced back to that Polyzoides speech. The projects team, for instance, is completing a master plan for the Health District, an expanding area fed by choked roads like Bluebonnet, Perkins, and Essen Lane where healthcare providers are clustered. The plan recommends leveraging existing health care assets there for greater returns, while simultaneously improving the infrastructure through tactics like connecting extant roads to ease traffic flow and by adding pedestrian pathways and parks to make a disjointed district more orderly and livable. Fixing the mistakes of the past there will be expensive, but necessary for the place to prosper.

Likewise, our master plan for reshaping the area around the University and City Park Lakes is as much about enhancing quality of life in the city and creating a shared public space as it is about reclaiming the lakes themselves. As Polyzoides showed us 20 years ago, for our city-parish to grow and flourish, it must return to where it began and adapt to what is to come.

...

In this issue, you'll read an update on several other projects. We're encouraged by the strong support shown for creating a treatment center to care for the mentally ill. Local elected officials and mental health experts have been working diligently with the Foundation for more than a year on this worthy effort.

You'll also see renderings of a new shelter for Companion Animal Alliance of Baton Rouge, a nonprofit that the Foundation created with local animal advocates. CAABR has raised more than half of the \$12 million needed for the new shelter, which is expected to further bolster its robust record of success in saving abandoned dogs and cats from being needlessly euthanized. We thank those who have contributed to this project, along with the advocates who have stood with us in turning street-bound strays into beloved family pets.

Sincerely,



C. Kris Kirkpatrick
Chair

Baton Rouge Area Foundation

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The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is a community foundation that takes advantage of opportunities to improve the quality of life in South Louisiana. We do so by providing two essential functions. One, the Foundation connects philanthropists with capable nonprofits to make sure the needs of our communities are met. For example, our donors support the Shaw Center for the Arts and education reform. Two, BRAF invests in and manages pivotal projects to improve the region.

For more information, contact Mukul Verma at mverma@braf.org.

Currents is published four times a year by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, 402 N. Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802. If you would like to be added to our distribution list, please contact us at 225.387.6126 or email the Foundation at mverma@braf.org.

ABOUT US

THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION ACCOMPLISHES ITS MISSION IN TWO WAYS :

1 We connect fund donors—philanthropists—to worthwhile projects and nonprofits. Over 51 years, our donors have granted more than \$350 million across South Louisiana and the world.

The Foundation offers several types of charitable funds, including donor-advised funds, which can be opened for a minimum of \$10,000. Contributions to the fund are tax deductible. Donors use these funds to make grants to nonprofits. The Foundation manages the money in the charitable accounts, offers local knowledge about issues and nonprofits, and manages all the necessary paperwork.

2 We conduct civic leadership initiatives that change the direction of the Baton Rouge region and South Louisiana. Members support these projects, which solve fundamental problems. Tax-deductible memberships range from \$100 to \$10,000.

KEY CIVIC LEADERSHIP PROJECTS

UNIVERSITY, CITY PARK LAKES MASTER PLAN

(BATONROUGELAKES.ORG) : The Foundation is leading a master plan for restoring and enhancing the lakes. We are doing the work in a collaboration with the city-parish and LSU, which own the lakes, and BREC, which operates parks on and around the lakes.

JUST TREATMENT OF THE MENTALLY ILL :

The Foundation is partnering with Mayor Kip Holden, EBR council members, EBR District Attorney Hillar Moore, EBR Sheriff Sid Gautreaux, Baton Rouge Police Chief Carl Dabadie Jr. and behavioral health specialists to design a center for treating people with mental illnesses and substance abuse problems. Because of mental illnesses, people in crisis sometimes commit minor, nonviolent crimes and are incarcerated. The center will offer a less expensive and humane alternative.

BATON ROUGE HEALTH DISTRICT

(BRHEALTHDISTRICT.ORG) : The Foundation hired consultants to engage local health care leaders and the community to deliver a master plan for creating a Health District, including a four-year LSU medical school and a Diabetes and Obesity Center. The plan will also offer a design and destination for health care in Baton Rouge, with recommendations to improve the flow of cars and people in an area that is set to have more health care services.

*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*


MISSION :

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation unites human and financial resources to enhance the quality of life in South Louisiana.

To achieve our mission, we:


- serve our donors to build the assets that drive initiatives and solutions;
- engage community leaders to develop appropriate responses to emerging opportunities and challenges;
- partner with entities from our service area, as well as with other community foundations, in order to leverage our collective resources and create the capacity to be a stimulus of positive regional change; and,
- evaluate our work and share the results with our stakeholders.

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON AT MANSHIP THEATRE



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SNOW WHAT!
NOVEMBER 12 | 7PM
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THE SHOEMAKER AND THE CHRISTMAS ELVES
DECEMBER 6 | 2PM
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AT 12:30 PM



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HOLIDAY CONCERT
DECEMBER 12 | 8PM



10TH ANNIVERSARY
MANSHIP THEATRE
SHAW CENTER FOR THE ARTS



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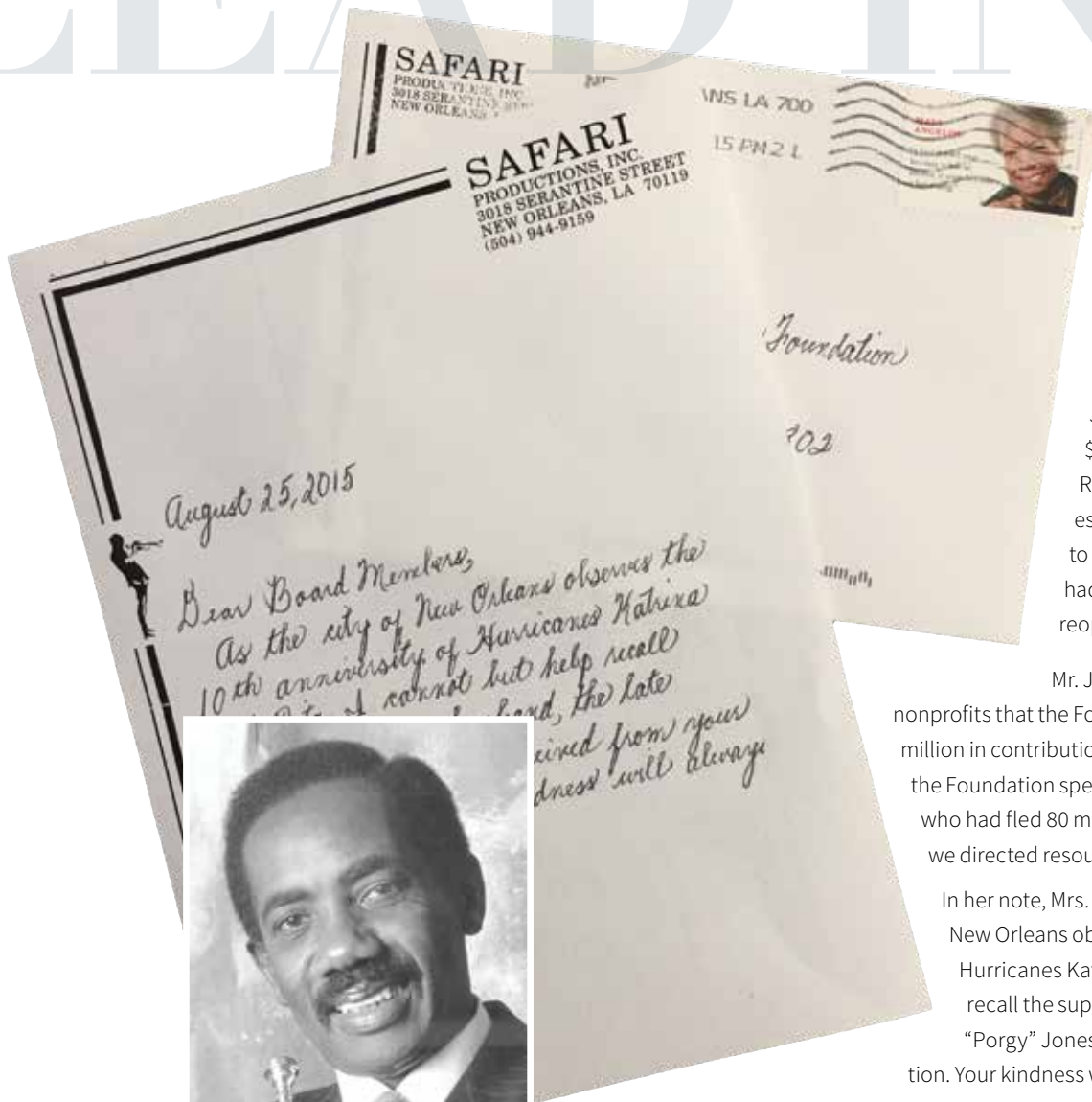
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LEAD IN



A KIND NOTE On the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the Foundation received a handwritten note from Mrs. Flaragene Jones. Her husband had received \$11,250 from the Higher Ground Relief Fund. Wynton Marsalis established the fund after Katrina to make grants to musicians who had lost their instruments and to reopen music venues.

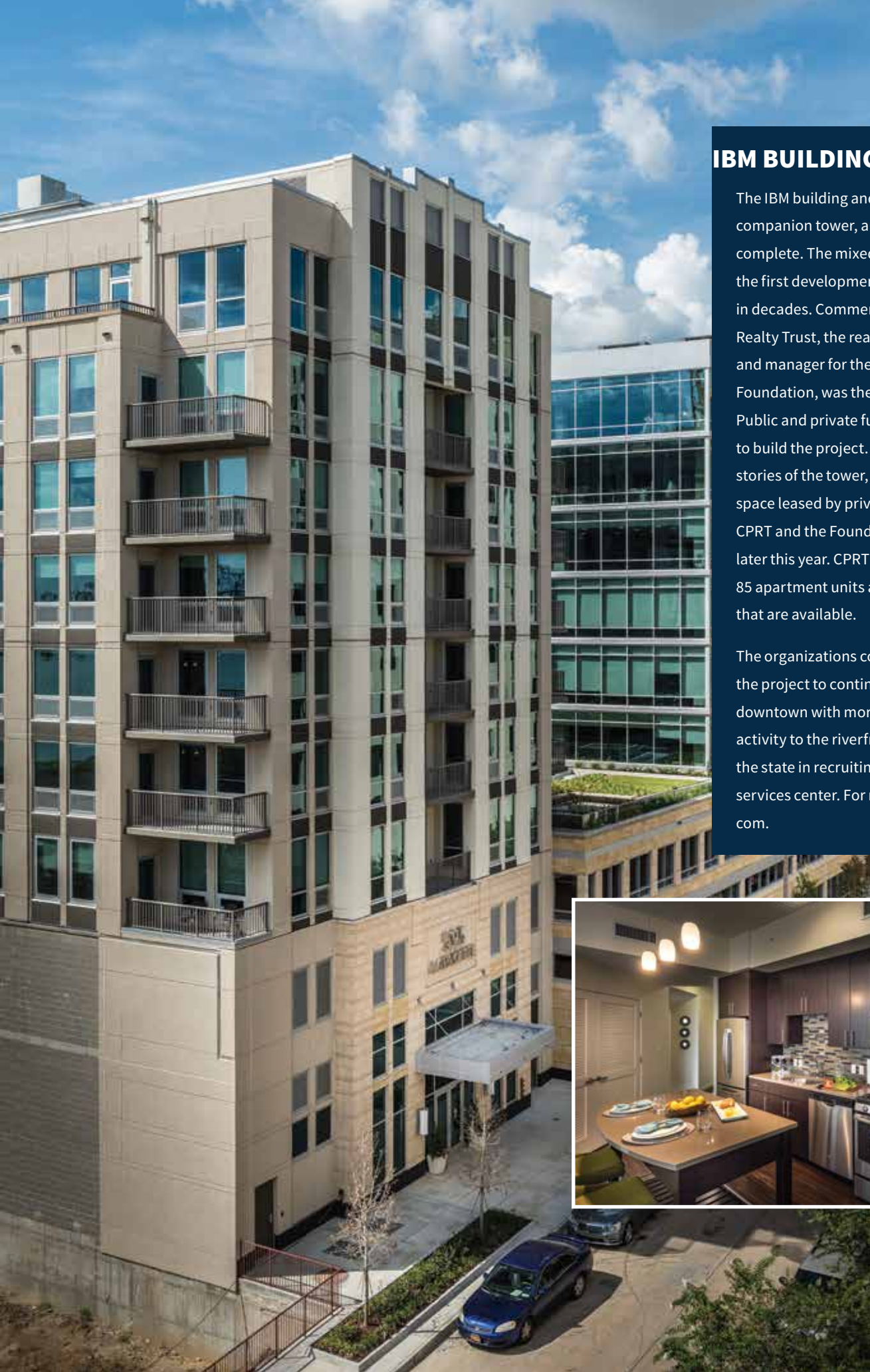
Mr. Jones was among people and nonprofits that the Foundation assisted with \$45 million in contributions from around the world. First, the Foundation spent money to care for thousands who had fled 80 miles north to Baton Rouge. Then we directed resources toward long-term relief.

In her note, Mrs. Jones writes, “As the City of New Orleans observes the 10th anniversary of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I cannot but help recall the support my husband, the late Warren “Porgy” Jones, received from your organization. Your kindness will always be remembered.”

Mr. Jones, who died in 2014, learned to play the horns as a child in New Orleans, then he studied music for three years at Southern University. He traveled as a musician but settled for a while in New York City, where he performed with the biggest stars: Ray Charles, Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, Smokey Robinson.

Eventually, Mr. Jones returned to the city that gave the world jazz, and he became one of the musicians who brought music back after the storm.

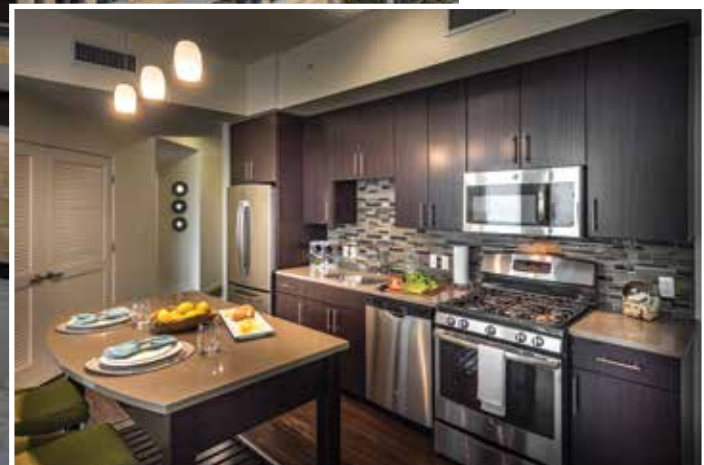
(Note: The Foundation commissioned a book on the 10th anniversary of Katrina. Written by C.E. Richard, the book tells stories about coastal people of Louisiana, who carry on in a spirit of celebration, balancing their lives on land that is always shifting beneath their feet. An excerpt of the book is on page 56.)



IBM BUILDING

The IBM building and 525 Lafayette, the companion tower, are more than 90% complete. The mixed-use complex is the first development on the riverfront in decades. Commercial Properties Realty Trust, the real estate developer and manager for the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, was the lead developer. Public and private funding was used to build the project. IBM occupies four stories of the tower, with the remaining space leased by private businesses. CPRT and the Foundation will move in later this year. CPRT is now renting the 85 apartment units at 525 Lafayette that are available.

The organizations collaborated on the project to continue the revival of downtown with more housing, to bring activity to the riverfront and to assist the state in recruiting IBM's software services center. For more, visit CPRT.com.





BIKE PATHS TO CITY PARK Riding your bike in Baton Rouge will get a little safer. A bike link between downtown and City Park is ready to get in gear. Much of the funding will be used to retrofit a bike path into North and East boulevards. Cyclists can ride from North to East to BREC's improved Expressway Park under the interstate, and then onward to City Park. Davis Rhorer, executive director of the Downtown Development District, says there will be several routes from East Boulevard to City Park. From the park, riders can pedal on an existing trail along Dalrymple Drive all the way to LSU. Rhorer says a second path to the north will link downtown to Memorial Park.

The DDD is overseeing a conversion of North Boulevard from Lafayette Street to the Mississippi River as well.

THE NEXT FRONTIER The interstate is no longer a dividing line between downtown and the land beyond. The Elysian apartment complex is evidence. Just north of I-110 on Spanish Town Road, all 100 units are rented, so developer Gulf Coast Housing Partnership is preparing to construct 100 more.



BACK TO THE FUTURE There is more progress in Old South Baton Rouge. A mixed-use development has begun on the site of the former Prince Murat on Nicholson Drive. River House LLC is building 224 apartments, 15,000 square feet of retail and a 4,600-square-foot community clubhouse. The project will be open within 18 months. It's on Oklahoma Street across from the Water Campus, a 35-acre hub for water research. Commercial Properties Realty Trust and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation are building the Water Campus. (Please see our cover story for a Water Campus update.)

CIVIC PROJECTS





RDA READYING GOVERNMENT STREET SITE

The East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority has selected Fregonese Associates to assist in returning the Entergy buildings to commerce. John Fregonese and his planners wrote FuturEBR, the master plan for growth across the parish. Now they are writing rules that will be used by the RDA to identify a developer to reinvent the Entergy property on Government Street, a corridor in Mid City already determined by Fregonese as ready for rebirth.

Fregonese Associates will start drafting the RFP for the site within weeks and hand it over to the RDA by December. The RDA board will issue the RFP soon after and select a developer by March 2016.

Entergy Corp. donated the six-acre industrial site near 12th Street to the RDA in 2014. On the property are two red-brick buildings, which are imagined for a mix of uses—retail, residences, restaurants and even a train station for a commuter line between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

“The RDA is grateful to Entergy for making this iconic site the centerpiece of a rebirth of this area of Baton Rouge,” said RDA Chairman John B. Noland. “Fregonese’s RFP will generate excitement and new life where decay once held sway. We can’t wait to see what emerges from this work.”

Government Street is slowly rebounding. The state is investing \$8 million to trim Government from four to three lanes—one lane each way and a center turn lane—and to flank the road with bike paths. A block of buildings next to Baton Rouge Magnet High School has been rehabbed for retail businesses and an architectural firm. A nonprofit that supports Catholic High School has interest from five developers in building a mixed-use project on the land that was home to Westmoreland Mall. A beer garden, a restaurant, a coffeehouse and an outdoor hamburger restaurant are in the works around Government and Steele Boulevard.

The RDA is entering a professional services agreement with Fregonese. It applied for and received a grant from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to pay the consultants.

ONYX COMPLETES THE ARTS BLOCK Onyx Residences will add 28 apartments to downtown Baton Rouge when the development opens in spring 2016.

Commercial Properties Realty Trust, which manages real estate for the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, is building the project. It fulfills a pledge by the Foundation to complete the Arts Block. The Shaw Center for the Arts is on the block, as are restaurants and other residences.

Located on the corner of Third and Convention streets, Onyx will have retailers on the first floor. The building is near entertainment venues and the Town Square. Across Third Street, developer Mike Wampold is turning a shuttered state office building into The Watermark, a 148-room Marriott Autograph hotel. The Watermark is slated to open in late 2016.



DECRIMINALIZING THE MENTALLY ILL

In August, the Foundation hired Health Management Associates to recommend services, governance and funding for a behavioral health treatment center for the parish. Health Management Associates will deliver a report by December.

The work is being underwritten by donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, including the David J. O'Quin Memorial Fund.

David O'Quin, who suffered from schizophrenic, was picked up by local police in February 2013 during an episode; he had stopped taking his medicine. Thirteen days later he died in prison. Had there been a treatment center, David's death could have been prevented.

After his death, his father, Bill O'Quin, asked the Foundation for assistance. Our research revealed that cuts to mental health services in Baton Rouge over the past decade have left police officers with only two places to take people in crisis: jail or an emergency room. Both are expensive and ineffective alternatives.

In response, the Foundation, local officials and behavioral health experts began collaborating to create a place where people can receive treatment.

Taxpayers have benefitted in cities that are diverting mentally ill, nonviolent people to therapy instead of jail. Ray Perryman, a Texas-based economist hired by the Foundation, estimated that EBR government would save millions of dollars and accumulate secondary benefits if people were treated, not jailed. Basing his calculations on an effective model in San Antonio, Perryman concluded that an EBR diversion program would directly save \$3 million in taxes in the first year and \$54.9 million over a decade.

Moreover, secondary benefits would reduce community costs \$15.9 million in the first year, \$42.4 million per year at maturity and \$288.7 million over 10 years. Secondary benefits include people with mental illnesses doing productive work, living healthier lives and not being homeless.



See the Lakes Master Plan at BatonRougeLakes.org

LAKES PROJECT GETS SEED FUNDING The Louisiana Bond Commission approved \$2 million to the Louisiana Lakes Conservancy to begin fulfilling the Baton Rouge Lakes Master Plan. Created by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, this nonprofit will continue to partner with key stakeholders to pursue this project, including LSU, East Baton Rouge Parish government, BREC and nearby residents.

The Lakes Conservancy will devote the money over the coming 18 months to convert the master plan into detailed engineering drawings, and to seek federal and state permits that would allow the project to commence.

Estimated to cost \$40 million, the first phase would include excavation, restoring lake edges, forming wetlands to clean runoff, and building paths to keep runners, walkers and bicyclists at a safe distance from vehicles around the six-mile perimeter.

In the 2015 session, the Legislature approved \$13 million of a \$40 million capital outlay request from the Lakes Conservancy. Building the first phase would provide the infrastructure to construct amenities over time, including an LSU nature center, boathouses, a promenade on LSU's sorority row and an expanded Milford Wampold Memorial Park.

In summer 2014, the Foundation raised \$750,000 from private donors to hire landscape architects SWA Group, which worked with Jeffrey Carbo Landscape Architects. Planners received ideas and feedback at five public meetings. More than 300 parish residents attended each of the meetings.

SWA's blueprint addresses two main problems. One, University and City Park lakes—and three of the four smaller lakes that surround them—are too shallow and are silting over time. Two, people use the lakes for running, biking, fishing and other recreational activities, though the lakes, when they were dug from swamps in the 1930s, were not designed for those purposes.

Planners are recommending dredging and a sediment bypass system to improve and sustain water quality as well as enhancements with the dredged material for recreational uses. The plan was conducted in consultation with donors to the project, lake area residents, users of the lakes, LSU, the city-parish, BREC, Louisiana Division of Administration, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Nature Conservancy of Louisiana and The Audubon Society.

EBR REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BUILDING ARDENDALE

A center to train automotive mechanics is coming out of the ground at Ardendale. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System will operate the \$25 million technical school when it opens in 2017. The center will be part of the East Campus of Baton Rouge Community College. A BRCC allied health training center will be next door. Plus, at Ardendale, the East Baton Rouge School System will build a career high school that teaches skills to let graduates get right to work. The remaining property will blend housing with retail and offices. The East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority is the lead developer of Ardendale.



PHILANTHROPY

WOMEN, MEN DIFFER ON GIVING Women and men give differently. When a man's income in a couple rises, the couple tends to give more to religious, youth, international and combined purpose organizations, such as United Way. When a woman's income increases, the couple is more likely to give—and to give a larger amount—to charities providing for basic human needs, such as the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, or a shelter for the homeless, according to a report by the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University.

“Much of the previous research has looked at household giving by couples as a single unit,” said Amir Pasic, dean of the school. “By delving more deeply into the factors that influence charitable giving by couples, this study provides a more thorough understanding of gender differences in giving.”

The study also found that 45% of all surveyed donors give specifically to causes that support women and girls. When researchers looked at giving by gender, they found that half of women donors and two out of five men donors give to these causes.

In high net worth households (those with \$250,000 or more in income and/or \$1 million or more in assets not including their principal residence), men and women shared the same top motivations for giving. Gender differences appeared in lower priority motivations. Women are more likely than men to say that they give because of their political or philosophical beliefs, give because they are on the board or volunteer for an organization, and give spontaneously in response to a need.

Previous research by Lilly's Women's Philanthropy Institute has found:

- Single women are more likely to give to charity and give more than similarly situated men.
- Women tend to spread their giving across more organizations, while men concentrate their giving.
- Women are more likely to give to almost every charitable subsector, with a few exceptions such as sports and adult recreation.

\$25 BILLION

Amount of untapped donations in the United States, as estimated by Camber Collective in the Money for Good report. Camber says philanthropic donations have been stuck at 2% of the nation's GDP. Reasons philanthropists aren't giving more: 49% of donors don't know how nonprofits use their money, 34% feel hassled by solicitations and 20% aren't sure who benefits from the work they donate toward. The report was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the F.B. Heron Foundation.

.....

PHILANTHROPY IN BETA Alexandre Mars, who pocketed a fortune by selling his messaging service to Blackberry, is trying a novel philanthropy strategy. Mars is underwriting the operating costs of the Epic Foundation, which he created to screen for the most effective nonprofits working on children's issues in California, New York, East Africa, Brazil, India and Southeast Asia. Epic is raising money from wealthy donors to fund ambitious projects by the 20 nonprofits that made the final list.

.....

VERBATIM

“To give away money is an easy matter and in any man's power. But to decide to whom to give it and how large and when, and for what purpose and how, is neither in every man's power nor an easy matter.”

—Aristotle

GRANTS

The Foundation's fund donors make thousands of grants from their charitable accounts. Grants for the third quarter of 2015 are listed below. They total \$4.75 million.

If you wish to learn more about opening a charitable fund at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, please call John Carpenter, director of donor services, at 225.387.6126. You can open a charitable fund for a minimum of \$10,000. The Foundation will manage the money and make grants on your behalf. Contributions to charitable funds are tax deductible.

Academic Distinction Fund \$53,445
Alcorn State University \$500
Alice Boucher School \$1,200
Allen Fort Colley Christian Soldier Fund \$248
Alzheimer's Association \$250
Alzheimer's Services of the Capital Area \$2,500
American Heart Association Inc. \$5,000
American Lung Association of Louisiana \$500
AMIkids Inc. \$235,916
Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$26,230
Arts Council of New Orleans \$20,000
The Ascension Fund \$12,086
Ascension Festivals and Cultural Council Inc. \$1,000
Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre Inc. \$2,500
Baton Rouge Bar Foundation \$500
Baton Rouge Blues Foundation \$5,000
Baton Rouge Cardinals Youth Organization \$1,500
Baton Rouge Children's Advocacy Center \$300
Baton Rouge College Preparatory Charter School \$10,000
Baton Rouge Community College \$750
Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center \$53,875
Baton Rouge Gallery Inc. \$11,250
Baton Rouge Green Association Inc. \$680
Baton Rouge High School Foundation \$250
Baton Rouge Opera Guild Inc. \$1,922
Baton Rouge Speech and Hearing Foundation Inc. \$2,217
Baton Rouge Sponsoring Committee \$250
Baton Rouge University Preparatory Charter School Inc. \$10,000
Baton Rouge Youth Coalition \$5,000
Bella Bowman Foundation Inc. \$200
Benilde-St. Margaret's High School \$2,000
Bevill State Community College \$2,500
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Louisiana Inc. \$8,500
The Big Brown Reaching Back Fund \$500
Big Buddy Program \$300
Bishop Ott Works of Mercy Trust/Catholic Diocese \$197

Blindness-Learning in New Dimensions Inc. \$5,000
Boy Scouts of America Istrouma Area Council \$500
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$500
Boys Hope Girls Hope of Baton Rouge \$1,500
BREADA (Big River Economic & Agricultural Development Alliance) \$500
BREC Foundation \$250
Building Excellent Schools Inc. \$10,000
Cancer Services of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$27,600
Capital Area Animal Welfare Society \$324
Capital Area CASA Association \$300
Capital Area Family Violence Intervention Center \$300
Capital Area United Way \$20,279
Cat Haven Inc. \$2,000
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Inc. \$56,500

HOW WE ISSUE GRANTS

Philanthropists establish charitable funds at the Foundation and deposit money in those accounts. The Foundation manages the money in these donor-advised funds. Donors recommend grants to nonprofits; the Foundation board reviews and approves the grants. Our staff manages all the paperwork, including issuing checks and sending acknowledgement letters. Contributions to donor advised funds are tax-deductible.

Catholic High School Foundation \$4,591
Catholic of Pointe Coupee \$750
Center for Planning Excellence Inc. \$6,500
Center for the Arts - Crested Butte \$9,000
Centre for the Arts \$1,000
Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc./McMains
Children's Development Center \$27,800
Chinese Christian Church of Baton Rouge \$302

Chris Kyle Frog Foundation \$1,500
 Christ Episcopal Church \$10,000
 Christ School \$10,000
 Christ the King Parish and Catholic Center at LSU \$16,963
 City Year Baton Rouge \$1,000
 CLIMB Community Development Corporation \$100,000
 The Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana \$500
 Coastal Conservation Association Louisiana Foundation \$200
 Colorado State University \$2,000
 Community Foundation of Jackson Hole \$10,000
 Community Fund for the Arts \$20,000
 Companion Animal Alliance \$12,791
 Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge \$22,500
 Cystic Fibrosis Foundation - Baton Rouge \$200
 Democracy Prep Public Schools Inc. \$6,000
 Doctors Without Borders USA Inc. \$1,000
 Douglas Manship Sr. Theatre Complex Holding Inc. \$23,978
 Ducks Unlimited Inc. \$209
 The Dunham School \$2,355
 Dyslexia Association of Greater Baton Rouge \$639
 East Mississippi Community College \$5,600
 Episcopal Church of the Incarnation \$3,600
 Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge \$78,548
 Evergreen Foundation \$350
 First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge \$1,000
 First United Methodist Church \$3,150
 Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano \$250
 Food4Kidz, Inc. \$5,000
 Foundation for a Better Louisiana \$1,000
 Foundation for Historical Louisiana Inc. \$12,907
 Foundation for Womans \$1,010,477
 Friends of the Animals BR Inc. \$500
 Friends of the Baton Rouge Zoo \$2,700
 Friends of Hilltop Arboretum Inc. \$200
 Friends of Louisiana Public Broadcasting Inc. \$750
 The Friends of the Rural Life Museum Inc. \$1,700
 Friendship Louisiana \$600
 Garden Island Research Conservation \$800
 General Health Foundation \$41,000
 God's Light Shining Ministries Inc. \$6,000
 Gonzales Middle School \$1,200
 Goodwill of the Great Plains \$10,000
 Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership Inc. \$1,000
 Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank Inc. \$1,250
 Greater Baton Rouge Hope Academy \$2,000
 Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation \$5,000
 Greenville Superintendent Academy \$600
 Groton School \$100,000
 Groves Academy \$2,000
 Habitat for Humanity International Inc. \$500
 Habitat for Humanity of Greater Baton Rouge \$500
 Hampden-Sydney College \$1,000
 Harmony Church of Bartlett \$50,000
 Healing Place Church \$1,500
 Heritage Ranch \$2,200
 Highlands-Cashiers Hospital Foundation \$1,000
 Hinds Community College \$500

Holy Family Catholic Church \$12,240
 Hospice Foundation of Greater Baton Rouge \$750
 Hospice of Texarkana Inc. \$500
 Houston Community College \$1,000
 Iberville Foundation for Academic Excellence \$6,047
 The Interfaith Federation of Greater Baton Rouge \$250
 International Hospitality Foundation LSU \$1,898
 International Society for Krishna Consciousness of New Orleans \$2,502
 The JL Foundation \$25,000
 Jess' Bra Closet Incorporated \$3,000
 Jewish Children's Regional Service \$1,000
 Jewish Federation of Greater Baton Rouge \$2,000
 Johns Hopkins University \$1,000
 Jones County Junior College \$2,000
 Jubilee Community Inc. \$1,000
 Junior Achievement of Greater Baton Rouge and Acadiana \$2,558
 Junior Achievement of Southeast Texas \$7,500
 Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International \$1,500
 Kids' Orchestra Inc. \$11,100
 Knock Knock Children's Museum \$30,000
 LCTCS Foundation \$5,000
 The Louisiana Architectural Foundation \$1,000
 Louisiana Art and Science Museum Inc. \$8,853
 Louisiana Assistive Technology Access Network (LATAN) \$500
 Louisiana Bar Foundation \$450
 Louisiana Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross \$324
 Louisiana Culinary Institute \$1,000
 Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities \$2,000
 Louisiana Industries for the Disabled Inc. \$250
 Louisiana Naval War Memorial Commission \$2,338
 Louisiana Public Health Institute \$118,040
 Louisiana Resource Center for Educators \$1,500
 Louisiana State University and A&M College \$24,200
 Louisiana State University in Shreveport \$500
 Louisiana Symphony Association/Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra \$2,250
 Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services Inc. \$600
 Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation \$500
 Louisiana Wildlife Federation \$100
 LSU Alumni Association \$250
 LSU Foundation \$124,719
 University Lab School Foundation \$2,625
 Martinez Education Foundation \$250
 Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center \$96,700
 Mental Health Association of Greater Baton Rouge \$250
 Mental Health Initiative Project \$75,000
 MetroMorphosis \$5,000
 Mid City Redevelopment Alliance Inc. \$250
 Mighty Bluebirds Inc. \$1,980
 Mighty Moms \$1,000
 Millennium Relief and Development Services Inc. \$1,000
 The Miracle League of Sioux City \$7,500
 Mississippi State University \$3,500
 Morgan Efferson \$3,000
 Muscular Dystrophy Association \$250
 National Federation of the Blind Inc. \$5,000
 National Federation of the Blind of Louisiana Inc. \$5,000

National Wildlife Federation \$100
 National World War II Museum Inc. \$25,000
 Nature Conservancy \$350
 Nature Conservancy of Louisiana \$111,392
 The Nature Conservancy Mississippi Chapter \$75,000
 New Orleans South African Connection \$25,000
 Nicholls State University \$2,500
 Northeast Elementary \$1,200
 Oakland Public Education Fund \$1,838
 O'Brien House Inc. \$3,438
 Ollie Steele Burden Manor \$370
 Opera Louisiane Inc. \$1,750
 Our Lady of Holy Cross College \$500
 Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church \$37,736
 Our Lady of the Lake College \$1,750
 Our Lady of the Lake Foundation \$15,000
 Oxfam-America Inc. \$1,000
 Particular Council of St. Vincent de Paul of Baton Rouge Louisiana \$8,681
 Partners in Health \$1,000
 The Patrons of the East Baton Rouge Parish Public Library \$100
 Pastoral Center \$26,715
 Pearl River Community College \$2,500
 Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation \$5,000
 Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast \$40,000
 Pointe Coupee Private School System Inc. \$5,750
 President & Fellows of Harvard College \$1,000
 Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana Inc. \$1,000
 Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana Inc. \$5,200
 Pulaski Academy \$2,500
 Pyramid Atlantic Inc. \$100
 Red Shoes Inc. \$300
 Red Stick Project Fund \$1,000
 Regents of the University of California at Berkeley \$750
 Regents of the University of Minnesota \$2,000
 The Original Richland Library Restoration Society, Inc. \$847
 River City Jazz Coalition Fund \$2,500
 Rocketkidz Foundation Incorporated \$5,000
 Rockwall Youth Sports Association \$8,700
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge \$115,984
 Saint Jean Vianney Catholic Church \$2,523
 Saint Joseph's University \$6,000
 The Salvation Army \$4,500
 Savannah College of Art and Design \$500
 Sceptre Foundation Inc. \$5,000
 Sierra Club Foundation \$1,497
 Single Stop USA Inc. \$225,000
 Sister Dulce Foundation \$1,450
 Smile Train Inc. \$250
 Soledad O'Brien and Brad Raymond Foundation Inc. \$1,420
 Southeastern Louisiana University \$7,250
 Southern Rep \$25,000
 Southern University and A&M College \$6,300
 Special Olympics Louisiana Inc. \$2,000
 St. Anna's Episcopal Church \$10,000
 St. Augustine Church \$941
 St. Elizabeth Foundation \$500

St. Gerard Majella Church \$10,500
 St. James Episcopal Church \$2,000
 St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church \$10,000
 St. John Health System Foundation Inc. \$100
 St. Joseph Cathedral \$800
 St. Joseph the Worker Church \$6,078
 St. Joseph's Academy \$500
 St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Inc. \$850
 St. Luke's Episcopal Church \$13,750
 St. Paul Adult Learning Center \$200
 St. Philip Parish \$3,744
 St. Sharbel Makhoulouf Foundation Inc. \$10,000
 St. Thomas Academy \$2,000
 St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School \$14,492
 Stand for Children Louisiana \$300
 Swine Palace Productions Inc. \$3,000
 TankProof \$5,000
 Teach for America - South Louisiana \$75,000
 Texas A&M University \$1,500
 The University of Mississippi \$1,000
 The Walls Project \$250
 THRIVE Baton Rouge \$310,000
 Trinity Episcopal Day School \$2,000
 Troy University \$500
 Tulane University \$3,000
 Tyrone Glover Foundation \$1,200
 Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults Inc. \$500
 Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) \$250
 University of Florida \$500
 University of Louisiana at Lafayette \$4,250
 University of Louisiana at Monroe \$2,000
 University of Missouri \$18,000
 University of North Carolina at Wilmington \$2,000
 University of South Alabama \$140,736
 University of Southern Mississippi \$4,000
 University Presbyterian Church \$21,250
 Volunteers In Public Schools Inc. \$250
 Water Institute of the Gulfs Delta \$311,250
 West Baton Rouge Foundation for Academic Excellence \$6,400
 Western Michigan University \$4,500
 William Carey University \$1,000
 Willwoods Community \$500
 Woman's Hospital Foundation \$18,894
 Wounded Warrior Project Inc. \$500
 WRKF Public Radio Inc. \$1,230
 Xavier University \$1,500
 Youth Oasis \$200

BATON ROUGE

CITYSTATS

Indicators for tracking our quality of life

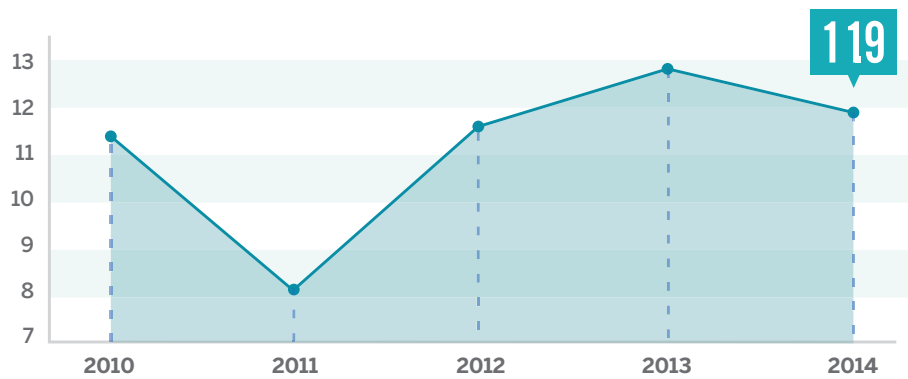
Underwritten by the **Newton B. Thomas Support Foundation**



EBR INFANT MORTALITY RATE

(Source: Department of Health and Hospitals)

11.9 OF EVERY
1,000
EBR INFANTS
died before 12 months of age,
compared to **6.1 nationally**



SAFE SLEEP

To reduce the risk of sleep-related causes of infant death:

- ▶ Always place baby on his or her back to sleep for all sleep times, including naps.
- ▶ Room share—keep baby's sleep area in the same room, next to where you sleep.
- ▶ Use a firm sleep surface, free from soft objects, toys, blankets and crib bumpers.

In 2011, Milwaukee had an ad campaign to stop parents and caregivers sleeping with their infants. Some advocates for children welcomed the ads, while others said education in the home of at-risk infants was also required to reduce deaths from suffocation.



Shane Evans has a grim job. Head of investigations for East Baton Rouge's coroner, Evans is dispatched whenever someone dies in the parish. This means he's called out a lot, but it never gets easier. Having to determine the cause of death is particularly gloomy when it's a baby. And, as Evans knows all too well, this happens far more often than it should in Baton Rouge.

He could tell you all the stark statistics.

The infant mortality rate in EBR is twice the national average. And it's all the more dreadful when you consider that the national average here in the U.S. is twice that of European countries. Nearly 12 out of every 1,000 babies born in EBR die before their first candle ever flickers atop a birthday cake.

But Evans also knows that behind those cold statistics are the names of real children. In fact, he prints a recent list of 24 names—all babies who've died here in less than the last two years. And the one thing every child on his list has in common is what killed them: They all died in their sleep of suffocation.

"Almost all the deaths were preventable," Evans says.

Once upon a time, this type of death was referred to by a well-known acronym: SIDS. But Sudden Infant Death Syndrome,

says Evans, was a like a kind of cover-up. Wanting to spare parents the grief and guilt of knowing their children died unnecessarily, authorities would label the deaths as SIDS—all the while knowing that the real cause of death was, in fact, accidental suffocation.

Parents would roll over in their sleep and smother their babies lying next to them, or else the infant was placed face-down in a crib with too many toys, pillows or loose blankets and left with no room to breathe.

The correlations are clear now. The number of SIDS deaths has declined because cops and investigators like Evans are now accurately classifying the cause of death for those babies as suffocation.

But there's an unexpected hope in this. Understanding—and honestly acknowledging—the real cause of infant deaths, Evans says, increases the chances for informed parents to prevent them. This means more babies in EBR will get the chance to grow up, remaining real people with real names that their playmates know, instead of becoming bleak statistics, too easily overlooked. •

STAR *light*

Rebranded Rape Crisis Center gets assertive to change the way we think about sexual violence.

By Maggie Heyn Richardson

“Our business is social change,” says Racheal Hebert, executive director of the Baton Rouge-based nonprofit, Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response, or STAR.

It’s not just lip service.

Hebert, who was appointed to lead STAR in 2012, is putting Greater Baton Rouge’s principal sexual assault nonprofit on the map. STAR is intent on advocating for survivors and changing the way communities look at sexual violence.

The organization was started in 1975 as the Rape Crisis Center, a division of the East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney’s Office. In 2011, it became an independent nonprofit with expanded programs for counseling and victim advocacy.

STAR, like the Rape Crisis Center before it, also operates a 24-hour hotline. The nonprofit has independent offices on Goodwood Boulevard in Baton Rouge and serves survivors of sexual assault and their families in East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge,

Iberville, Pointe Coupee, Ascension, East Feliciana and West Feliciana parishes.

STAR’s transition to an independent nonprofit provided an opportunity for rebranding, says Hebert. The organization’s messaging is careful to be inclusive of the needs of both female and male survivors of sexual assault, since reports of male victimization have increased. STAR also emphatically places the perspectives of survivors at the center of its mission.

According to the Department of Justice, one in five women a year, as well as one in 71 men, are the victims of a completed or attempted rape in the United States. But the social stigma that still surrounds sexual violence, and the persistent tendency for many law enforcement officers—and society—to blame victims, keeps an alarming number of rapes from being reported, says Hebert.

The Department of Justice’s 2006 National Crime Victimization Survey surmises that 60% of survivors did not report their victimization to law enforcement.

NONPROFITS



Against this backdrop, Hebert and her team of nine staff members and 50 trained volunteers are trying to rewrite the rules of perception, improve the system of response and do what it takes to bring normalcy to victims whose lives are forever altered. There are many measures communities can take to help survivors heal.

“In our office, we take the concept of problem solving very seriously,” says Hebert, who started as a volunteer with the organization while an LSU student. “We look at all aspects, whether it’s advocacy, legal issues or counseling, and we do the work until it’s done.”

In October 2014, STAR was awarded two highly competitive national grants from the Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women to strengthen services to survivors of sexual assault in the Capital Region.

The DOJ’s Legal Assistance to Victims grant is enabling STAR to establish a legal services division and provide free legal services to survivors to enhance their safety, privacy, self-sufficiency and well-being, says Hebert.

The project also establishes a Sexual Assault Survivors Law Clinic, a collaboration between STAR and the Clinical Legal Education Program at LSU’s Paul M. Hebert Law Center.

“This is the first project of its kind in Louisiana,” says Hebert. “It is intended to address survivors’ unique civil legal needs as a result of sexual assault.”

The project is being modeled after the Victim Rights Law Center in Portland, Ore., the first such legal clinic in the country. The VRLC was established in 2003 and provides legal services to survivors through both staff and pro bono attorneys. The goal is to help restore victims’ lives after an attack by helping them stay in school, protecting their confidential mental health records, preserving their jobs, securing benefits, addressing family law issues, maintaining immigration status and other measures.

In August, VRLC National Training Director Jessie Mindlin trained LSU law students at the new Advocacy for Sexual Assault Survivors Law Clinic.

“To be able to offer this to law students is an incredible opportunity for our state,” says Hebert.

STAR’s Morgan Lamandre, vice president of survivor services and an attorney, is spearheading the new project. She says the trauma of a sexual assault is often the first of many subsequent traumas, including having to return to an apartment that no

longer feels safe.

“Secondary traumas are a big part of what survivors face,” says Lamandre, who, like Hebert, started her career with the organization as a volunteer. “We can minimize them by addressing things like getting out of a lease easily so that a survivor can restore that sense of safety.”

STAR also received a three-year DOJ award through the Louisiana Office of the Attorney General’s Grants to Encourage Arrest Program. This grant addresses the lack of a coordinated community response to sexual assault and the shortage of victim services in the Capital Region. The AG’s office is subcontracting with STAR to implement regional

sexual assault investigation and prosecution protocols, says Hebert.

The project also calls for strengthening and developing sexual assault response teams in each judicial district within the Capital Region. It also includes training law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary on sexual assault and expanding victim services in rural areas to ensure that all sexual assault victims have access to advocacy

and support services.

The project reflects one of STAR’s major planks: society needs to re-examine the way it handles sexual violence.

STAR’s Vice President of Social Change Rebecca Marchiafava says the grant will enable the organization to expand training programs that challenge current social norms, such as assuming victims did something to invite the crime.

“A lot of what we do is getting people to stop focusing on victims and asking, ‘OK, so what are the impacts when we think about sexual assault this way, or another way,’” says Marchiafava.

“We hold people more accountable for vulnerability in our society than we do for violence,” she adds. “And we want to bring attention to that.” •

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and our donors have granted \$41,500 to STAR/Rape Crisis Center since 2010.

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10**
7:30PM

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QUINTET**

SCENE
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EVENT



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15**
7:30PM

CARMEN LUNDY



**MAR
30**
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Kids today

Friends since childhood, Sydney Saia and Elizabeth Sherman raise money for OLOL's Children's Hospital

By David Jacobs | Photos by Tim Mueller

They have been friends since before they could walk—next door neighbors, too. So when Sydney Saia and Elizabeth Sherman discovered two of their high school friends had to travel for medical care—one to Birmingham and the other to Memphis—they decided together to explore why. A tour of Our Lady of the Lake Children's Hospital, which is housed inside Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, confirmed Sherman and Saia's original theory: Baton Rouge needs a stand-alone children's hospital.

On the 2012 tour, they also learned a secret that the leaders of the children's hospital hadn't told the people of South Louisiana. For several years, OLOL had been quietly planning to move the children's hospital to a facility of its own. Sherman, then a junior at St. Joseph's Academy, and Saia, a sophomore at nearby University Lab School, had found their purpose. They organized 4thekids Baton Rouge to support OLOL Children's Hospital.

"We really wanted to get involved," Sherman says. The two also wanted to offer a path for others their age to do the same.

But they were clueless about running a nonprofit. "We started from the very bottom," Sherman says. "We didn't know what to do or how to do it."

Idea No. 1 was obvious: sell T-shirts. That's because teenagers buy a lot of them, and the benefits of selling branded shirts are twofold. "If you have a cute T-shirt, it's not only advertising; it's a way for others to support your cause that's not too time consuming," says Andréé Laville, a longtime friend of Sherman's who designs all of the group's T-shirts and is now a board member with 4thekids. "They can just buy a shirt and wear it around for you."

Some of the children being treated at OLOL had a hand in designing the charity's first shirt. "We went and made a poster with those kids in the playroom," Laville says. "We got all their handprints and we made a little heart out of it; then we took that poster and made it into a shirt design. ...

It just kind of took off from there."

Since then, 4thekids has produced two concerts for teens at Chelsea's Cafe, sold baked goods at the Louisiana State Chili Cook-Off and the Annual Garden Show at LSU, and held "estate sales" of donated items.

One of the more creative fundraising efforts is the "Coeur" sage Project, which they have initiated at seven area high schools. Instead of going to a dance and spending \$20 on a disposable flower corsage, teens can buy a "coeur" sage bracelet that features a heart-shaped pendant and a 4thekids handprint logo. (*Coeur* is French for *heart*.)

"We did it for a passion that we had."

—Sydney Saia



Sydney Saia, left, and Elizabeth Sherman with a patient at OLOL Children's Hospital. The two friends started a nonprofit to support the hospital.

4thekids raised \$5,000 the first year and \$10,000 the second. They granted \$20,000 this year, Saia says. Included in that total is a \$10,000 VGo “telepresence robot.”

“It’s so exciting for us to raise money, but in reality, it’s almost a drop in the bucket for this multimillion dollar hospital,” Sherman says. “We wanted something very specific and innovative that would be a gift for the new hospital ... something that we could give them that they wouldn’t have gotten on their own.”

Remember that Saia and Sherman support the hospital project because they want local kids to be treated closer to home where they can stay connected with their friends and family. The VGo, which they’ve nicknamed “WeeGeaux by VGo!”, takes that idea a step further.

Sherman describes it as “FaceTime on wheels.” It looks a bit like a Segway with a small computer monitor on top. It can give patients a virtual presence at home with family, at school, and even at social events with friends.

Pediatricians and pediatric specialists can use the robot to check in on patients even when the physicians are not at the hospital, says OLOL spokeswoman Kelly Zimmerman. The user outside of the hospital is given a log-in code. The physician’s face appears on the screen and he or she can drive the robot around the hospital room, she says.

Soon enough, the WeeGeaux will probably be rolling around a new OLOL Children’s Hospital. The future hospital will be located on a 60-acre tract that runs parallel to Interstate 10 between Bluebonnet Boulevard and Essen Lane.

To finance the children’s campus—estimated to cost more than \$200 million—OLOL is raising money through public and private sources. Plans for the 350,000-square-foot hospital include inpatient beds, an emergency room, a surgical unit and a dedicated hematology/oncology unit, Zimmerman says. An attached 95,000-square-foot medical office building will support the hospital. Construction could begin early next year with completion expected in late 2018.

Zimmerman says a freestanding hospital should “attract greater subspecialists in pediatric specialties, increasing our capabilities to offer advanced medical care and allowing more children to receive excellent care close to home.”

“We understand children are not small adults, and they require unique care in a specialized environment with equipment designed especially for them,” says Dr. Shaun Kemmerly, the children’s hospital’s chief medical officer. “Our goal is to design and build a hospital that will further advance care and research for children through greater recruitment of pediatric specialists, building upon our successful pediatric residency

program that trains future Louisiana pediatricians, and capitalizing upon strategic partnerships like that of our relationship with St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.”

To support this giant enterprise, Saia and Sherman turned first to the people closest to them. “It was just us and our moms,” Saia says. “We would have meetings after Elizabeth and I finished school and extracurricular activities.” Often those meetings wouldn’t wrap up until 11 p.m.; but since they were neighbors, the trip back home was just a walk across the yard.

Since the onset, their friends have supported 4thekids, buying T-shirts and making donations. When they started having events, their friends would jump in to help.

Now that they’re both in college at LSU, they’re starting to build a formal organization for their charity. Sherman is the president and Saia is the vice president. They recently constituted a board of directors made up of other young adults, and they plan to create a junior board of directors comprised of high school students.

“When we started 4thekids, the biggest ‘wow factor’ that we got from people wasn’t about the projects we were doing,” says Saia. “It was the fact that two high school girls could come together and follow through with something they said they were going to do. For us, it was very important to not lose touch with that original aspect.”

Besides helping to build and enhance the hospital, they say getting young people involved in their community is an important aspect of 4thekids.

Laville recalls doing service work in high school but not really being able to see the impact. Being able to meet the children that she is working to help is far more rewarding, she says. “It was something that was purely our own,” Laville says. “It was such an opportunity to get out of ourselves and to take a look around and see what else is going on in the community around us.”

Says Sherman, “4thekids is one of the main passions of my life. I see so much potential for the hospital here in Baton Rouge. To be a part of that is absolutely more than I could ask for.”

The need for the new hospital is the most important aspect of the project, says Saia, but she also takes pride in developing her leadership ability and meeting her goals.

“To be able to tell the hospital that we had a \$20,000 donation was very rewarding. They always say how proud they are of us. But we never did it for the satisfaction of people thinking that we were good kids or doing a good thing. We did it for a passion that we had.” •



4theKids donated a VGo robot to OLOL Children's Hospital.



MARY BIRD PERKINS
OUR LADY OF THE LAKE
CANCER CENTER

In the details

Mary Bird Perkins renovation centers on patient care

By Sara Bongiorno

You are forgiven if you conclude, incorrectly, that the renovation and expansion of Mary Bird Perkins—Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center is mostly about contemporary architecture.

Any building with glowing bars embedded in the walls of a soaring glass-and-light atrium with a view of the sky is bound to capture your attention, after all.

In fact, what drove the renovation—and its stunning end result—is research on best treatment practices and on what cancer patients themselves say they want. That research shows patients want access to specialists in their type of cancer; state-of-the-art treatment; board-certified, fellowship-trained physicians; outside validation such as accreditation; and abundant patient services.

That is what they get at the cancer center on Essen Lane, where Mary Bird Perkins and the Lake now provide the full spectrum of cancer treatment through a three-year partnership for cancer care.

Each organization provides certain aspects of treatment, but the patients don't notice: care is seamless. A new walking path connecting inpatient services at the Lake with outpatient care at

the renovated building underscores the affiliation and the one-stop-shop concept.

But co-location of the full spectrum of cancer services doesn't fully explain the look and feel of the renovation of the six-story building. Todd Stevens, president and CEO of Mary Bird Perkins, says the building is only the beginning.

"This is about creating an environment that supports our ability to deliver quality," Stevens said. "This is about creating a place where the people inside flourish, both patients and doctors alike."

The building itself seems to make the point. Hustle and bustle has been removed by design from patient-care areas. Artwork along softly-lit corridors supports a feeling of well-being and calm, while providing a distraction that research shows benefits patients.

Potentially intimidating medical devices, such as the massive, Swedish-made radiation equipment, are hidden behind walls in

treatment rooms where patients pick the color of ambient lighting and choose what music to play.

Small and inviting nooks throughout the building create a feeling of intimacy, while some new spaces are large by design. A new, high-tech conference room on the second floor lets multi-

"This is about creating a place where the people inside flourish, both patients and doctors alike."

—Todd Stevens, CEO
Mary Bird Perkins—Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center



disciplinary physician teams gather to discuss individual treatment strategies. The multidisciplinary approach, implemented in recent years in part through a National Institutes of Health grant to Mary Bird, aligns with that of the best-known cancer centers in the country, such as Memorial Sloan Kettering and MD Anderson.

Input from physicians and other caregivers was critical to the 18-month design process that included trips to Huntsman Cancer Institute in Utah and the University of New Mexico Cancer Center, both noted for their revolutionary design of research and treatment areas.

“What we have created here puts us on par with any center in the country,” said K. Scott Wester, CEO of Our Lady of the Lake. “We have the complete package.”

Key elements of the \$23 million makeover and expansion include:

- A 14,000-square-foot, 56-bay infusion suite—the largest such infusion facility in Louisiana;
- A new patient drop-off and pick-up area and a new lobby/atrium with high-speed elevators;
- A renovated, cancer-specific radiation-oncology clinic with private waiting areas for certain types of treatment and technology that provides faster, more targeted treatment of tumors and complex cancers;
- An 8,000-square-foot imaging center with a full range of diagnostic technologies;
- A second-floor café and visitor waiting area;
- A new meditation room tucked behind a massive stained-glass installation above the lobby.

An extended campus at the LSU North Baton Rouge Clinic and new medical-oncology infusion services and a patient pharmacy on Picardy Avenue are also part of the expansion.

Changes in the physical structure went hand-in-hand with changes in human and medical processes that focus on creating a nurturing environment for patients and caregivers alike.

Take the new lobby and patient drop-off area: On a rainy weekday morning, members of the cancer center’s guest services team greet patients at the door of their cars as they pull up to the drop-off point.

With an umbrella shielding patients from the drops, staffers introduce themselves and then escort patients inside to the elevators or to first-floor appointments with cancer-specific “navigators” that guide them through treatment and support.

The flow of activity from the car door to the elevator functions as a hug of sorts from the moment of arrival. The process is new, and it was designed in tandem with other elements of the build-

ing’s new points of arrival and departure. Those elements include a “living wall” of rock, plants and water, as well as a heated waiting area to keep patients out of the cold as they wait to be picked up during wintertime visits.

“We want patients to feel they are embraced from the moment they arrive here,” says Linda Lee, cancer center administrator.

Other changes are subtle, even surprising.

For instance, it’s not an accident that there are only a small number of chairs in the waiting area of the Thomas J. Moran Imaging Center. That’s because the staff reworked its processes to move patients more quickly into treatment areas so that few chairs are needed.

“We don’t want our patients to spend much time waiting,” Lee says.

Likewise, the design of the building works to support the goal of quiet focus on the patient. Flooring in the public “on-stage” areas is made of sound-buffering wood composite material, while staff-only areas have tile flooring.

The shift in materials functions as a visual reminder that such “off stage” areas are where things like cell phone calls should take place, Lee explained.

Similarly, in the sixth-floor infusion suite, pharmacists and supply technicians do their work steps away from patients so they can get their medications faster, but they work out of sight. So the largest infusion suite in the state feels calm and peaceful even on a busy Tuesday morning when patients are receiving treatment in 41 of its 56 infusion bays.

“It’s big, but it doesn’t feel big,” said Wester. “It is comprehensive care in a place that feels intimate.” •

Chaos *and* creation

The unexpected role art plays in the healing process

By Jeff Roedel

It wasn't for financial reasons or even frivolity. It wasn't always for fun. Having lived through a fit of depression in his 20s—that Blue Period was intensely personal—a tempestuous divorce, even the Nazi occupation of Paris, Pablo Picasso confessed that the importance of making something and, alternately, experiencing another's creations cuts much deeper than the chisel can ever go into the rock.

"The purpose of art," the iconic painter and sculptor once said, "is washing the dust of daily life off our souls."

Awash in cool blues and sharp reds that refract off the irises of her eyes as she gazes into a melting field of colors, Nora Taylor sits quietly inside a slip of a room that feels like it must be tucked away in some spire of solace at a cathedral top.

Taylor is 71, but she looks not a day over 65. And she doesn't feel sick when she rests in here. The dreaded C-word never escapes her lips.

They call this the Meditation Room, and it is positioned strategically behind Stephen Wilson's towering stained-glass piece, *Lord Hear Our Prayers*, that hangs down across the second floor of the recently renovated Mary Bird Perkins Our Lady of the Lake Cancer Center in Baton Rouge.

"I designed the golden bands rising up as symbols for prayer and meditation," Wilson says. "I hope these aid patients and their families in their healing."

With colored light pouring in floor to ceiling, this almost-secret space is a place of peace and reflection for Taylor and many patients undergoing chemotherapy, radiation and other treatments.

Taylor received her first diagnosis in 2011: acute myeloid leukemia.

Doctors gave her a 13% chance to live, and yet here she is. After going into remission, the cancer returned in 2013 only for her to beat it back again.

"I don't know if it'll come back, but I wanted to be ready," Taylor says, exhaling a long, deep breath. "Now I am."

These aren't the words of tragedy. They are a battle cry of survival.

In part, Taylor credits her confidence and her calm to a series of imaginative endeavors she has undertaken through a new program at Mary Bird Perkins. Every Thursday, Taylor arrives at the cancer center not for medicine but for a class called Mind Body Together.

The small group welcomes a series of artists and specialists to the center, where Taylor has thrown herself into drawing and scrapbooking projects. She has discovered the art of arranging fresh-cut flowers, the relaxation of coloring a mandala, the thrill of becoming skilled in the basics of yoga, Pilates and massage therapy.

"Oh no, I never miss a week," she says with schoolgirl glee.

Through a practice called guided imagery—in which a group leader's words walk participants through the noise of daily life to a place more internal, more intuitive—she was able to picture herself telling her late brother who died when she was much younger about her leukemia.

"It's hard to describe, but the guided imagery helped me deal not only with my situation, but with feelings I've had for a long time about losing him," Taylor says.

Though she would have never described herself as the creative type, Taylor calls her new hobbies empowering.

Author and architectural designer Austin Hill Shaw has



pursued the purpose of creativity for years and often delivers keynote addresses on the topic. He calls the creation of art a defining trait of being human. Everyone can be creative, he believes. It is the path to honesty.

In his series *Creativity Matters*, Shaw describes the creation process as essential for “dropping the stories about who you should be and letting the world as it is come rushing in,” and “building a bridge to the world.”

Francine Lawrence, director of survivorship at Mary Bird, agrees. She relishes that moment, like the one Taylor experienced, when each patient takes control. At last.

“They realize they can do something to help heal themselves, and that’s very important because you’re no longer a victim, you’re a partner in your own healing journey,” Lawrence says. “Mind Body Together is all about bringing the emotional and spiritual to the medical. It’s amazing to see how people turn. You can just see it.”

While art has been used by cultures worldwide throughout history as a way to process pain and suffering, contemporary art therapy as a distinct practice with tangible therapeutic properties began in earnest in the 1940s with programs that introduced long-term patients of mental hospitals in England to the art of painting.

In the U.S., Austrian-born Dr. Edith Kramer helped codify the first graduate program for art therapy at NYU in 1944. Twenty-five years later, the American Art Therapy Association launched in 1969.

Lawrence is nearing the completion of her Ph.D. in Integrative Medicine, a field focused on a holistic approach to healing that finds creative ways of bridging the gap that has historically existed between what the chemistry of medicine does to the body and what the psychology of art does to the mind.

Lawrence wants to find the best answer to the question: How can we coordinate these disparate disciplines into a two-front war on suffering?

“People are not compartmentalized—we are one,” Lawrence says. “The mind affects the body. So when you address both things in one package, then you’re addressing the whole person, and that’s when healing can begin. The real trick is getting these things integrated into a traditional medical setting, which Mary Bird Perkins is.”

The renovations are extensive and not merely cosmetic. After more than two years of planning, Mary Bird’s new look debuted in September.

Gallery owner Ann Connelly, who helped curate the art pieces filling the renovated center, calls the upgrade a beautiful

“What do you see? These pieces are about taking a part of your brain and connecting it with something else, pulling something positive out of your mind. See, you’ve just taken part in the healing arts.”

—Linda Lee, cancer center administrator

distraction.

“Some old posters going down the wall of a hospital, that’s not going to cut it anymore,” Connelly says. “We thought, ‘Let’s break out of the box. The patients deserve more than that.’”

Tasked with crafting a message of healing, hope, inspiration and encouragement—all through artwork—and not only for the patients but also for the caregivers and the families to enjoy, too, Connelly and her collaborators screened and obtained work from dozens of artists, some of them among Louisiana’s top talents.

This healing arts program began with first finding the art.

And though pieces large and small pop up everywhere—from hallways and waiting rooms, to the small painted pieces of the doorway signage system, and in the luxurious semi-private treatment stations—the real star is Wilson’s commanding stained-glass structure.

“You and I are going to have a moment,” says Linda Lee as she stands under Wilson’s piece near the reception area. “Imagine you’ve just found out that you are sick—no one expects to be told they have cancer—and you walk in, and this is what you see. This is a gateway of hope.”

As administrator of the cancer center, Lee understands the need to deal with a patient’s struggles that go beyond the illness. “There’s a huge emotional aspect,” she says.

Every elevator now opens up to massive windows and a view of



the Baton Rouge tree line—from this vantage point, an endless dark green expanse.

On the wall above the check-in desk in the waiting room is a clutch of sculpture that looks like butterfly wings dashed with surreal scenes of mountain ranges, a sunset, and the rush of cool surf.

“What do you see?” Lee asks. “These pieces are about taking a part of your brain and connecting it with something else, pulling something positive out of your mind. See, you’ve just taken part in the healing arts.”

Robin Toler, a certified and accredited art therapist in Baton Rouge for 24 years and author of *Get Real: From Storytelling to Authenticity*, says that for someone who is suffering, art can be a more authentic form of expression than even conversation.

“It’s closer to the heart,” she says.

And in that way, working on a creative project can help patients transition from one stage of life to another and address the big questions that can come with cancer.

What happens after treatment is successful? Who am I now that I am cancer-free? How do I deal with not being able to perform my old job or my favorite physical activity?

“You have to respect this experience and take the tools learned from it through the rest of your life,” Lee says. “That’s what post-treatment is about. And through the healing arts we can give

them coping mechanisms for life.”

Though much of it is more intangible and esoteric than a platelet count on a monitor, Toler believes she has identified why art therapy really works. “Art is universal. It can organize the chaos, and it helps us connect to and identify patterns of behavior and character so we can relate to them and learn from them.”

For the gorgeous new look of Mary Bird Perkins to impress visitors, donors and civic leaders is one thing, but it all means very little if the patients aren’t being impacted by artful changes to the medical environment and these creative programs in the best possible way.

“It’s all about the patient experience,” Lee says.

And Lawrence believes they are. For a medical practitioner who was at first unsure how a 70-year-old would react to a hand massage, she says the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

“People ask me all the time if working with cancer patients is depressing and, you know, it’s the opposite,” Lawrence says. “These people show everyone the essence of life.”

As Taylor gathers her purse and looks across the room at the bright prism ahead, it’s clear she has left the past behind, and she just can’t wait until next Thursday.

“I’ve made wonderful friends through the class; and Francine, she’s been amazing,” Taylor says. “We’re in this together.” •

COVER

A shrine *for science:*

*The Water Campus
building will bring people
back to the river*

By Mukul Verma

42 Baton Rouge is built on one of the world's four largest rivers. But as big as the Mississippi is, you can't see it most of the time. That's because the great river is hidden behind tall levees, raised to keep the city safe from flooding. But a new landmark, dedicated to visionary outlooks and scientific discovery, will soon restore to residents a beautiful view of what gave birth to Baton Rouge in the first place: the river.

Perched next to the city's original municipal dock, this three-story structure will be home to forward-looking scientists who are researching critical water issues, including the rising of the

sea and the falling of the land in Louisiana and many other places. The scientists presently work in a rented space downtown that houses The Water Institute of the Gulf—a nonprofit that, among other things, provides support for Louisiana's coastal restoration plan to be implemented over the coming decades. Within 24 months, however, The Water Institute's researchers will move into their permanent headquarters overlooking the big river in the new building at the dock.

Backing the project is the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and its real estate development and management company, Commercial Properties Realty Trust. CPRT is raising the eye-catching glass structure as the centerpiece of its Water Campus, a 35-acre hub for water research at the foot of the Mississippi





The top floor of the Water Institute building will have a conference center.

River Bridge, on Nicholson Drive adjacent to downtown.

Ground breaking for The Water Institute's building will take place in November. Two other important components of the Water Campus are already under construction there: LSU is constructing the Center for River Studies, housing a scaled physical model that can replicate the dynamics of rivers and coastal areas; CPRT is constructing the other building, which will become the headquarters for the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, a division of state government responsible for implementing the \$50 billion Coastal Master Plan. CPRT is leasing out a fourth building to private-sector tenants that work on water issues; its construction is expected to begin next year.

When completed, the Water Campus will comprise more than 1.2 million square feet of labs, offices, retail destinations, and residential space. A bright emblem of what Baton Rouge can accomplish, the facilities will be visible to the tens of thousands of motorists who travel through the city over the bridge, heading east to Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. And among the strand of buildings, the most prominent jewel of the Campus' entire setting will be the sparkling structure for The Water Institute of the Gulf.


Following are a few details about that building, as related by architects Ryan Bussard of Pekins+Will and Buddy Ragland of Coleman Partners. •



THE SITE: The Water Institute of the Gulf will be constructed at the site of the old Municipal Dock. On one side are wetlands; on the other is the Mississippi River Bridge. The levee-top path—a favorite place among recreational runners—will allow pedestrians to take a break at the new building, walk around it, and scope out a better view of the working river.

THE APPROACH: The Water Institute building will draw motorists up a new road, Water Street, running parallel to Oklahoma Street. Drivers will be able to pull up onto the levee and park in a number of spaces near the front of the building, while a nearby parking garage will allow easy access to the TWIG facility.

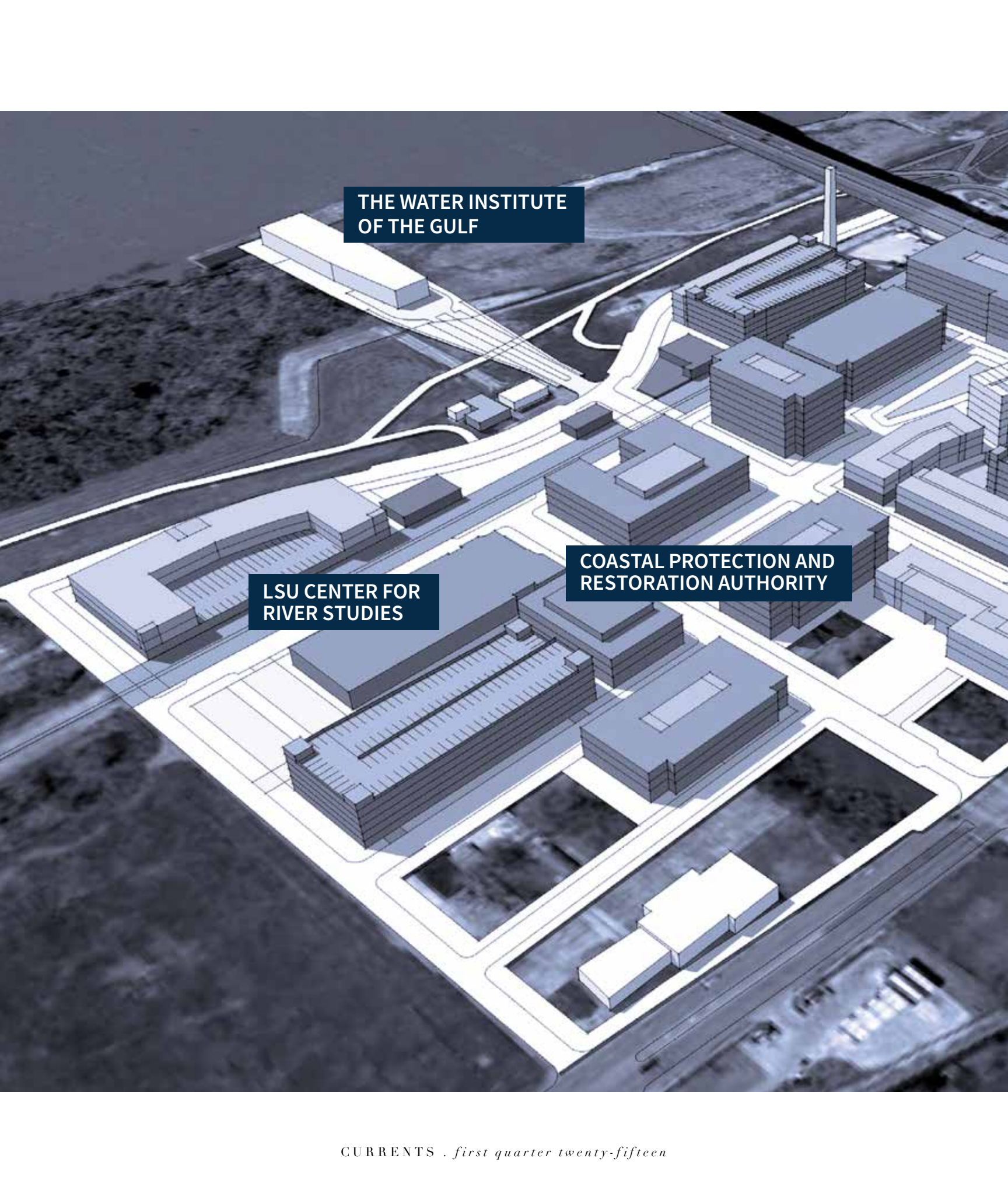
THE DESIGN: In times past, Baton Rouge residents cherished the refreshing breezes that blew across the river waters and cooled their porches on steamy afternoons. Architects with Perkins+Will and Coleman Partners wanted to recall the region's iconic porches in their design, so the building will be wrapped in a perforated metal screen, reminiscent of the screened porches that once made our homes here so much more comfortable.



THE LOCATION—OLD CITY DOCK: A century ago, corralling the river within city levees caused the water level to change dramatically with the seasons, sometimes rising more than 40 feet in late spring. The old dockside piers were no longer sturdy enough for Baton Rouge’s growing maritime trade. To solve the problem, the city government spent \$550,000 to open the first municipal dock in 1926. It featured impressive technologies for its time, including a locomotive crane that crossed back and forth on rails for offloading heavy cargo from oceangoing vessels, lifting it onto trucks and barges that would move goods around the country. Eventually, though, economic growth required EBR to open an even bigger and more advanced port facility on the west bank in the 1950s, making the original municipal dock obsolete. Private enterprises have tried again and again to imagine new uses for the old dock, but never with any real success, and this sprawling riverside real estate has remained abandoned ever since. Now, however, philanthropy and public agencies are joining to revive the once-bustling wharf so it can do a different kind of heavy lifting—big data and weighty research that could change the way the world uses its water resources.

FOR THE SCIENTISTS: The Water Institute of the Gulf will occupy the first two stories. Because the building will be constructed mostly from glass, the scientists will be afforded big, beautiful vistas of America’s most inspiring waterway. And, at the same time, visitors will see the scientists as they work to envision solutions for a future in which the critical importance of our water resources will only grow. The third floor will feature conference rooms designed to foster collaboration.

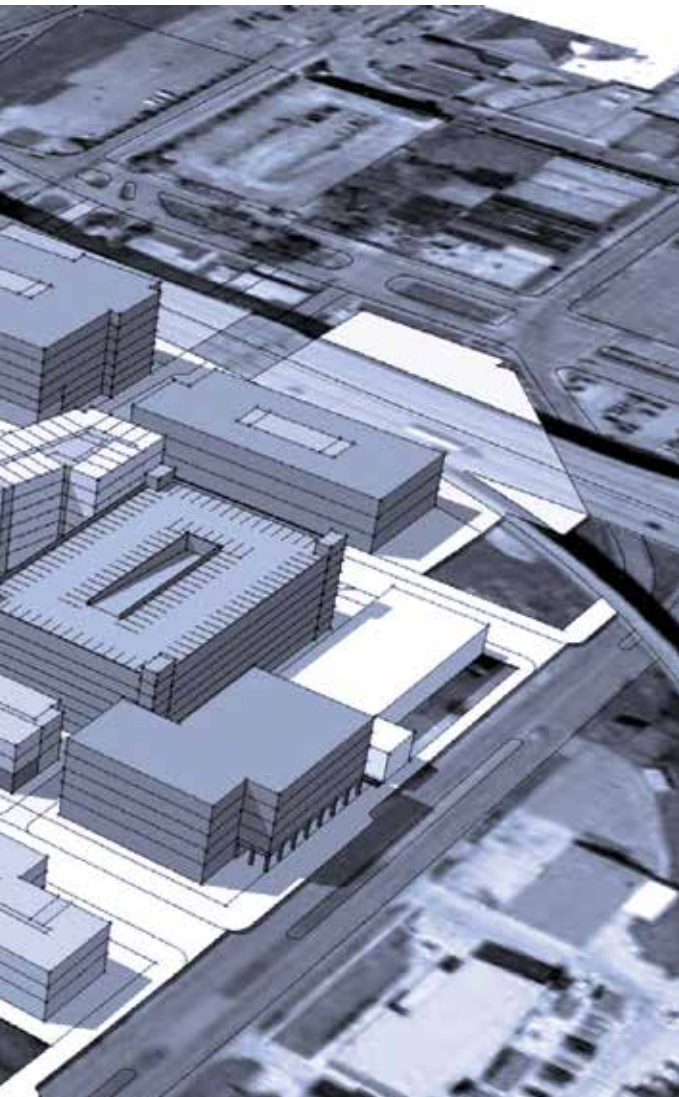
FOR THE PUBLIC: The Water Institute building will restore to the people of Baton Rouge something that many haven’t had in a long time: an accessible outlook on the Mississippi River. The public will be free to walk around the facility and approach the dock behind it. With a view of the Mississippi’s broad, brown back, carrying in freight from around the world and moving the nation’s trade out to sea, visitors will have a visible reminder of why the Father of Waters remains such a central figure in America’s story.



**THE WATER INSTITUTE
OF THE GULF**

**LSU CENTER FOR
RIVER STUDIES**

**COASTAL PROTECTION AND
RESTORATION AUTHORITY**



THE WATER CAMPUS

SIZE: 35 Acres

PLANNED SIZE: 1.2 million square feet

LOCATION: Nicholson Drive and River Road, next to the Mississippi River Bridge

DEVELOPERS: Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Commercial Properties Realty Trust

PURPOSE: A community for public agencies, nonprofits and private firms that are offering solutions based in science to take on the double peril of rising seas and subsiding

UNDER CONSTRUCTION: LSU's Center for River Studies; Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority headquarters. Soon, construction of The Water Institute of the Gulf, the centerpiece of the campus, will begin.








LEGACY

Showing initiative

Murelle Harrison and her grassroots coalition work to improve Gardere

By Jeff Roedel | Photo by Tim Mueller





T

he address is no typo.

A growing coalition of about 20 stakeholders—including faith-based groups and churches to Realtors and city-centric crime prevention organizations—operating as the Gardere Initiative has made its headquarters out of a converted apartment on Ned Avenue right in the heart of the neighborhood.

The inconspicuous office and meeting space is surrounded by neighbors within arm's reach. Among them are mothers fighting to make ends meet and preschool children carving dark wet lines in the grey cement with their tricycle tires on a steamy and wet September afternoon.

About a third of the 3.5-square-mile area's 10,000 residents live below the poverty line, and so the negative perceptions of Gardere—its very real economic challenges and violent crime rates that have, at times, dominated the docket of the nightly news in Baton Rouge—ensnare this humble office, too.

But the air here is thick with purpose. This does not feel like any other sloped parking lot sitting below one of the many inexpensive fourplexes that dominate the landscape. This feels like a place of hope.

Blocking any view of the apartment that sits not far from Burbank Drive and the shiny, epic Cypress Mounds baseball complex is a towering mobile medical unit, pink with Woman's Hospital flagged all along its side. Today, Gardere Initiative is offering residents free mammograms and prostate exams, even as pellets of rain crash against the pitched, sagging roof of the small pop-up tent sheltering its half-dozen volunteers.

They are here. For anyone who needs them.

At the edge of the tent, peering out down the street, sits Murelle Harrison, executive director of the Gardere Initiative. She told me to stop by anytime this afternoon, and with a quick smile and a knowing glance, she immediately guesses that I'm the writer who wants to interview her.

"Let's go inside," she says. "I'll show you who we are."

Inside, the headquarters feels small, but even as volunteers and staff flow in and out, it is never overly cramped. Little has been done to alter or mask its homey feel, though one room off the narrow kitchen, surely designed for a dining table, is now a makeshift office and workspace with desks, computers, a printer and Wi-Fi. All the basic office supplies and technologies that

most in south Baton Rouge take for granted are offered here to those in need for free Monday through Friday, 9 to 5.

"These kids don't have anywhere to print their school projects, so we offer that so they don't fall behind in class," Harrison says.

Other services include adult education courses, after-school tutoring for elementary through high school students, nutrition programs, parenting classes, business and job sourcing skills development, as well Bible studies and all manner of support and resources for those overcoming substance abuse.

"Some people just like to come sit on our steps for Wi-Fi so they can use their cell phones," Harrison says. "And that's OK, too."

But even as L'Auberge Casino & Hotel thrives nearby and developers push their multimillion-dollar neighboring projects forward, Gardere sits as a 3.39-square-mile question mark in the middle of much economic promise to the south and east of the city limits.

The Gardere Initiative is looking at the area holistically, and its work doesn't end when the office closes in the evenings.

Harrison works for Gardere and thinks through its challenges almost around the clock. She wakes up with one thought in mind: "What can we do to make a difference today?"

Her concern is not with the area's real estate value, only its people. "We look at this as our resource center," Harrison says as she scans the room. "Whatever needs are in the community, people can come here, and we will find a way."

A licensed industrial/organizational psychologist, she retired from Southern University in 2011 after many years as an instructor and an expert in the areas of substance abuse, AIDS/HIV awareness and general student counseling.

In 2006, the Gardere Initiative began with a modest back-to-school party to offer school supplies and get parents and children excited about learning. This was amid a violent wave of post-Katrina crime that swept the area like a storm surge and included eight murders in one year.

Harrison took her post as executive director of the group in January 2013. This past summer's back-to-school outreach drew 1,100 people—and no trouble.

The "apartment," as Harrison still calls it, backs up to Hartley Vey Gardere Park and the new playground on-site that her neighbors and volunteers constructed in one day to earn a grant through BREC, Dr. Pepper/Snapple and a nonprofit called

KaBOOM! that is devoted to giving children opportunities for physical activities.

“We knew we wanted our backyard to be this park,” she says.

At 67, Harrison’s voice is clear and feather light, warm and, above all, disarmingly reassuring.

She leans on her elbows, hands folded, looking down her nose past a pair of reading glasses. When she speaks it’s as if she were a grandmother giving correction with helpings of virtue instead of vinegar.

“Making change is about building relationships, and the most positive thing I think I see in Gardere is what’s now a comprehensive quality of life change,” says Bart Riggins, the 45-year-old pastor of Faith Chapel Church of God where Harrison has served as Sunday school superintendent, picking up children in the church van and bringing them to breakfast and worship services for decades.

“Murelle is able to express God’s love in an outward way. She shares, and her caring and acts of kindness show people the possibility for change.”

Harrison has been jolted by the ills of poverty—urban poverty, she disclaims—but she’s seen the light, too.

She was raised in a large family in a tiny town: Palmetto, Louisiana, not far from Opelousas. Surrounded by cotton fields and pigs, she says.

“I grew up in a very rural area, so I know what community is supposed to look like,” says the mother of two. “In Palmetto, we had church, we had school, and we had family. And that’s what shaped your life. Things have changed now, but I still think community plays a big, big part.”

With a boost from the Sheriff’s Office, now operating with a substation at L’Auberge Crossing and a \$150,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to bring BRAVE tactics and further statistical analysis to target the neighborhood, burglaries, assaults and homicides have all fallen.

But Harrison argues that it’s not just the financial support but also an attitude shift that is turning the tide against crime and drug abuse. Largely, the area’s patrol officers are buying into this new attitude. One officer has earned the nickname “Captain Hotdog” for how often he’s seen grilling out with residents, just for fun and camaraderie.

“Our neighbors have to change their perception of law enforcement,” Harrison says. “But perceptions have to change

both ways.”

As a longtime prevention professional, Harrison’s focus is always on coalition building. “It takes a village” is not a slogan she takes for granted.

“You can get so much more done when people come together from all walks of life,” she says.

So, what is it that Gardere Initiative needs the most in 2016?

“If you’d have asked me that three weeks ago, I would have said money,” Harrison says with a smile. “But we were just given \$600,000.”

The five-year grant is awarded by the White House Initiative for Drug-Free Communities, and will allow Gardere Initiative to pay its staff with more consistency. Some had been volunteering for years only to receive their first paycheck back in May, Harrison says.

With this new funding, her vision is on expansion. “We need more office space here,” she admits.

“We need to do *more*.”

After Harrison’s prodding, the parish now has plans to add more sidewalks in Gardere—many of its residents are without cars—but Harrison wants a crosswalk or even a walkable concrete overpass across Burbank Drive. “Gardere would be so much less isolated with

“I grew up in a very rural area, so I know what community is supposed to look like.”

—Murelle Harrison

that,” she says.

As her staff begins to pick up and pack up outside, the Woman’s mobile unit rolls on, and a kind lady from a nearby church offers us red beans and rice. Harrison laments that more people did not show up to take advantage of the free medical services.

“The rain,” she says flatly.

Even with her best efforts, there are elements out of her control. And in the face of improved statistics, tragedy can still strike.

When it does, those positive new numbers are only cold comfort, and Gardere Initiative’s importance is reinforced.

When a young man was killed in the area over the summer, Harrison and her staff visited the grieving family at their home and prayed over them. They held an early morning community breakfast at the office where neighbors held hands, broke bread, and watched the darkness fade and a new day arrive—together.

“Spiritual intervention is in our mission statement,” Harrison says. “That has to happen for all of this change to come together. I’m a positive person in general, but my hope comes from my faith. And I think hope spreads. No matter what happens, we at Gardere Initiative try to have a positive, going-forward attitude.”•

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Yes, in my backyard

Four Baton Rouge neighborhoods complete plans for safer streets

By Maggie Heyn Richardson | Photos by Brian Baiamonte

For cities, few challenges are thornier than converting a car-centric culture into one that welcomes alternative forms of transportation. That's where Baton Rouge finds itself today, as more residents demand streets that accommodate walking, jogging and cycling.

Recently, residents in four Mid City neighborhoods took on the task of completing "safe streets" plans. Under the direction of the Center for Planning Excellence, Webb Park, Capital Heights, Bernard Terrace and Valley Park completed neighborhood connectivity plans this summer that call for balanced road conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

The four adjacent neighborhoods are located north and south of Government Street, a major thoroughfare slated for improvements in the East Baton Rouge Parish Comprehensive Plan, FuturEBR. Sections of Government Street are expected to go from four lanes to three, freeing up space for bike lanes and bringing better exposure to the bevy of local shops and restaurants situated there. It's a progressive step for this important east-west corridor, but it may also alter traffic patterns in surrounding neighborhoods.

The intention of the Street Smart plan, says CPEX Director of Implementation Haley Blakeman, is to document the preferences of the neighborhoods about how to create a better relationship between pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. Moreover, because four neighborhoods are working together, there's a better chance to establish real connectivity between future bike lanes and walking paths, she says.

"One of the challenges in Baton Rouge is that we have pockets of pedestrian facilities but they're not connected," Blakeman says. "We need better linkages."

While CPEX facilitated the plan, the neighborhoods will implement it, adds Blakeman. "This is officially their document," she says. "They can take it to their council members and DPW and show that they have consensus on how to improve conditions."

Capital Heights Neighborhood Association President Tyler Hicks says it's the right time in Baton Rouge for this type of strategy. "It's important to have a city plan, but it's equally important that you have feedback from neighborhoods—local plans that are going to mesh with the larger plan," says Hicks."

CPEX reached out to leaders in the four neighborhoods in spring 2014 and held a public meeting in July of that year. Two hundred residents attended and voiced concerns about current

conditions on local streets.

No surprise, cut-through traffic was a big issue. The geographic placement of these neighborhoods is advantageous—it’s part of what makes them popular places to live. The downside, though, is that motorists have long used the streets in Capital Heights, Valley Park and Webb Park to shorten their travel time between Acadian Thruway and College Drive and Jefferson Highway.

“Cut-through traffic is a big deal for Valley Park. It’s right in the middle of the city,” says Brandon DeCuir, secretary of the Valley Park Neighborhood Association and an attorney whose family owns a house in the neighborhood. “In discussions with the neighborhood, they want to be sure they have a pedestrian-friendly environment that can accommodate walkers, bikers and public transportation users.”

Speeding was another issue. Residents voiced repeated concerns about motorists driving at perilous speeds, even as children and families ambled along streets with strollers and bicycles. The long, wide streets throughout much of Webb Park, which includes Steele Place, are attractive, but their design invites motorists to accelerate to unsafe speeds.

Finally, the lack of pedestrian footpaths or cycling lanes also bothers residents, many of whom welcome the chance to hop on a bike and cycle to a nearby restaurant for dinner or walk safely to BREC’s Webb Park on Country Club Drive.

“We are fortunate to have a renovated park and golf course nearby,” says Webb Park Neighborhood Association board member Kelsey Kornick Funes. “Installation of routes along Broussard and from Claycut to Country Club are key to assuring a safe route to that destination.”

During the next step of the planning process, CPEX relied on the old “seeing is believing” adage. Rather than holding a meeting where residents pore over maps and scribble complaints on Post-it Notes, the organization rolled out possible solutions in an experiential, real-world fashion.

CPEX held a Street Smart demonstration weekend last October, during which temporary bike lanes, signage, crosswalks, sidewalks and other measures were installed for the duration of the weekend at 11 locations throughout the neighborhoods. The demonstration weekend was promoted heavily, encouraging residents to get out and experience what the changes would look and feel like.

“For the most part, they really liked them,” says Blakeman.

The demonstrations included converting a cut-through street in Bernard Terrace from two-way to one-way to ease traffic and creating a “sidewalk” (painted grass) along Claycut Road that could help residents reach the Webb Park playground safely on foot. And a traffic choker was installed on Richland Avenue to help slow speeding vehicles.

In addition, a partial street closure showed residents what it would be like to limit cut-through traffic on Claycut, a popular corridor that runs parallel to Government Street. It already has a high volume of motorists who are eager to bypass Government’s unpredictable traffic, an issue that will intensify as the corridor sees changes.

At the conclusion of the weekend, residents provided feedback on each project’s functionality through online surveys and other means, helping to shape CPEX’s final recommendations. The completed plan includes a concrete list of ideas for each neighborhood.

For example, the plan calls for buffered bike lanes on Country Club Drive, Steele Boulevard, West Drive and Westmoreland Drive and dedicated bike lanes on Broussard Street, Edison Street, Nairn Drive/Valley Street and Woodside Drive. The plan also documents the most advantageous placements for new sidewalks,

intersection improvements and crosswalks, as well as better signage and better bike lane transitions at intersections.

“In all cases,” says Blakeman, “we tried to look at things that were double-duty, like decreasing lane size but also adding a bike lane. Nothing is too complicated, and most ideas are affordable.”

The plan also empowers neighborhood leaders with the right language and the ability to interact with local government at an informed level. Rather than just calling a Metropolitan Council member or Department of Public Works official and complaining, neighborhood leaders can now specify exactly where they need a new bike lane or stop sign—and why.

In Capital Heights for example, a new stop sign has already been installed on Capital Heights Avenue at Blanchard Street. Hicks says he has reached out to DPW officials about other projects as well.

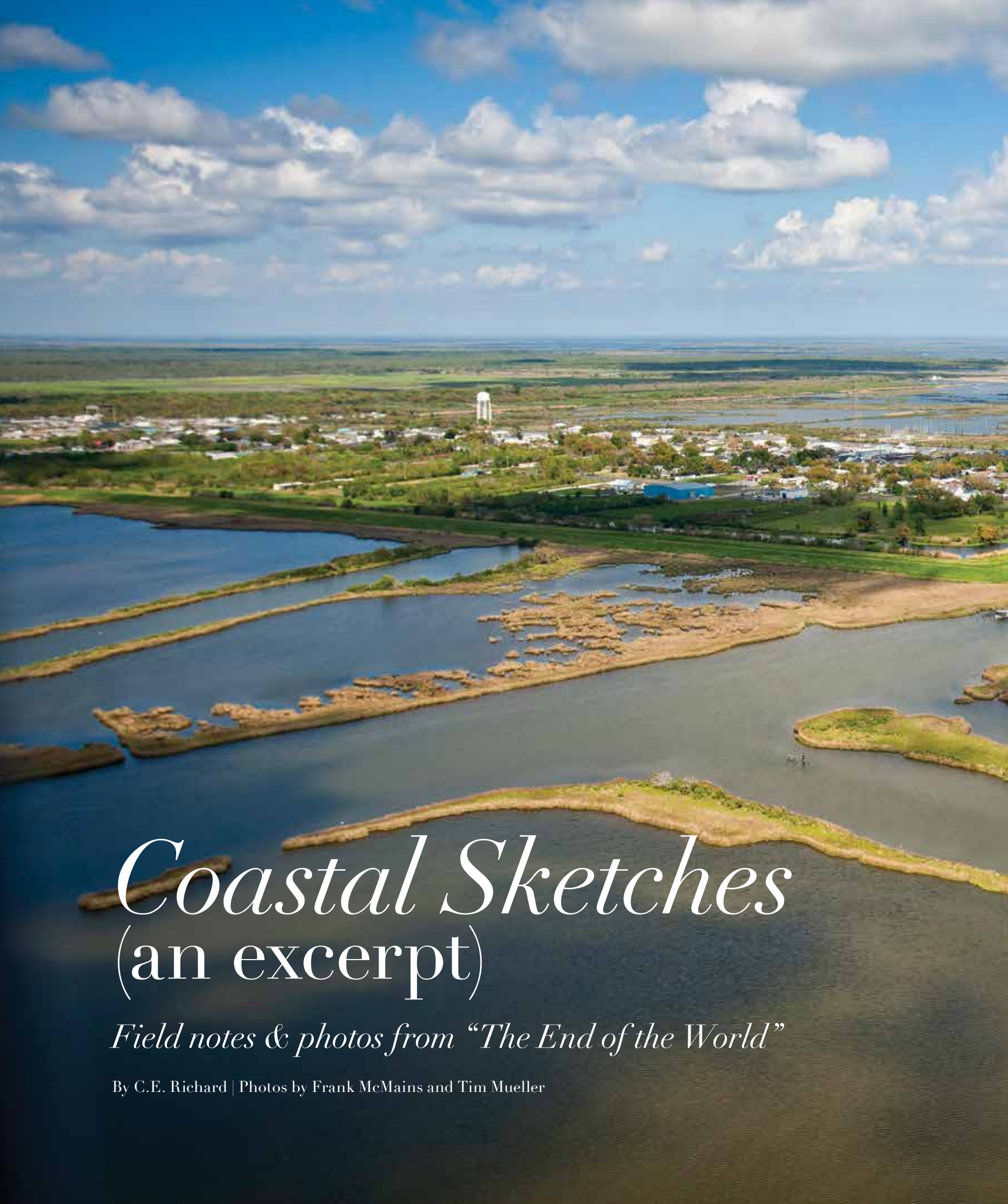
“A lot of people are interested in improving our communities and our neighborhoods, and having direction is important,” says Hicks. •

“We need better linkages.”

—Haley Blakeman, CPEX



In October 2014, temporary bike lanes were among demonstrations of livability improvements in Mid City.



Coastal Sketches (an excerpt)

Field notes & photos from “The End of the World”

By C.E. Richard | Photos by Frank McMains and Tim Mueller



For the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation commissioned a book about the Louisiana coast. C.E. Richard traveled the watery land to tell us about a place that is an enigma to outsiders—the land is eroding so slowly that it goes almost unnoticed, but vanishing so fast that it cannot be ignored. To the people who live there, however, there's little mystery. They carry on each day in a spirit of celebration as well as stoicism, just as their ancestors have done for centuries, balancing their lives on a land that they have always known is shifting beneath their feet.

Our members and donors have already received a copy of the book. If you would like your own copy, we invite you to become a member at BRAf.org/membership or by calling 387-6126. Memberships start at \$100.

THE ROAD

Grand Isle. To get there, you follow LA 1 going south—a long ribbon of roadway unfurling along the west bank of Bayou Lafourche, shadowing every bend and turn of that disabled waterway, from its split with the Mississippi River at Donaldsonville down to where it empties into the Gulf of Mexico and the surrounding marshes along the way. Loose and steady on the steering wheel, my hands know all the coming curves in the road ahead, feeling them in my fingers even before they round into view. I've driven this route more times than I can count.

But, today, I am trying to see it differently. I want to rub from my eyes the dull glaze of familiarity that leads you to think you know a place; the slow-growing cataracts that make it hard to notice the changes seeping into your surroundings so gradually that they escape your attention completely until, all at once, you no longer recognize where you are, in what was once a part of your home.

At more than 430 miles, this old highway is Louisiana's longest, draped diagonally across the state like a ceremonial sash, from the northwest corner above Shreveport down to

the southeast corner at Grand Isle, where it halts at the water's edge. I'm traveling to the island to meet again with photographer Frank McMains, a native of South Louisiana like me, and my chief collaborator over the next year in an introspective endeavor to know the coast in a new way.

Frank and I had never met before beginning this work. We have in common an editor who knows the books and films we've each made about Louisiana through the years. Allowing us extraordinary creative latitude, he asked us to try to document what, arguably, could be the most significant thing to happen here since LaSalle landed and gave a name to this place—the destruction of Louisiana's coast. But after several field excursions and reams of research, Frank and I still don't know how to rightly address the question or record such a grand transformation.

These trips to the water's edge have become a paradoxical sort of pilgrimage, a journey to strange places we already know, to look for something without an idea of what it really is.

STORIES

Right now, however, riding in the passenger seat beside me is my other constant companion in these travels: a stack of papers, prints, and old books—collections of Louisiana literature, a few quite rare, written by authors who, over the course of several centuries, have undertaken the same enterprise, groping for words and images to depict the incomparable setting I am passing through as I journey southward down LA 1.

There is Kate Chopin, of course. But among my books and photocopied stories are also works by Eudora Welty, Frank de Caro, Christopher Hallowell, Harlan Hubbard, Mike Tidwell, Roger Emile Stouff, and John McPhee. There are others, some much older, like the letters of Sister Marie Madeleine Hachard de St. Stanislaus—a young Ursuline nun who left her home of Rouen, France, in 1727, determined to help civilize the people of New Orleans (a work that still continues), less than ten years after the city's founding. I have Lafcadio Hearn's indispensable novella *Chita: A Memory of Last Island* and a rare copy of *Un Été à la Grand'Isle* (A Summer at Grand Isle), in translation, by an overlooked New Orleans Creole author named Adolphe du Quesnay—a gift from one of his descendants, an elderly professor and colleague of mine named Maurice.

Du Quesnay's 1892 novella is an intriguing but profoundly sad little book that few remember or have ever read. The central character, Olivier, is a French émigré on his way to the island on holiday with his Creole bride and their baby. Olivier spends



considerable time looking out at the edge of the Gulf on Grand Isle in meditation. He remembers his first glimpse of it with these words:

This vast and gloomy shore was struck on its edge by the powerful shock of the great waves, bouncing on top of one another, hurling themselves along continuously. Crazy, the immense foaming waves struck the shore again and again, disheveled, stretching out...

It seemed strange to me when I read that description. I always remembered the waters around the island as green and genial during the summer. Apparently, Olivier arrived at Grand Isle at a time when the surf was especially turbulent. Or perhaps, after reflecting on the place later, having lost his entire family to the sea there, Olivier recognized something in the tides that normally goes unnoticed by most of us. For him, the Gulf was an inscrutable force of relentless rage, “*a delirious sea persisting in its struggle against its shores.*”

Thinking about the breathtaking destruction that Frank and I have seen occurring along Louisiana’s coastline, I’m inclined to wonder whether Olivier’s losses and terrible grief allowed him to perceive more immediately a fundamental truth about this place. What seems stable, peaceful, even permanent is, in fact, a tremendous tumult, occurring on a scale too large for short-lived creatures like us to see, most of the time. Seemingly suspended in equipoise, I have learned, is a titanic clash of elemental forces much bigger, much older than we realize, fighting for ends we cannot foresee.

REFUGE

Thibodaux, Raceland, Mathews. The road rolls forward through the same sequence of small towns that I remember—Lockport, Larose, Cut Off—strung along the bayou like the smooth-worn beads of an old rosary—Galliano, Golden Meadow, Leeville—familiar villages built by generations of folks who, up until recent times, mostly spoke French, regardless of where their ancestors originated. It’s hard to tell exactly where one little town ends and the next begins, but moving through them, I can recite their names as easily as the bedtime prayers of childhood.

When I was a boy, we used to caravan in carloads down LA 1 with our neighbors, a big family by the name of Vezina, following them to their camp on Grand Isle. Louisiana’s last inhabited

barrier island, Grand Isle was the customary refuge for people looking to escape New Orleans for a few days’ vacation. This was a tradition among the citizenry dating back well into the nineteenth century, if not earlier, whether it was to flee the heat, avoid the recurring plagues of yellow fever, or leave behind the strange sense of stifling oppression there that writers described simply as “the miasma.” The excuses have changed, but that same need to escape the close quarters of New Orleans still wells up in people with no less urgency, and the ritual of retreating to Grand Isle persists today. Driving along Bayou Lafourche this November morning, I am reminded of the many trips we made this way, following the Vezinas between the city and the island, when I was a child.

And, as I look around now, with the drone of the roadway under my wheels, it would be easy to allow myself to slip into hypnotic nostalgia, imagining that nothing has really changed. Shrimp boats still dock here. Ships are still built at the Bollinger yards. The old folks still toddle across the road in summer to cut okra and eggplant from well-tended rows in the swatch of rich alluvial earth that lies between the bayou and the highway. Here and there, a few grand plantation homes still hide in the oak shade, set back just shy of busy LA 1.

But things are not the same.

THIS PLACE

Visiting the marshes not far from here, the nineteenth-century writer Lafcadio Hearn sensed “*the weight of the Silences, the solemnities of sea and sky in these low regions where all things seem to dream.*” Those who’ve lived amid Louisiana’s coastlands will know what he means, and if they’ve read Hearn’s stories, they’ll likely concede that he comes closer than most to getting it right. But not quite. Always almost.

Ceaselessly changing, Louisiana’s coast is a place unlike any other, stubbornly defying the grasp of description and oozing out from between the fingers of anyone trying to firm it up in words or fix it in pictures. It’s a place that won’t keep still.

Differing from the rest of the American shoreline, Louisiana’s intricate coast can’t be defined as any neat border or narrow band of sandy beach keeping the sea segregated from the land. Instead, our coast is a liminal place reaching deep inland, far from the lapping of the Gulf and the smell of salt. Here is where lines dissolve and distinctions blur. It’s where one of the world’s Four Great Rivers, cocoa-colored and freighted with earth collected from across the continent, pushes itself outward against the blue of the sea. Along the way, the Mississippi is unburdened of this dirt, spreading a delta whose lower reaches



are never wholly dry land, neither entirely water; nearing its end, what flows down and out is no longer fully fit to be called a river, nor rightly named the ocean yet either. Louisiana's coastlands are an intermarriage of differences, far more syncretic than even the mix of peoples who've settled into it together like layers of sediment; a confluence of contrasts, land and water, salt water and sweet, merging so gradually that it's never quite clear where one begins and the other ends, like lingering between wakefulness and sleep, and where, true enough, together, all things seem to dream.

Travel the length of LA 1 along the Lafourche, follow it all the way to its finish on Grand Isle, and soon you realize that our coast is less a place than it is a process, constantly washing itself away and building itself back.

At least, that's how it had been for a long time.

But things are not the same.

LOSS

Louisiana's coastlands are vanishing from under the feet of a people who've made their home here much longer than they have called themselves Americans.

The seas are rising, the land is sinking, and this state has ceded more territory in the last century than our country would ever tolerate losing otherwise without going to war.

There is no question about this. These things are not in dispute.

The matter of Louisiana's coastal crisis has not suffered the kind of blind denial of science that still beleaguers policymakers grappling with climate change, nor has it been cynically manipulated as a wedge issue to win elections. Evidence of the problem is abundant and conclusive; it has been faithfully reported; and there is growing public awareness of this slow-motion catastrophe, not only here but, increasingly, in the national media as well. Stacks of data about coastal erosion have been well represented in compelling statistics, slick graphics, convincing forecasts. More people than ever now know, for instance, that Louisiana is losing 25 to 35 square miles of land per year. We've all heard more than once that current erosion rates will submerge another 640,000 acres by 2050. School kids routinely inform us in their oral reports that this is an area roughly equivalent to the size of Rhode Island.

Most everyone now acknowledges that Louisiana's coastline is crumbling away into the Gulf at an alarming rate. Given our tradition of rancorous politics, I'm amazed by this rare show of universal consensus. Stranger still to me, however, is that it often appears matched by an equally unanimous indifference.

These are the things I think about as I look around at what I pass, making my way south on LA 1, down toward Grand Isle and the "delirious sea" where the road reaches its end. •

Perkins Road Overpass

How can we improve a popular destination

Photos by Tim Mueller

Invited by AARP to recommend improvements to the Perkins Road Overpass area, representatives of The Walkable and Livable Communities Institute traveled to Baton Rouge in late summer to learn about the popular locale. AARP has been championing walkable communities so that people of all ages can improve their health and enjoy their communities more by driving less. The Institute will issue a report on the Perkins Road Overpass before the end of 2015. Ahead of the report, *Currents* editor Mukul Verma talked to the nonprofit's Robert Ping, who is technical assistance program manager.

CURRENTS: WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE AREA?

Robert Ping: What potential! There is already strong commercial activity along Perkins Road with restaurants and retail that are increasingly popular, developers who are investing in the area, a university and parks nearby, and city staff who are smart and motivated to make improvements. We did notice quickly, however, that Baton Rouge needs to connect its neighborhoods and commercial areas together better for people who would take transit, walk or bicycle. And that Baton Rouge, like most cities in America, has mostly traded off livability and safety for driv-

ing speed. Large, wide, fast-moving roadways divide neighborhoods, cost more money to build and maintain, cause injuries and death, and don't create the kinds of places that people generally want to visit, move to or stay in, especially young people and older adults. In survey after survey, the majority of Americans say that they want more livability and walkability in their communities.

THE PERKINS ROAD OVERPASS—THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE—SEEMS TO DIVIDE THE RETAIL FROM THE RESIDENTIAL. THE NARROW SIDEWALK OF THE OVERPASS IS SPARINGLY USED, AND MORE THAN A LITTLE DANGEROUS. DO YOU HAVE IDEAS FOR BETTER CONNECTIVITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE OVERPASS?

To qualify my responses: All of our ideas are based on a very short trip to Baton Rouge and will need to be studied for their feasibility.

The three-foot sidewalks on the overpass right next to the street are substandard, and bicycles must share the lane with cars and trucks, which is dangerous and inconvenient, especially with the uphill climb necessary to scale the overpass. Sidewalks should be at least 5 feet wide in a residential setting



and 8 feet wide in a commercial setting. Our primary recommendation in the report for people who need to walk or bicycle between Southdowns and the Garden District is to install an at-grade, multiuse path that runs along the northeast edge of the bridge from the Raymond Avenue intersection, down underneath, across the rail tracks, and onto the other side of Perkins

plus ongoing maintenance. If we can reduce driving trips, we reduce parking demand and maintenance costs. The greatest cities in America and the world all have parking “problems” in their commercial districts because they have prioritized people over car storage, which actually brings more money and enjoyment to an area.

More lanes equals more driving, not more room on the freeway.

Road towards Kalurah Street. With enough funding, the path could continue to the Interstate 10 overpass and along the other side of Perkins Road as well, potentially to the Acadian Village shopping center.

BECAUSE THE AREA IS POPULAR AND PERKINS IS A CONNECTING STREET, THERE IS A LOT OF AUTO TRAFFIC AT PEAK TIMES. HOW CAN WE BALANCE THE NEEDS OF DRIVERS WITH THOSE OF PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS?

Currently, drivers have the benefit of a fast, wide roadway with few stops. This creates a safety hazard for people walking and bicycling and divides the neighborhood. It is impossible to revitalize an area and support retail businesses while at the same time allowing for high-speed traffic right through the middle of the commercial node. In order to improve this area for business, livability and residents, traffic will need to travel a bit slower and more carefully on Perkins Road, adding a few seconds to a driver’s route. The report we submit will outline techniques to address speed on Perkins Road, while allowing for reasonable travel speeds through the corridor and creating a new balance between speed, safety and livability. There is little balance of needs right now—drivers have priority, at the expense of other travelers.

PARKING ITSELF IS DIFFICULT. ANY RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW IT WOULD BE EASIER TO NAVIGATE TO PARKING SPACES AND USE THEM MORE EFFICIENTLY?

In general, we don’t have a parking capacity problem in the U.S. but a perception problem. We expect “free” parking everywhere we drive, and right in front of our destination, but parking isn’t free. Parking spaces cost money—\$4,000 per space in a surface lot and up to \$30,000 per space in a multi-floor garage,

A parking study should be completed for this area to determine the actual supply and demand. Our recommendation is to convert the ad hoc parking under Interstate 10 into people uses, such as seating, landscaping, food trucks, play structures, lighting, performances, etc., as part of a new plaza, and then to add head-out, diagonal parking (the safest, most efficient form of on-street parking) on Kalurah Street and to maximize on-street parking elsewhere in the area to compensate.

HERE’S A HOT BUTTON ISSUE: THE STATE IS CONSIDERING WIDENING THE INTERSTATE OVER THE AREA. CAN THAT BE DONE WITHOUT DAMAGING THIS PLACE THAT IS SO SPECIAL TO THE PEOPLE OF BATON ROUGE? IF SO, WE’D LIKE TO HEAR SOME PRESCRIPTIONS.

No, freeway expansion will indeed damage the neighborhood. We have enough freeways and freeway lanes in America; we don’t need more. We need to reduce driving trips and vehicle miles traveled. Additional freeway lanes tend to create “induced demand.” More lanes equals more driving, not more room on the freeway.

It isn’t intuitive, but it is true for nearly all freeway expansion projects. We cannot build our way out of America’s driving problem; we need to create more choices for people so that they aren’t forced to drive everywhere. Besides, on any given day, 25-39% of people cannot drive, especially older adults and youth. The preventive work of creating more transportation choices will help our economy, increase livability and health, and reduce our massive freeway burden. We need more walking and bicycling, less single-occupant driving. Besides, pedestrian and bicycle projects create more jobs per dollar than freeway projects.



WHAT DESIGNS WOULD YOU IMPLEMENT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE TO WALK AMONG BUSINESSES?

We will recommend building connected sidewalks and better street crossings; installing multiuse paths; adding pedestrian-scale lighting underneath the overpasses and along sidewalks; adding seating, landscaping, improved bus stops and other techniques to improve the safety and convenience of people walking, bicycling, or using wheelchairs, skateboards, strollers and other human-powered transportation devices.

THE BUSINESSES ARE THRIVING THERE, BUT THE INFRASTRUCTURE IS RAGGED. IF THERE WAS A DESIGN TO IMPROVE THE LOOKS OF THE STRETCH, WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR FUNDING THE IMPLEMENTATION?

Existing transportation and public works budgets can be prioritized and can be supplemented with federal and state grants, of which there are multiple sources. In addition, once a

streetscape is improved and more people become interested in an area that now looks cared for and people-friendly, private investment tends to follow. There are also techniques to incentivize new development and street improvements, such as tax savings for developers, business improvement districts that collect fees from businesses to improve the area, and many more options.

Also, people walking and bicycling are the “cheap date;” maintenance and infrastructure needs for people traveling under their own power are much less expensive than providing for heavy, fast, motorized vehicles that are much more expensive to cater to. Automobiles only pay about 40% of their direct costs—everyone helps to supplement driving, even those who don’t drive. If we can reduce driving trips and miles traveled, we save money and lives. •

A vision for universal pre-K in East Baton Rouge

By Chris Meyer, Catherine Pozniak and Gwen Hamilton

From Common Core to school choice, education is rife with controversial and divisive issues. But preschool is not among them. A 2013 survey showed 74% of adults in Louisiana support “a proposal for state government to provide funding so that all 4-year-olds can attend a high-quality pre-kindergarten program if their parents want them to.”

Despite overwhelming public support, Louisiana has stopped short of offering preschool to every child. In Louisiana, only about half of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in preschool. The children that aren't in preschool are disproportionately minorities from low-income households.

There is compelling evidence demonstrating the value of preschool, not just to the children but also to the larger community. More than any other education or training program, preschool provides the highest return in education. Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child found that high-quality early childhood programs produce \$4 to \$9 for each invested dollar. What's more, the earlier the investment, the greater the return.

Why is preschool so beneficial? Most simply, skills beget skills. A child who can count to 20 and knows her alphabet heading into kindergarten will be practicing more complex tasks than a child who still needs to learn those basics.

Preschool does more than just give kids a running start, though. The adage “use it or lose it” is real when it comes to cognitive development. Think of the brain as a large electrical panel with the capacity to hold many circuits. We are born

prewired for endless possibilities. Because our brain is highly efficient, however, it performs “synaptic pruning” to divert resources from the circuits we are not using. This is why young children learn at rates unparalleled later in life: They actually have more potential pathways to process information. It is also why skill gaps open up early and stay large for those children who do not maximize their learning capacity from a very young age.

Early childhood also is prime time for developing executive function, otherwise known as the “CEO” of our brains. Executive function is our management system; it lets us plan, remember, focus, prioritize and practice self-control. Command of these functions allows children to become healthy and productive citizens and community members, and it may be why children who attend preschool earn higher wages and have a lower likelihood of becoming teenage parents.

Our inattention to pre-K has led to wide-ranging quality among preschool programs, low standards for preschool teacher qualifications and low wages for teachers. Pre-K teachers are paid half what their peers earn teaching K-12.

We think we can do better as a parish. It's in our collective best interest to increase high-quality preschool options if we want to live in a community that is safe, prosperous and healthy.

It's time to recalibrate our priorities. Here are five ideas to put Baton Rouge on a path to universal preschool in the next five years:

- Fund only pre-K through 11th-grade education. OK, it's

unlikely that we end up defunding grade 12, but thinking along these lines could be the jolt that generates creative solutions. Instead of positioning this as four-year-olds versus twelfth-graders, imagine if we shifted late-stage high schooling to higher education. For example, TOPS dollars could allow high schoolers to gain earlier entry in and credits toward a culminating technical, associate or college degree, saving time and money to bring preschool education fully into the realm of traditional publicly funded schooling.

- Flip the funding model and make bigger investments early on. What would happen if greater investments were made earlier to ensure students are prepared for high school and beyond? Getting students on the right track early in their schools careers is important. Last year's state test scores show that 38% of third graders in Louisiana public schools were not able to read on grade level, a critical time when students transition from learning to read to reading to learn. As kids continue to advance through school, the gap continues to grow.

In 2014, it was estimated that more than 60% of Louisiana high school graduates required some form of remediation to pursue a certificate or degree. Districts like Washington, D.C., allocate more per-pupil funding in preschool and elementary school than high school to ensure students have a strong foundation early. In Baton Rouge, \$4,667 is available per preschool student compared to \$10,300 per K-12 student. This discourages schools from adding preschool classrooms even though doing so would be beneficial to both students and schools in the long run. The National Institute for Early Education Research estimates that if preschool expanded to children from families within 200% of the poverty line, the cost savings to Louisiana's K-12 system would be nearly \$250 million by 2030.

- Fund pre-K through vouchers underwritten by tax credits and/or by consolidating existing funding streams. Louisiana has endorsed taxpayer-funded scholarships or vouchers for children in low-income households to escape low-performing schools and attend private institutions of their choice for K-12 education, so long as the schools meet minimum standards. The same can be true for preschool. Currently, more than \$400 million in state and federal dollars are provided for at-risk Louisiana four-year-olds to attend preschool, but regulations often tie this money to buildings and programs instead of students. Under a voucher system, all types of approved early learning centers could compete for private-paying and voucher-funded students to attend. The state could set kindergarten readiness performance standards for centers to remain eligible, and students and families would experience an increase in the number of options

available to them, regardless of income level.

- Create Social Impact Bonds. Here's how it would work: Private investors give to a social project such as a city-based universal preschool initiative and are paid back by government if the program is successful. Chicago Public Schools experimented with these bonds in partnership with Goldman Sachs and the Pritzker Family Foundation. While the results were mixed because organizers failed to account for quality and accountability, the concept is a worthwhile one. Investors win if school operators save money when more kids are kindergarten-ready, fewer students require special education services (which increases the costs of education), and literacy scores demonstrate kids are on track through 3rd grade. The city wins by having more of its students on track for a successful life.

- Establish an endowment. The Community Foundation serving Boulder County has established an endowment to permanently fund pre-K education. We could do the same in Baton Rouge.

Our proposals are not for the faint of heart. We believe achieving universal pre-K requires bold, out-of-the-box thinking. Baton Rouge can become the first city in Louisiana and among a handful across the country to offer universal preschool. To start, we have to take this priority off our long list of nice-to-haves. Every day, we pay the cost of underinvesting in early childhood education through the rising costs and diminishing returns of remedial education services, welfare and other social interventions. Providing every child in Baton Rouge a high-quality preschool option is the smartest investment we can make for our people, especially for the children.

Chris Meyer is CEO and president of New Schools for Baton Rouge, a nonprofit started by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. New Schools recruits and supports top charter schools to operate in the parish.

Catherine Pozniak is a candidate in the Doctor of Education Leadership Program at Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is co-founder and the former chief operating officer of New Schools for Baton Rouge.

Gwen Hamilton is a native of Baton Rouge and currently leads community affairs for New Schools for Baton Rouge. She previously served as the secretary of the Louisiana Department of Social Services.



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THE END IS NOT NIGH In Google's restructuring—the company is among many now under parent firm Alphabet—an unusual subsidiary came into the light. Calico, shorthand for California Life Company, is taking on aging. There aren't many details at the website, CalicoLabs.com, but it does say that researchers are using technology to understand the biology that controls lifespan.

The promise: "We will use that knowledge to devise interventions that enable people to lead longer and healthier lives."

The company has recruited scientists who study molecular biology, medicine, drug development and genetics. Reading the bios of its leadership is a good way to spend a few minutes. The president of research and development, for instance, has degrees in physics and medicine, while the scientist responsible for aging research discovered that getting old and dying is subject to genetic control.



CRISPR IS PROMISING, AND FRIGHTENING Startups using CRISPR—a tool that allows for fast and cheap gene editing—have raised nearly \$1 billion this year to invent novel treatments and superior plants.

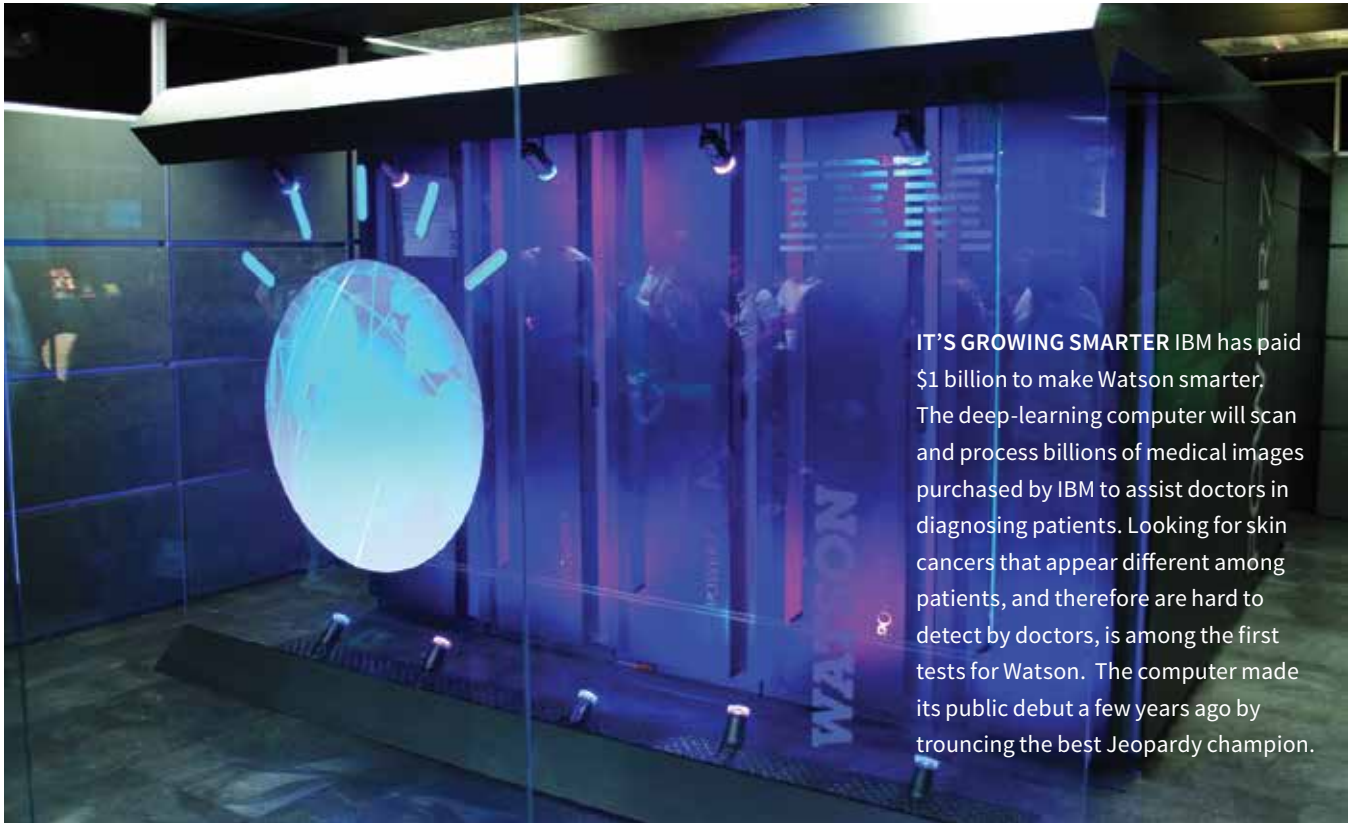
Editas Medicine is among them. With more than 40 employees, Editas has raised \$120 million to create therapies for cancers and sickle-cell anemia. Researchers are cutting and pasting genes in T-cells, hoping that the disease-fighting cells recognize and kill cancers, which are particularly good at hiding from the immune system.

DuPont, meantime, predicts it will sell seeds manipulated with CRISPR within five years. The agriculture giant has invested in a firm that is creating drought-resistant corn and wheat plants with yields that are 15% higher.

But CRISPR could also do harm. Some scientists are concerned the tool will be used to create superbugs.

SAVING BABIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES Premature babies can't regulate their body temperature. In the first world, they are placed in incubators. In the developing world, they die too often from hypothermia because incubators aren't available. A student from India solved this problem while studying at Stanford in 2007. Rahul Panicker used his fieldwork in Nepal to create Embrace, an inexpensive and reusable incubator with phase change materials to produce heat at a constant and comfortable temperature. Embrace has warmed more than 200,000 babies. Donating \$200 at EmbraceGlobal.org purchases one warmer, which can be used up to 50 times.





IT'S GROWING SMARTER IBM has paid \$1 billion to make Watson smarter. The deep-learning computer will scan and process billions of medical images purchased by IBM to assist doctors in diagnosing patients. Looking for skin cancers that appear different among patients, and therefore are hard to detect by doctors, is among the first tests for Watson. The computer made its public debut a few years ago by trouncing the best Jeopardy champion.

CANCER KILLER FROM BR Esperance Pharmaceuticals of Baton Rouge will accelerate the clinical development of its lead anti-cancer drug in an alliance with MD Anderson Cancer Center.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has an investment in Esperance through venture capital funds that are encouraging technology development in Louisiana.

Esperance's EP-100 drug looks for hormones that are expressed by cancer cells, attaches itself to receptors and kills them with a piggybacking poison. The drug leaves healthy cells alone. The technology was developed by LSU researchers Carola Leuschner and William Hansel of Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

Esperance has reported positive results in Phase I and II clinical trials for patients with ovarian cancer who are resistant to another cancer drug, paclitaxel. The next round of trials will determine if EP-100 is effective in breast and ovarian cancers.

"We see the immense value that MD Anderson brings as a partner who can ensure high-quality studies that will produce an optimal design for our Phase III trials and potentially lead to accelerated review and approval," said Hector Alila, Esperance CEO.



MOSQUITOES BE GONE A California company is a few steps away from marketing a patch that repels mosquitoes. In the lab, mosquitoes can't detect carbon dioxide exhaled by people who are wearing the Kite patch for up to two days. If it works in the natural environment, the patch would be an alternative to insecticides and bug spray. The patch would save lives as well. Diseases carried by mosquitoes kill hundreds of thousands each year. The Kite patch is being developed by Olafactor Laboratories.

CITIES



ENDING THE BIKE—MOTORIST WAR A few residents on Glenmore Avenue in Baton Rouge are battling cyclists over a bike lane on the street. People want to park cars in the lanes; cyclists say that's dangerous, and the city-parish agrees with them. A possible solution to this standoff comes from a North Carolina State University study. The researchers don't address the BR bike brouhaha, but their work does take on the squabble indirectly. Proper communication of road rules improves safety, they found in a study. They recommend, for instance, replacing ambiguous "Share the Road" signs with "Bicycles May Use Full Lane" signs so all users understand proper road use.

SLOW LANE People who believe narrower lanes on roads are safer can cite evidence. Civil engineer Dewan Masum Karim evaluated dozens of intersections in Toronto and Tokyo to conclude that 10-foot lanes are safer than 12-foot lanes. Motorists are more cautious on narrower lanes; driving slower means fewer accidents.

Says Karim, a senior transportation planner with Toronto government: "Given the empirical evidence that favours 'narrower is safer,' the 'wider is safer' approach based on intuition should be discarded once and for all. Narrower lane width, combined with other livable streets elements in urban areas, results in less aggressive driving and increases the ability to slow or stop a vehicle over shorter distances to avoid a collision."



DEMAND THE SUN You can buy solar energy without installing solar panels. SunPort has started selling a device that plugs into an electrical outlet and requests that any item plugged into it only be powered from solar power on the grid. The gadget works because the EPA created Renewable Energy Certificates, which provide information on energy that is coming from green sources.

Demand from SunPort could spur energy companies to install more renewable power. Going solar through SunPort will cost you. Each device costs \$49 and incurs a charge of \$20 per year after the first year.

CODA

A close-up photograph of two golden retrievers. The dog on the left is drinking from a clear glass that has a label on it that says "BEER FEST". The dog on the right is looking towards the glass with its tongue out. A person's hand is holding the glass. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a wooden fence or structure.

HIPSTER BEARDS WERE SPOTTED

The Cap City Beer Fest adds to Baton Rouge's list of events that make the city cool for the cool kids. About 600 people bought tickets to sample from a menu of more than 250 beers in Town Square. The downtown festival benefited Companion Animal Alliance, a nonprofit created by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in conjunction with animal advocates to improve the welfare of dogs, cats and other critters. Some dogs at the event sipped water from beer glasses; others chased their own tails. The second annual festival will be held October 2016.



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