

# CURRENTS

*first quarter twenty-sixteen . baton rouge area foundation*

## T. Geronimo Johnson

*Winner of the 2015 Ernest J. Gaines  
Award for Literary Excellence*



The Foundation and Commercial Properties move—story on page 62











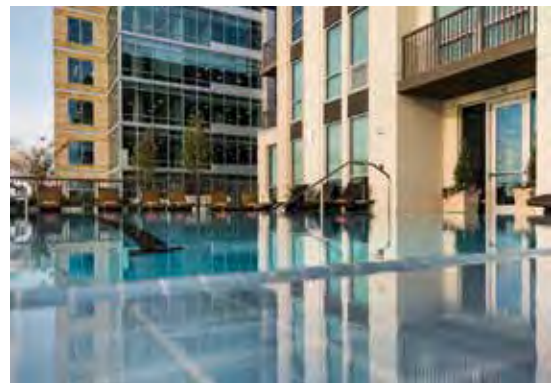
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# CONTENTS

VOLUME TEN | NUMBER ONE

6–Letter from the chair

8–About us

10–Lead in

14–Civic projects

21–Fourth quarter grants

26–Nonprofits: *New South Story Lab*

30–*Kids Orchestra*

34–*Baton Rouge General’s Regional Burn Center*

40–Cover story: *Ernest Gaines Award Winner 2016*

48–Legacy: *John Noland Sr.*

52–*Big Brown*

56–Spark: *LSU food incubator*

59–Spark briefs

62–Coda: *The Foundation’s new address*

*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

100 North Street, Suite 900 | Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802 | [braf.org](http://braf.org)

# LETTER



**I**t might be tempting to call it an “invisible” public health crisis. But the truth is that we could see its victims on the streets of Baton Rouge every day:

people suffering from mental illness were wandering, homeless, and eventually bumping up against the law. The government had slashed budgets that paid for their housing and health care, leaving the sick with no safe place to go and making our streets more dangerous for everyone.

The hardships of the mentally ill became even more startlingly visible for us at the Foundation when Donna Mayeux shared her story. Donna is well known for her mastery in maneuvering through and around public agencies. But even her ample experience was no match for the labyrinthine system that confronted her when she tried to secure housing for a friend burdened with mental illness. Donna learned that even those who managed to brave the bureaucratic maze inevitably arrived at the end to find very little housing available for the mentally ill, and none of it matching their needs.

What happened next serves to illustrate how the Foundation typically works with residents and government decision-makers to accomplish a civic good.

Our staff began preliminary research on services available to people with mental illness. At the same time, a Foundation donor came to see us with a similar story of his own. His name is Bill O’Quinn, and his son David—a schizophrenic—had been picked up by the local police during a mental breakdown in February 2013. Thirteen days later, David died in prison.

His story was the tipping point.

A little more research by our special projects staff uncovered

*We know that working with residents, their elected representatives and agency leaders offers a clear path to solving problems with the best ideas.*

a pattern. Stuck on the street due to scant services and housing, many others suffering with mental illness were winding up like David, imprisoned and gravely endangered—usually for just breaking minor laws, and often without even understanding their own actions. But we also discovered that the police were not to blame: as elsewhere, officers have no other options in Baton Rouge, especially since Earl K. Long Medical Center, once a safety net for the mentally ill, has been shuttered.

Our staff received approval from the Foundation’s civic initiatives committee and separately from the board of directors to pursue the Mental Health Initiative, a project to create a treatment center where the mentally ill could be diverted to get health care instead of incarceration.

Through the years, the Foundation staff has learned that we can only succeed through collaborations. We know that working with residents, their elected representatives and agency leaders offers a clear path to solving problems with the best ideas. Better than going it alone, such partnerships reduce unproductive opposition and speed implementation.

Our offer to conduct the Mental Health Initiative in cooperation with other stakeholders was met with enthusiasm. Public officials, especially those in the mayor’s office, the local justice system and mental health fields, were already seeking their own solutions. Alliances were forged through a shared understanding that jailing sick people, instead of treating them, is just wrong and expensive.

Together, we sought the best solution. Research showed that San Antonio had a diversion program that could provide a model; we contracted with the lead of that project to consult with us. We



## 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](mailto:mverma@braf.org).

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also hired a top financial analyst to determine whether what's working in San Antonio could likewise prove financially beneficial to Baton Rouge.

Rounding out our efforts, we underwrote a lecture series to provide the public with a clearer perspective on what has become a problem not only in Baton Rouge, but also across the country: jails have replaced asylums, and it's costing lives.

And so here we are. Open public meetings. Reliable knowledge and experience from mental health experts. Guidance from public security leaders and elected representatives. Smart ideas and feedback from local residents. All of these have led us to create a joint plan for a treatment and restoration center that doesn't confuse crime with disease.

Open around the clock, the Restoration Center will offer crisis services for substance abuse and mental health issues. A crisis hotline, mobile outreach, sobering, detox respite psychiatric care and case management will be among services.

Treating people is less expensive than imprisoning them, and with this center we can all expect to see a savings in our tax dollars. But it's not about money. In fact, the most "visible" result of this project will be something you won't see. You won't see the mentally ill wandering dangerously on the streets of Baton Rouge because, instead, they will be getting the treatment they need.

Sincerely,



C. Kris Kirkpatrick  
Chair

# 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 52 years, our donors have granted more than \$400 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 offers 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.





# Markets Matter

BREADA's markets benefit farmers and our community



## Support family farmers:

Direct sales at farmers markets are crucial for small farmers to remain sustainable. Income from markets helps preserve farmland which is often lost to development.



## Taste New things:

Find and sample unique heirloom produce varieties. Learn new recipes from local chefs at the weekly **Fresh from the Market** cooking demonstration.



**Meet the face who grows your food:** The most rewarding part of shopping at the farmers market is the opportunity to be face to face with the hands that grew your food.



**Enjoy full flavors:** Local, seasonal produce found at markets ripens on the vine and fully develops its intense flavor. You look forward to blueberries in the summer and satsumas in the fall.



## Empower the next

**generation:** Markets teach our children where real food comes from and the importance of healthy eating. Our Red Stick Sprouts program makes kids an active participant in their food choices.

**BREADA is the link between you and the food that feeds your family.**

Please consider a tax deductible gift to continue our work. Give securely online at [www.breada.org](http://www.breada.org)



## PERFECT HARMONY

The electric Coca-Cola sign, a vivid part of downtown life for more than three generations, is shining over Third Street again.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation took possession of the sign through a donation from the Arts Council in November; Entergy Corp. agreed to cover the cost of keeping the lights burning; and Baton Rouge Coca-Cola Bottling Co. will pay for upkeep of the vintage billboard. Building owner David Crouch and Raising Canes owner Todd Graves were among people instrumental in completing the transfer of the sign.

The sign first flickered into the city's history in 1951, six years after World War II ended and veterans began returning to the comforts of home. Flashing "Pause, Refresh" with the familiar Coca-Cola logo in Spencerian script, the sign was mounted above the Liggett Drug Store, the largest self-serve store of its kind in the South.

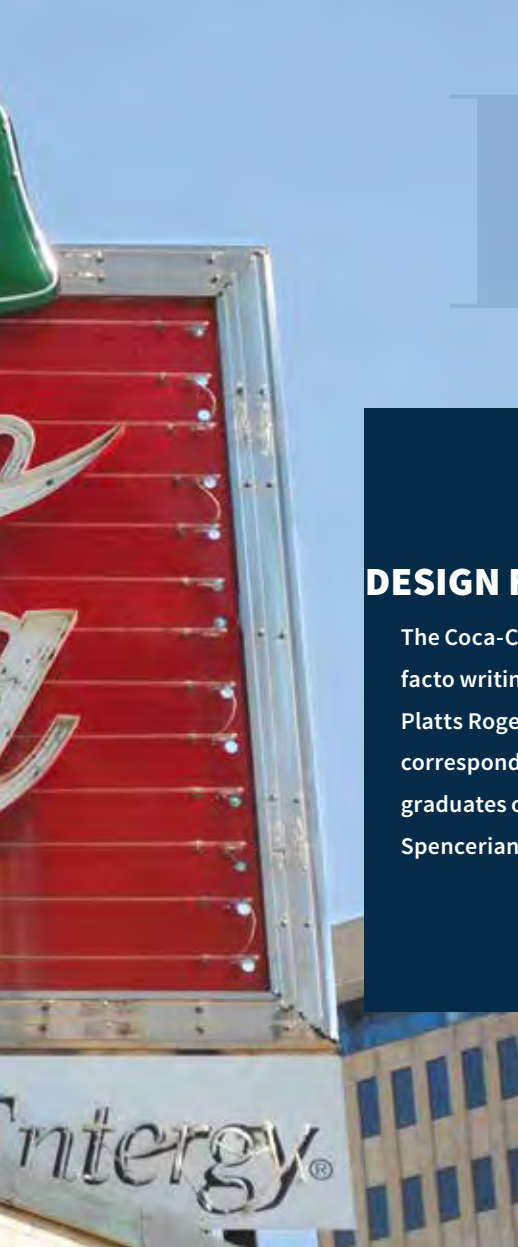
Customers could wander open aisles and select what they wanted to buy, without the assistance of a drug store employee. The first Piccadilly Cafeteria was a block away. Couples went to picture shows together at the Paramount Theater, the first movie house in the country with lighted aisles.

But downtown Baton Rouge dimmed after the interstate opened in the 1960s. Prosperity bypassed the heart of the city and residents fled to the new suburbs because far-flung parts of the parish were open to development by I-10. The electric sign stayed on until, finally, Hurricane Andrew's winds blew out the neon lights altogether in 1992.

Interest in restoring it was shown in 2002, when Entergy, Coca-Cola, the Downtown Development District, the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge and the Downtown Merchants Association collabo-



# LEAD IN



## DESIGN FACT

The Coca-Cola logo is in Spencerian script, a style that was popular from 1850 to 1925. The font was the de facto writing style for business correspondence before the widespread adoption of the typewriter. In 1840, Platt Rogers Spencer designed Spencerian script, an oval-based font. It was quick to write for business correspondence and elegant enough for personal letters. Spencer started a school to teach the script. His graduates opened branches of their own to spread the style around the world. Ford Motor Co.'s logo is in Spencerian.

rated to refurbish the billboard. Jones Electric Signs of Denham Springs was paid \$28,000 to replace old transponders and install new neon. Building owners Jocelyn and Elvin Richoux donated the sign to the Arts Council and contributed \$100 per month in lease payments for assistance and upkeep, while Entergy covered the cost of power.

A recent dispute over who owns the antique sign led to its unplugging, until October.

Coca-Cola Corp. could not trace the history of the sign, but folklore tells us that it may be the only sign of its kind left in the country. Others have been destroyed by time, and one was converted from neon to LED lights.

—Mukul Verma

## CORRECTION:

Ms. Ellen Fuoto and Mr. John Rasi were members of the Foundation in 2015. We apologize for not including them in our annual report in the third quarter 2015 issue of *Currents*.



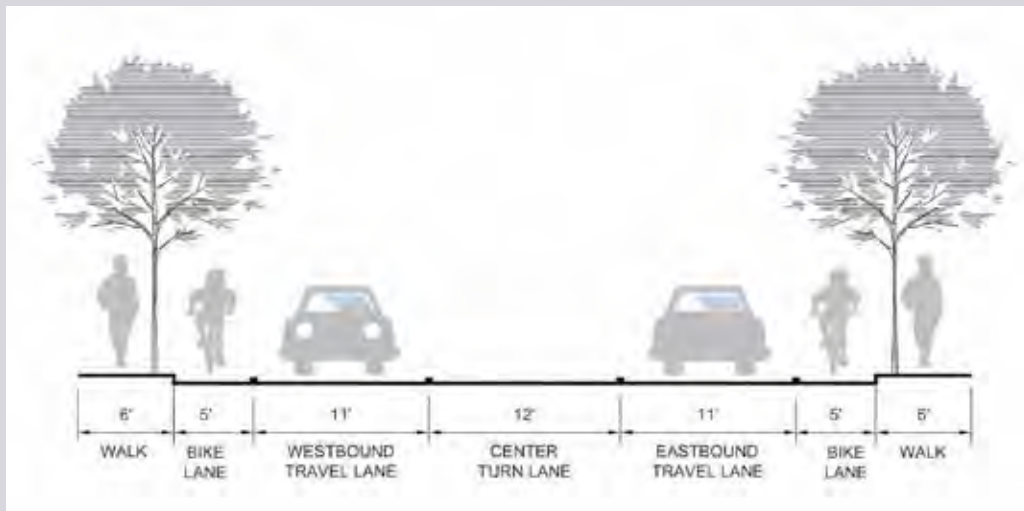
**WATER CAMPUS RISING** The Water Campus is rising. Construction workers are pouring foundations and welding metal beams for two buildings—a headquarter for Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and for the LSU Center for River Studies—and soon will be pounding pilings for the main office of The Water Institute of the Gulf on the old city dock. A fourth building and parking garage with housing high enough to peek over the levee are expected to begin this year. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and its real estate management firm, Commercial Properties Realty Trust, is building the 1.2-million-square-foot Water Campus. On the edge of an expanded downtown—bounded by Nicholson Drive, the Mississippi River, the I-10 bridge and Oklahoma Street—the Water Campus is a 35-acre development for scientists, engineers and others solving water issues for coasts in Louisiana and the world. More information is at [TheWaterCampus.org](http://TheWaterCampus.org).



**RIVER SONG** In its own way, the Mississippi River sings a song. In 2018, you'll be able to sing along. San Francisco artist Po Shu Wang's sculpture on the Mississippi Riverfront at Florida Street will use electronics to interpret the height and speed of the river into music for visitors to "sing along" by either touching buttons or actually singing. The public art—three shiny metal spheres, the tallest 14 feet—will be a gift of the Rotary Club of Baton Rouge, which has raised more than \$350,000 for the piece as part of its Centennial Celebration. A Rotary Club committee chose Wang's entry from more than 150 submissions.



**LSU GATEWAY PROJECT** The LSU Property Foundation has picked two finalists from 10 submissions for the Nicholson Gateway Project, a 28-acre project that will reshape the university. American Campus Communities of Austin and RISE Real Estate of Valdosta, Ga., are negotiating with the LSU Property Foundation, which will pick a winner from them in spring. The chosen firm will build housing for students and staff, restaurant and retail space from Skip Bertman Drive to East Chimes Street. The LSU Foundation building, pictured above, is already under construction there. LSU wants to build 1,600 beds and 50,000 square feet of retail in the project. “The Nicholson Gateway project, focused on the largest underdeveloped tract of university-owned property that is adjacent to the campus core, will turn what has traditionally been the back of the campus into an exciting new gateway district,” the university says in a news release.



Proposed 3-lane with bike lanes

**GOVERNMENT STREET ROAD DIET PROGRESSES** Motorists play bumper cars on Government Street. Trying their best to compress time, they switch at high speed to lanes with less traffic, making the road among the most dangerous in East Baton Rouge Parish. About 270 crashes per year occur on the road. Engineering firm Stantec estimates about half the crashes will be eliminated when the road is reconfigured by its owner, the State of Louisiana. But many of the people who reside in the area are more delighted by the secondary benefits—a more prosperous and livable area.

The state and the parish held a meeting in December to elicit community response on a proposal to improve Government Street.

More than 200 people saw that the designs would reduce the road from four to three lanes: one lane each way with a center turn lane, flanked with bike paths along most of the road from downtown to where it ends at Lobdell Avenue. Planted medians would ensure turning lanes are safer in dangerous spots. The bike lane would be diverted to Capital Heights near busy Foster Drive, and a roundabout would improve traffic flow at the intersection of Government and Lobdell Avenue, at Independence Park. The state will pay for most of the \$12 million rehab before transferring ownership to the city-parish. No schedule has been set to begin construction on the 4.2-mile thoroughfare.

# CIVIC PROJECTS



## THRIVE ACADEMY RELOCATING, EXPANDING

THRIVE Academy has started building a 43,000-square-foot student dormitory and renovating a building for classrooms on Brightside Drive. THRIVE, a boarding charter school, is financing the \$11.5 million initiative with a combination of grants and public and private financing.

THRIVE will expand to educate 160 students when the new dorm and classrooms open in the upcoming school year. The school now serves 110 at-risk East Baton Rouge schoolchildren attending 6th through 10th grades. THRIVE plans to add a second dorm and more classrooms within three years to teach up to 350 students in a middle and high school.

Sarah Broome, a Teach For America alumna, opened THRIVE in 2011. Since then, the school has proven its model; smaller classes and extended schooldays result in soaring achievement scores for EBR students. The children live at the school during the week, taking afterschool enrichment lessons and assisting in chores. They spend weekends at home.

**The Baton Rouge Area Foundation provided advice on philanthropy and finance to THRIVE, and the Foundation and our donors have granted nearly \$1 million to the charter school.**

The school will shift from its current location at the Family and Youth Services Center on Government Street near Interstate 10 to open at the new location in August 2016. THRIVE paid \$1.2 million to the Diocese of Baton Rouge for 7.4 acres on Brightside. The former Catholic Deaf Center on site will be renovated for classrooms and THRIVE will lease space for sports program.





## AUTOMOTIVE TRAINING CENTER

83,000 square feet; 2 fully-equipped diesel labs, 3 industry standard diagnostic / technical Labs, 6 classrooms, 100-seat auditorium.

The first of at least three education facilities are nearly complete in one of the most unique developments in the country. Baton Rouge Community College will open an automotive training center in fall within Ardenale, a mixed-use development by the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority that makes it unique because education will be its anchor. EBR Schools is building a career high school and BRCC will add an allied health training center, all on North Lobdell, where the Automotive Training Center is almost completed. Other training facilities are being considered, as is housing, retail and offices mingled with greenspace. The first three training centers total more than \$50 million in public investment.







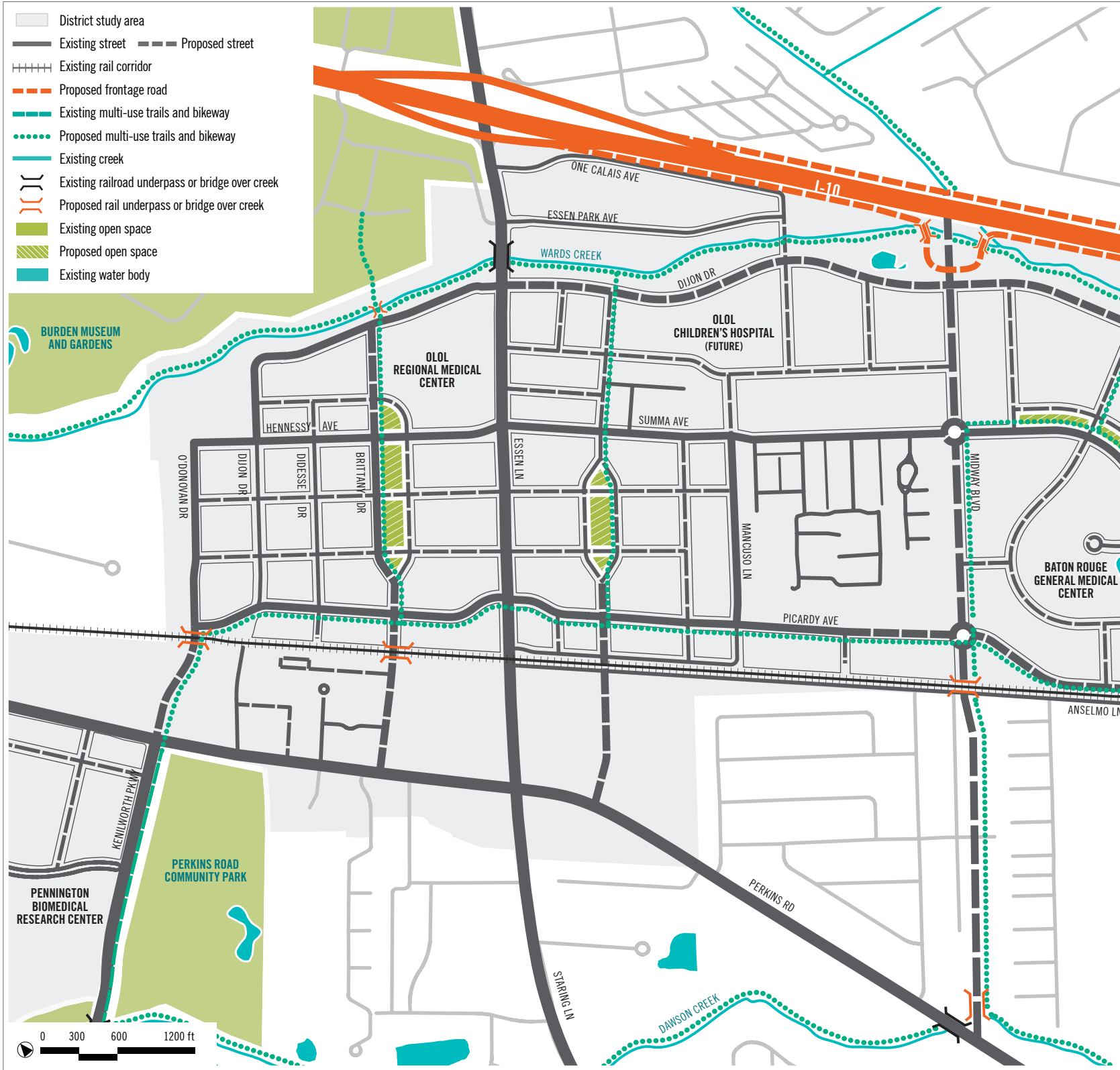




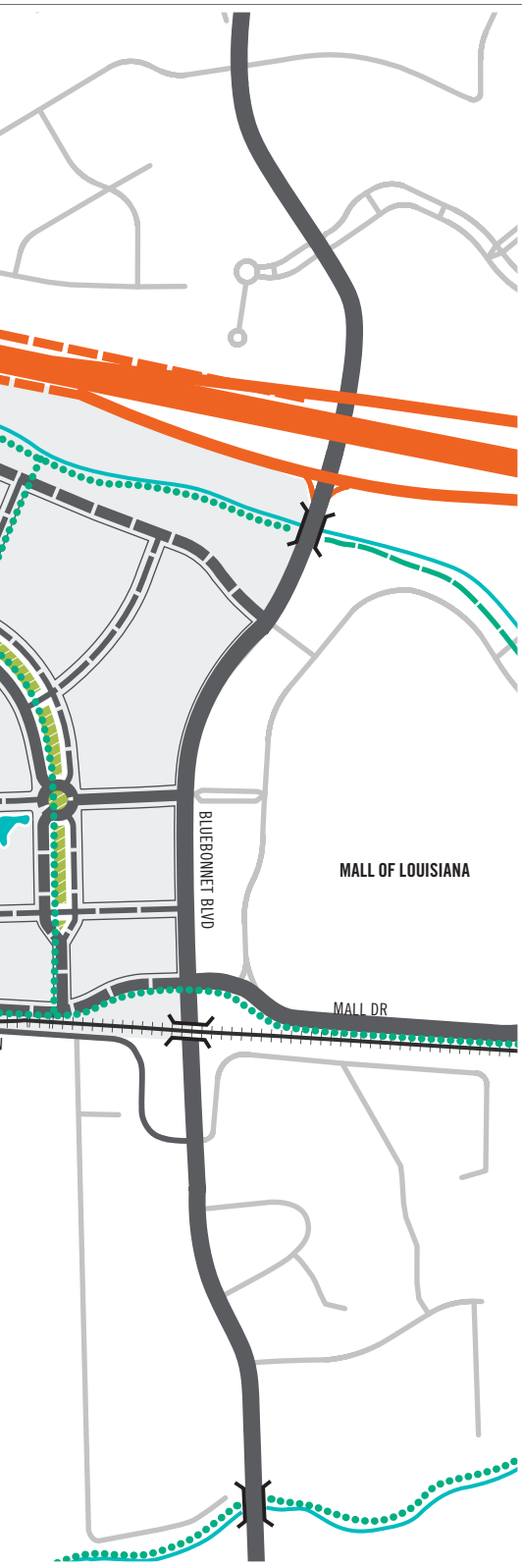
## **RDA SEEKS DEVELOPERS**

In early spring, the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority will seek developers interested in reinventing the former Entergy buildings in Mid City. Entergy donated the industrial buildings and six acres to the RDA. The redevelopment is predicted to spark more projects along and around Government. The RDA wants to pick a developer by summer and have a project underway before the end of this year.

Photo by Tim Mueller







**HEALTH DISTRICT MASTER PLAN RELEASED** In December, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation released a master plan for the Health District, a prescription for a thriving but congested area where more health care assets will be under construction soon.

Among its central recommendations are building new roads and upgrading infrastructure to improve circulation, expanding the Baton Rouge branch of LSU’s School of Medicine in New Orleans, opening a Diabetes and Obesity Center and creating a new nonprofit to implement the plan itself.

The Foundation was asked to create a more detailed plan for the health corridor by the FuturEBR Implementation Team, a group of government and civic leaders who are overseeing the application of the overarching growth plan for East Baton Rouge Parish. The corridor was chosen for a more detailed plan because the area needs retrofitting to improve traffic on Bluebonnet, Perkins Road and Essen Lane, where health care assets are clustered and hundreds of millions in new buildings are planned, including a new Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital and an expansion of the Baton Rouge General’s Bluebonnet campus into a health, wellness and lifestyle destination.

The Foundation paid for the \$700,000 plan and created it in a collaboration with health care leaders, consultants and residents. On the planning team were top leaders of Baton Rouge General, OLOL, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana, Ochsner Health Systems, Woman’s Hospital, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, LSU Health Sciences, and a number of clinics and specialty care providers, as well as decision-makers from local and state government.

Four key recommendations emerged from the plan.

1. Form an independent nonprofit to seek opportunities and implement the master plan. Health care leaders have taken this step by forming the Baton Rouge Health District. They are jointly funding operations and seeking the nonprofit’s first executive director.
2. Update and retrofit the infrastructure. Build new roads, sidewalks and paths to reduce traffic and offer transportation choices, while integrating parks to promote better health. Key recommendations include adding a new road, Midway Boulevard, between and parallel to Essen and Bluebonnet; extending Dijon Drive across Essen to Bluebonnet; rerouting Picardy Avenue; extending Kenilworth Parkway into the Health District; and building railroad underpasses so ambulances won’t have to wait for trains.
- At a press conference to release the plan, Mayor Kip Holden announced a project that is recommended in the blueprint. Using federal and city funds, the parish will build a \$23 million four-lane extension of Dijon Drive along I-10 to its connection with Bluebonnet Boulevard. A four-lane boulevard, Dijon would provide access to the future OLOL Children’s Hospital and disperse traffic away from Baton Rouge General’s main campus when it opens in 2019.
3. Expand the Baton Rouge branch of LSU’s School of Medicine in New Orleans in the Health District to match rising demand for physicians, while offering a unique curriculum that doesn’t compete with existing LSU medical schools. The Foundation has hired Tripp-Umbach to produce a feasibility and economic impact study for the four-year medical school by summer 2016. Consultants are examining an engineering-based medical program that offers master’s and doctoral degrees in bio-innovation and are researching innovative new funding sources.
4. Open a Diabetes and Obesity Center that conducts research and provides services, such as health checkups and monitoring and nutrition and exercise advice.

For a copy of the complete plan, visit [BRHealthDistrict.org](http://BRHealthDistrict.org) or [BRAf.org](http://BRAf.org).

# PHILANTHROPY

## VERBATIM

*“What’s the most pressing issue of our time? It really is ending poverty in the world. And we know to do that you have to put women and girls at the center.”*

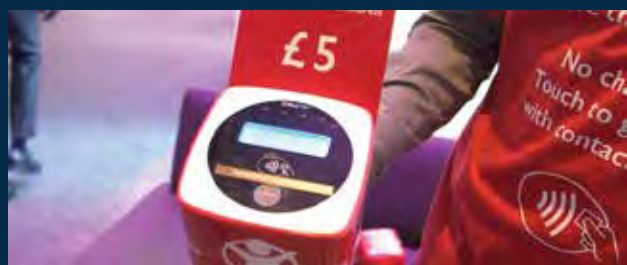
—Melinda Gates, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

*“I don’t know the important issues necessarily 50 years from now. I do know what I consider the important issues now. And I know some terrific people who operate in those fields. Everything I have will be spent within 10 years after the closing of my estate. There will be plenty of philanthropists 10, 20, 50, 100 years from now. They can look at the problems of that day and the people of that day and pick out the best managers.”*

—Warren Buffett, chairman and CEO, Berkshire Hathaway, in Forbes



**2.5 MILLION BOXES** Girl Scout cookies sold online in 2015, the first time digital sales were tried by the organization. Girl Scouts sold 194 million total boxes last year. This year, Visa and Dell are investing \$3 million to update the Girl Scouts’ digital cookie platform. The site includes games, videos and music and lessons in math and technology to draw more girls into studying technology. Membership for GSA has been declining. Girls Scouts numbered 1.88 million in 2015, down from 2.1 million three years ago, reports the *New York Times*. One problem: some are complaining about selling cookies instead of doing activities.



**NO CASH, NO EXCUSE** The collection bucket is going high-tech in England. Bell ringers of the Salvation Army and other charities this year will begin accepting digital donations through “contactless collection tins.” Brits would donate to causes by waving their debit or credit cards over the devices, which are being developed by the UK Cards Association with major charities, including Cancer Research UK. In the UK, cash transactions account for less than one in every four pounds of retail spending.



# GRANTS

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation's fund donors make thousands of grants from their charitable accounts. Grants for the fourth quarter of 2015 are listed below. They total \$5.7 million.

If you wish to learn more about opening a charitable fund at the 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 fund and make grants on your behalf. Contributions to charitable funds are tax deductible.

Academic Distinction Fund \$51,100  
Academy of the Sacred Heart New Orleans Foundation Inc. \$12,000  
Acts of Love Inc. \$1,700  
Adult Literacy Advocates of Greater Baton Rouge \$5,120  
AFS Intercultural Programs Inc. \$250  
Agenda for Children - New Orleans \$500  
Ainsley's Angels of America \$4,000  
ALS Association Louisiana-Mississippi Chapter \$5,000  
Alzheimer's Services of the Capital Area \$13,053  
American Cancer Society Inc. \$1,500  
American Heart Association Greater Southeast Affiliate \$32,333  
AMIkids \$10,000  
Annunciation Orthodox School \$3,000  
Arkansas Baptist College \$33,000  
Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$16,606  
Arts Council of New Orleans \$10,000  
Ascension of Our Lord Catholic Church \$7,500  
Audubon Nature Institute Inc. \$1,650  
Backstreet Cultural Museum \$1,000  
Ballet Acadiana Inc. \$5,000  
Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre Inc. \$10,000  
Baton Rouge Christian Education Foundation / The Dunham School \$80,286  
Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center \$16,680  
Baton Rouge Green Association Inc. \$15,222  
Baton Rouge High School Foundation \$100  
Baton Rouge Opera Guild Inc. \$1,462  
Baton Rouge Regional Eye Bank Inc. \$15,000  
Baton Rouge Speech and Hearing Foundation Inc. \$11,348  
Baton Rouge Sponsoring Committee \$1,000  
Baton Rouge Youth Coalition \$60,500  
Be the Change Inc. \$50,000  
Best Friends Animal Society \$400  
Bevill State Community College \$1,000  
Beyond Batten Disease Foundation \$1,000  
Bishop Ott Works of Mercy Trust/Cath Diocese \$187

Boy Scouts of America Istroma Area Council \$1,000  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$5,000  
BREADA (Big River Economic & Agricultural Development Alliance) \$11,550  
Breakthrough New Orleans \$1,000  
Broadmoor United Methodist Church \$5,000  
Broadway Cares-Equity Fights AIDS Inc. \$2,500  
Building Excellent Schools Inc. \$10,000  
Campus Crusade for Christ Inc. / Family Life \$5,000  
Cancer Services of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$52,133  
Capital Area Alliance for the Homeless \$2,500  
Capital Area Animal Welfare Society \$306  
Capital Area Family Violence Intervention Center \$2,400

## 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.

Capital Area United Way \$142,400  
Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans \$5,000  
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans \$315,000  
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Inc. \$10,000  
Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge/Bishop's Annual Appeal \$2,900  
Catholic High School Foundation \$7,790  
Catholic Relief Services Inc. \$1,000  
Catholic Youth Organization of Baton Rouge \$500  
Center for Planning Excellence Inc. \$65,500  
Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc./McMains

Children's Develo \$6,500  
 Charity Global Inc. \$7,500  
 Chatfield College \$1,000  
 Children's Cup \$1,000  
 Chinese Christian Church of Baton Rouge \$285  
 Christ the King Evangelical Lutheran Church \$2,000  
 Christ the King Parish and Catholic Center at LSU \$11,163  
 City Year Baton Rouge \$18,500  
 Coalition for Louisiana Progress Inc. \$2,000  
 Communities in Schools New Orleans Inc. \$17,000  
 Community Fund for the Arts \$1,000  
 Community Initiatives Foundation \$1,000  
 Companion Animal Alliance \$40,000  
 Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge \$12,350  
 Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph Inc. \$1,100  
 Contemporary Arts Center \$10,000  
 Covenant House New Orleans \$2,500  
 Crippled Children Foundation \$500  
 Cross Way Christian Center \$1,200  
 Cumberland Center Inc. \$500,000  
 David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies \$10,000  
 Dawson School \$1,000  
 Dermott Baptist Church \$500  
 Deutsche Samstagsschule Houston Inc. \$1,500  
 Diocese of Little Rock \$2,000  
 Doctors Without Borders USA Inc. \$2,500  
 Douglas Manship Sr. Theatre Complex Holding Inc. \$18,299  
 Dyslexia Association of Greater Baton Rouge \$603  
 East Baton Rouge Parish Council on Aging Inc. \$2,750  
 East Baton Rouge Parish Library \$2,923  
 East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority \$40,000  
 Ecorise Youth Innovations \$1,000  
 Eden House \$1,000  
 Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion \$6,000  
 Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge \$253,803  
 Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre \$1,200  
 Family Service of Greater Baton Rouge \$100  
 Father Flanagan's Boys Home \$300  
 First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge \$1,287  
 First United Methodist Church \$10,050  
 Foundation for a Better Louisiana \$5,500  
 Foundation for East Baton Rouge School System \$500  
 Foundation for Excellence in Louisiana Public Broadcasting \$2,000  
 Foundation for Historical Louisiana Inc. \$5,325  
 Foundation for Woman's \$47,334  
 French Camp Academy \$1,000  
 French Heritage Society \$150  
 Friends of Cantera Inc. \$2,500  
 Friends of Hilltop Arboretum Inc. \$2,850  
 Friends of Louisiana Public Broadcasting Inc. \$13,455  
 Friends of Magnolia Mound \$8,000  
 Friends of Rosedown Inc. \$1,000  
 Friends of the Baton Rouge Zoo \$1,000

Friends of the Louisiana State Archives \$100  
 Friends of the Oakley Plantation \$100  
 GaitWay Therapeutic Horsemanship \$8,000  
 Gardere Community Christian School \$3,000  
 General Health Foundation \$7,980  
 Girl Scouts Louisiana East \$7,325  
 Girl Scouts-Audubon Council Inc. \$150  
 Good Fellows - Good Samaritans Inc. \$200  
 Grace Episcopal Church \$500  
 Grant's Gift Foundation Support Fund \$500  
 Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership Inc. \$50,000  
 Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank Inc. \$10,250  
 Greater Baton Rouge Hope Academy \$500  
 Greater Mount Canaan Baptist Church \$400  
 Greater New Orleans Educational Television Foundation \$1,200  
 Groton School \$25,000  
 GW Catholics \$500  
 Habitat for Humanity of Greater Baton Rouge \$3,000  
 Hampden-Sydney College \$250  
 Harding Academy \$5,000  
 Hargrove Foundation \$1,000  
 Harmony Church of Bartlett \$50,000  
 Hathaway Brown School \$1,000  
 Hattiesburg Civic Chorus and Concert Association Inc. \$5,000  
 Healing Place Church \$2,500  
 Health Net Foundation Inc. \$500  
 Hole in the Wall Gang Fund Inc. \$1,500  
 Holy Family Catholic Church \$11,454  
 Hope Landing \$1,000  
 HOPE Ministries of Baton Rouge \$300  
 HOPE Ministry of Pointe Coupee Inc. \$1,600  
 Hospice Foundation of Greater Baton Rouge \$41,394  
 Houston Chamber Choir \$2,000  
 Houston Symphony Society \$2,000  
 Iberville Foundation for Academic Excellence \$5,704  
 International Center for Journalists Inc. \$5,000  
 International Hospitality Foundation LSU \$1,563  
 International Society for Krishna Consciousness of New Orleans \$3,753  
 Isidore Newman School \$2,500  
 Jack and Jill of America Foundation Inc. \$5,000  
 James Dick Foundation for the Performing Arts \$1,000  
 Jewish Family Service of New Orleans \$1,000  
 Julius Freyhan Foundation \$100  
 Junior Achievement of Greater Baton Rouge and Acadiana \$1,940  
 Junior League of Baton Rouge Inc. \$500  
 Just Cause LA Inc. \$5,500  
 Kappa Alpha Order Educational Foundation \$100  
 Karnival Krewe de Louisiane \$1,000  
 Kenyon College \$1,000  
 Kids' Orchestra Inc. \$1,500  
 Knock Knock Children's Museum \$6,870  
 Lighthouse for the Blind in New Orleans Inc. \$1,500  
 Louise S. McGehee School \$500



Louisiana Art and Science Museum Inc. \$26,877  
 Louisiana Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross \$1,406  
 Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities \$1,000  
 Louisiana Environmental Action Network \$5,000  
 Louisiana Landmarks Society Inc. \$100  
 Louisiana Naval War Memorial Commission \$30,000  
 Louisiana Public Health Institute \$118,040  
 Louisiana Resource Center for Educators \$20,100  
 Louisiana State Assembly on School Based Health Care \$750  
 Louisiana State University and A&M College \$3,000  
 Louisiana Success \$7,500  
 Louisiana Symphony Association/Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra \$41,537  
 Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation \$50,000  
 Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation \$300  
 LSU Alumni Association \$2,500  
 LSU Foundation \$399,716  
 LSU Foundation - Burden Horticultural Society \$3,000  
 LSU Foundation - College of Agriculture \$5,000  
 LSU Foundation - College of Art & Design \$1,000  
 LSU Foundation - LSU Museum of Art \$18,150  
 LSU Foundation - LSU Press \$10,000  
 LSU Foundation - Manship School of Mass Communication \$1,000  
 LSU Foundation - Paul M. Hebert Law Center \$1,000  
 LSU Foundation - School of Social Work \$250  
 LSU Foundation - T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History \$250  
 LSUF - University Lab School Foundation \$13,250  
 Maison des Ami of Louisiana Inc. \$500  
 Mantle of Mary Inc. \$1,800  
 March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation, South Louisiana Chapter \$5,000  
 Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center \$152,050  
 McLindon Family Foundation \$1,500  
 McNeese State University Foundation \$2,000  
 MetroMorphosis \$21,500  
 Mid City Redevelopment Alliance Inc. \$1,100  
 Mission of Our Lady of Mercy \$400  
 Muscular Dystrophy Association \$500  
 Museum of Fine Arts Houston \$1,000  
 National Alliance for the Mentally Ill \$100  
 National Foundation of Dentistry For the Handicapped \$5,000  
 National World War II Museum Inc. \$21,000  
 Nature Conservancy of Louisiana \$113,492  
 New Orleans Bayou Steppers Social Aid and Pleasure Club \$10,000  
 New Orleans Film and Video Festival Inc. \$2,500  
 New Orleans Mission Inc. \$200  
 New Orleans Musicians Assistance Foundation \$25,000  
 New Orleans Opera Association \$6,500  
 New Orleans Photo Alliance \$100  
 New Schools for Baton Rouge \$10,000  
 Oakland Public Education Fund \$1,076  
 O'Brien House Inc. \$6,400  
 Ochsner Health System \$3,000

Of Moving Colors Productions \$1,200  
 Old State Capitol Associates \$100  
 Old State Capitol Foundation Inc. \$150  
 Ollie Steele Burden Manor Inc. \$849  
 Omicron Delta Kappa Foundation Inc. \$100  
 Opera Louisiane Inc. \$2,700  
 Operation Homefront \$2,250  
 Orange Coast Foursquare Church \$10,000  
 Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church \$1,000  
 Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School \$5,500  
 Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church \$35,184  
 Our Lady of the Lake Children's Hospital \$21,200  
 Our Lady of the Lake College \$1,000  
 Our Lady of the Lake Foundation \$16,800  
 Outdoor Ministry to the Disadvantaged Fund \$10,000  
 Particular Council of St. Vincent de Paul of Baton Rouge Louisiana \$3,000  
 Partnership for Philanthropic Planning Inc. \$500  
 Peggy Crosby Community Service Center \$800  
 Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation \$112,500  
 Phillips Exeter Academy \$2,000  
 Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast \$25,000  
 Pointe Coupee Early Childhood Coalition Inc. \$15,100  
 Pointe Coupee Historical Society Inc. \$100  
 Pointe Coupee Parish Police Jury \$250  
 Port Allen Educational Broadcasting Foundation \$300  
 Poydras Home \$4,000  
 Preservation Alliance of New Orleans \$100  
 Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana Inc. \$2,000  
 Prison Fellowship Ministries \$100  
 Project HOPE \$1,000  
 Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana Inc. \$1,000  
 Pulaski Academy \$5,000  
 Rebuilding Together Baton Rouge \$5,150  
 Red Shoes Inc. \$2,000  
 Rocketkidz Foundation Incorporated \$5,000  
 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation \$500  
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge \$104,898  
 Roots of Music Inc. \$25,000  
 Rotary Club of Baton Rouge Inc. Foundation \$600  
 S S C Progression Corp / St. Stanislaus College \$300  
 Sacred Heart School \$200  
 Saint Jean Vianney Catholic Church \$2,362  
 Saint Joseph's Abbey \$1,000  
 Share Our Strength \$25,000  
 Shriners Hospital for Children \$300  
 Single Stop USA Inc. \$225,000  
 Sisters of the Holy Family Motherhouse & Novitiate \$20,000  
 Southeastern Louisiana Area Health Education Center Foundation \$10,000  
 Southeastern Louisiana University \$1,000  
 Southern Rep \$40,000  
 Southern University System Foundation Inc. \$1,000

Spring Hill College \$50,000  
 St. Agnes Catholic Church \$5,000  
 St. Aloysius Church \$12,750  
 St. Andrew's - Sewanee School \$250  
 St. Anne Catholic Church \$1,947  
 St. Augustine Church \$877  
 St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School \$2,000  
 St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church \$1,000  
 St. Elizabeth Foundation \$1,000  
 St. Francis de Sales School \$2,000  
 St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church \$3,000  
 St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church \$1,000  
 St. Francisville Area Foundation Inc. \$100  
 St. George Episcopal School \$250  
 St. Gerard Majella Church \$10,500  
 St. James Episcopal Church \$13,000  
 St. James Episcopal Day School \$6,210  
 St. James Place of Baton Rouge Foundation Inc. \$250  
 St. Joseph Cathedral \$2,800  
 St. Joseph Seminary College \$500  
 St. Joseph Spirituality Center \$500  
 St. Joseph the Worker Church \$5,667  
 St. Joseph's Academy \$7,500  
 St. Joseph's Academy Foundation \$3,000  
 St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Inc. \$2,300  
 St. Luke's Episcopal Day School \$551  
 St. Mary's Church \$100  
 St. Mary's Episcopal Church \$500  
 St. Mary's Episcopal Church and Cemetery Association Inc. \$200  
 St. Paul Adult Learning Center \$3,000  
 St. Paul's Holy Trinity Episcopal Church \$15,864  
 St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School \$13,512  
 St. Thomas by the Sea Catholic Church \$750  
 Stuart Hall School for Boys \$12,100  
 Swine Palace Productions Inc. \$3,000  
 Teach For America - South Louisiana \$17,600  
 Texas Baptist Men \$5,000  
 The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund / Tulane University \$14,000  
 The Ascension Fund \$16,149  
 The Baddour Center Inc. \$1,000  
 The Bascom Corporation \$5,000  
 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University \$500  
 The Cahoon Museum of American Art Inc. \$1,000  
 The Christian Outreach Center of Baton Rouge, Inc. \$1,287  
 The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina \$1,500  
 The Endowment for Opera Louisiane \$10,146  
 The Foundation for Outdoor Advertising Research and Education \$5,000  
 The Friends of the Rural Life Museum Inc. \$1,100  
 The Fund for LSU Press \$900  
 The Glen Big Baby Davis Foundation \$500  
 The JL Foundation \$2,500

The Life of a Single Mom \$5,000  
 The Louisiana International Film Festival \$10,000  
 The Ogden Museum of Southern Art Inc. \$10,000  
 The Original Richland Library Restoration Society Inc. \$799  
 The Salvation Army \$4,600  
 The University of Mississippi \$500  
 THRIVE Baton Rouge \$1,000  
 Trinity Episcopal Church \$30,036  
 Trinity Episcopal School Endowment Trust II \$500  
 Triumph Kitchen \$12,000  
 Tulane Alumni Association \$1,136  
 Tulane Law School / Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy \$50,000  
 Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge \$500  
 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Sacred Heart Catholic Church \$500  
 University of Alabama at Birmingham \$1,000  
 University of New Orleans Foundation \$1,000  
 University of Richmond \$250  
 University of South Alabama \$140,736  
 University of the Cumberland \$300  
 University of the South \$12,500  
 University Presbyterian Church \$22,250  
 University School \$1,000  
 US Biennial Inc. \$25,000  
 Vanderbilt Catholic High School \$2,000  
 Veterans of Foreign Wars Foundation \$300  
 Volunteers In Public Schools Inc. \$51,300  
 Wallace State Community College \$1,000  
 Water Institute of the Gulfs Delta \$311,250  
 Wellesley College \$250,000  
 West Baton Rouge Foundation for Academic Excellence \$11,254  
 West Feliciana Historical Foundation \$100  
 West Feliciana Historical Society \$125  
 William Carey University \$500  
 Williams, Lora \$1,000  
 Willwoods Community \$500  
 Wounded Warrior Project Inc. \$800  
 WRKF Public Radio Inc. \$11,455  
 Yale University \$1,000  
 YMCA of the Capital Area \$150  
 Young Aspirations/Young Artists Inc. \$25,000  
 Young Life Baton Rouge \$3,000  
 Young Life New Orleans \$25,000  
 YWCA of Greater Baton Rouge \$3,000



# Some people *just get it.*

They are members of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. With them, the Foundation has accelerated civic projects. In the last year alone, we completed a master plan for the Baton Rouge Lakes, and another for the Baton Rouge Health District.

A blueprint for a treatment center for the mentally ill is almost completed. So is a road map to improve services for people with Autism

Help us move even faster. Join the Foundation at [BRAf.org/membership](https://braf.org/membership) or call 225.387.6126. Memberships start at \$100.

*Baton Rouge  
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NONPROFIT







# Inside *out loud*

*New South Story Lab  
and its founder help local  
students hone their unique  
creative voices*

By Jeff Roedel | Photos by Tim Mueller

A warm, familiar cracking sound escapes the pages as Virginia Archer opens a volume that is textbook thick and nearly as wide as her corner table inside Highland Coffees.

Looking past a vividly inked scarf, Archer flips from her baby pictures on the opening spread to a full collage dedicated to a still-popular heartthrob by page 4. “Yeah, I had a Johnny Depp phase,” she admits, releasing a laugh much larger than her petite frame while letting her eyes linger in curiosity over the scrapbook she pieced together long ago, once upon a time, in the 1990s. “This was just my life story at that point—I was documenting *everything*.”

For the impeccably composed tutor, mentor and creative writer, this is a rare look into her more random seek-and-find teenage years. She created the book to help make sense of it all. The panic of choosing that just-right homecoming dress, the unexplored edges of a surreal Beatles lyric, the explosive rush of the big football game, and, yes, the perfection and promise of Depp’s smoky gaze.

It’s the brimming boil of youth, the same emotionally charged and mysterious pieces of life that Archer’s young pupils navigate each and every day.

More than a year ago, the now-30-year-old Meridian, Miss., native founded New South Story Lab, a Baton Rouge-based nonprofit focused on helping area students journey further down the creative paths on which they've already taken their first tentative steps.

According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 93% of teens write for their own pleasure. To give support to this inherent desire, Archer has created free project-based workshops and extracurricular classes, arts-focused events and one-on-one apprenticeships with professionals.

New South Story Lab's goal is to foster storytelling through the arts and supplement primary education by providing young learners with more opportunities to do, make and speak, to find that voice inside and let it out.

To do that, New South has partnered with, among others, the nationally recognized childhood development nonprofit Pathways, the University Lab School, and a network of local homeschool students, for a myriad of projects and art shows.

Martha Guarisco, an English teacher at Episcopal School, sits on the group's board.

"New South Story Lab is filling a hole that's been apparent to me for a long time," Guarisco says. "There isn't nearly enough time within a language arts curriculum to devote to creative storytelling, particularly as students get older. As kids learn to communicate for wider purposes, less and less time is given to narrative writing. That isn't a knock on language arts instruction; kids do need to be able to write informatively and analytically, but it's awfully hard to find one's voice through academic writing."

While students of New South hone their skills and focus on the specific stories they wish to tell, Archer's ambitions are expansive by comparison.

"I'm much more interested in their well-being than their creative excellence," she says. "Although for many students, those two things are completely connected."

For years Archer flirted with a career in teaching after graduating from LSU, though she never felt completely comfortable with the idea of fitting into the structure of traditional education.

Instead she connected with a local learning service and began tutoring students that schools had labeled with behavioral issues. Archer introduced them to a wellspring of the creative arts, through watching classic films, reading poetry, visiting art galleries and allowing them to respond to the masters with their own creations.

"These were the kids no one else had had much success with," Archer says. "A lot of the time, they would have a creative

## NEW SOUTH STORY LAB

**PURPOSE:** Foster storytelling through the arts and supplement primary education by providing young learners with more opportunities to do, make and speak.

**EVENTS:** New South Story Lab released its first student chapbook at a reception and reading in January. It will hold a screening of short student films on Feb. 13, starting at 4 p.m. at the main library on Goodwood Boulevard.

More information on the organization's programming and events is at [newsouthstorylab.org](http://newsouthstorylab.org).

impulse, but no outlet for it. They were sensitive and feeling life acutely. Helping them engage creatively proved to be therapeutic, and then those behavioral issues faded away."

New South's mission is not reforming poor behavior, but the ancillary effects of an art form explored and a mentor gained are a welcome benefit, Archer says. And in many ways, the nonprofit simply was Archer's way of formalizing and expanding her own previous passion and years of mentoring.

But it is Archer's gift of networking and collaboration that friends say is attracting a necessary variety of creative professionals to her cause.

Jessi Arnold, whose globetrotting photography has appeared in a variety of fine art shows, magazines and nonprofit efforts, calls Archer's passion infectious. A fashion and portrait photographer by trade, Arnold serves as a volunteer mentor through New South.

"I thought about how growing up I didn't have a lot of options to explore creatively or someone to guide me," Arnold says. "I was really excited to see that Virginia also saw that gap and decided to do something about it."

Many on the New South board are involved on the craft level and help make the workshops run, but Archer is someone who can walk on both sides of the nonprofit world, explains board





Joshua Marshall, 14, writes in his notebook before the start of a Story Lab class in the teen room of the East Baton Rouge Parish Main Library. New South Story Lab is an educational nonprofit organized to foster creative writing and filmmaking.

member Daniel Pena, a writer and native of Mexico City. He calls her the calmest energetic person he knows.

“Virginia can write curriculum and teach but she can also go out and make those connections in the community that keep New South Story Lab afloat,” Pena says. “Those people are rare. I think that’s why she’s as beloved by her students as she is in the Baton Rouge community.”

That community has opened its arms in the form of the East Baton Rouge Parish Public Library System. Archer holds her free creative writing workshops weekly in the Teen Room at the Main Branch Library on Goodwood Boulevard.

“It gives us an opportunity to contradict all the negative stereotypes about teenagers,” says Mary Stein, the library’s long-time assistant director. “The imagination and inventiveness displayed by these young writers is really wonderful, and the skills that are acquired and nurtured will always stand them in good stead, no matter what they study or what career path they take.”

As for Archer, her path as a teacher and creative is finally set, thanks to the energy galvanized by New South Story Lab. Her students have made short films and chapbooks filled with poetry

and short fiction, and developed all manner of visual content for their portfolios in an environment that is, by design, collaborative rather than competitive.

“We’d love to help our students become more successful nationally within art schools and top college art programs, but more than that we simply want to continue to create a safe and supportive space for these young people to be creative, and to help enrich local schools and support the parents of our creative young people.”

Archer is planning a move into a newly renovated space in Mid City later this year, a location she says will be suitable for workshops, film screenings, community forums, poetry readings and more.

“Until now it’s been very grassroots, but that’s been a beautiful, person-to-person thing. We’re so thankful for our volunteers, who really are driven not by profit but by sharing and communicating through their creativity.” •

# Child's play

*In five years, Baton Rouge nonprofit builds largest kids' orchestra in the country*

By Sara Bongiorno | Photos by Tim Mueller

**K**ids' Orchestra, the afterschool program that is transforming children's music-education in Baton Rouge, traces its roots in part to "60 Minutes."

That's what Nanette Noland was watching on a Sunday night five years ago when the CBS program aired a segment on Gustavo Dudamel, the artistic director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Dudamel credits Venezuela's publicly funded El Sistema music-education program for putting a violin in his hands at age 10 and beginning his rise to the global arts stage.

The segment struck a chord with Noland, whose rector at St. James Episcopal Church that morning had called on parishioners to do more to bridge the community's racial divide.

Noland got up the next morning and decided to start something similar in Baton Rouge. "This is about using music to build







teamwork, awareness and standards of excellence,” said Noland, who in addition to founding Kids’ Orchestra also serves as chair of its board of directors. “I wanted that for children here.”

Five years later, Kids’ Orchestra is the largest U.S. music program of its kind for children from kindergarten through fifth grade. By comparison, Dudamel’s program in L.A., a model for the one here, serves 600 children. A similar El Sistema-inspired program in San Antonio reaches 450 kids.

Twice a week during the school year, nearly 800 children with instruments on loan from Kids’ Orchestra gather in classrooms across the parish for instruction in classical instruments or to rehearse for one of the organization’s two choirs.

Kids’ Orchestra runs two summer camps in addition to three orchestras. It has more than 100 contract employees, including 74 professional musicians who teach the children. The nonprofit with seven full-time employees is the largest employer of music teachers in the community. It provides bus transportation and outfits the children in T-shirts for dozens of public performances across the city, including performances by its 200-member honors orchestra.

A sliding scale determines the cost of participation, as little as \$10 per semester in some cases. Twenty-six private and public schools participate. Lessons are held at 12 sites across the parish.

There are more than 100 children on its waiting list.

“There was nothing here like it five years ago,” said Jody Hanet, its executive director. “This fills a void.”

That void in large part has to do with music education in public schools. Hanet studied voice at LSU and taught music at schools in Arizona, New Jersey and New York before returning to Baton Rouge after more than 20 years away.

She says music is a bigger part of public education elsewhere. Poor funding and lagging understanding of the positive impact on academic performance, according to Hanet, have hampered public music education in Baton Rouge.

What isn’t lacking is talent. “I see more raw talent here than anywhere I’ve lived; children with talent that gives you goose bumps,” she says. “We have children hungry for music, but we haven’t fed that.”

Responding to longing and another sort of hunger—the real

## GIVING OPPORTUNITY

Nanette Noland grants money from her donor advised fund at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to support Kids’ Orchestra. She founded the nonprofit, which is the largest afterschool program of its kind in the nation. To contribute to Kids’ Orchestra, call Donor Services at 225.387.6126.

kind—is also a core function of Kids’ Orchestra. Its 90-minute sessions start with substantial nutritious snacks provided by Revolution Foods, a nonprofit child-nutrition program out of Metairie.

It offers still-heartier afternoon suppers through a partnership with the East Baton Rouge School District at some participating schools. The reason is simple: Many of the kids would go hungry otherwise.

Homework is another focus. On a recent Tuesday afternoon at

St. James Episcopal School, 43 children from St. James and nearby Dufroq Elementary hunker down over homework sheets and turkey sandwiches and apples as the first order of business.

The atmosphere is cheerfully controlled chaos, but as with the turkey sandwiches and apples there is something larger at work in setting aside time to nourish mind and body.

“Many of our children do not have an adult at home who asks about homework and helps them with it,” Hanet says. “We want them to understand that is something that they need to do every day.”

Only after the children have eaten and helped to clean up do they divide into smaller groups for 60-minute lessons in percussion, ball, violin, cello, flute and other instruments.

Abundant research shows that music education has a positive impact on academic achievement, including in reading and mathematics. Parents, teachers and principals tell Hanet that Kids’ Orchestra produces positive results among local children, including improved attendance and better self-esteem, although academic achievement is not a formal part of its mission.

“That wasn’t our focus, but we’re seeing that happening,” she says.

Hanet wants to bolster those anecdotes with concrete measures. To that end, researchers at the LSU School of Music are developing a case study to track the impact of Kids’ Orchestra participating on academic performance and social well-being. Additional ties to the music school include an internship program for graduate students now under development that will begin in the 2016-17 academic year.

Over time, Kids’ Orchestra could grow to about 1,200 students, Hanet says.

Expanding the program to additional schools and students is





*“This is about using music to build teamwork, awareness and standards of excellence.”*

—Nanette Noland, founder and chair of Kids’ Orchestra

on hold for now, however, to allow the organization to solidify its funding structure and develop a long-term funding mechanism.

Kids’ Orchestra currently relies chiefly on grants, donations and foundation support to cover the per-child cost of about \$1,000 a year. Nearly all of the children receive scholarships, with some families paying about \$600 for 28 weeks of music instruction, snacks and other elements of the program.

Noland says her expectations over Kids’ Orchestra have been surpassed again and again since she started it five years back. She sees huge benefits for the community, from less juvenile

delinquency to developing “the next Tchaikovsky or maybe Mick Jagger.”

She also says growing understanding of the program’s benefits to children will eventually inspire something even bigger than the fast-growing organization, although she doesn’t know what that might be.

“I do know this is something that can raise awareness of so many kinds, starting with awareness of each other among the children,” Noland says. “You come and see the children and you can see for yourself that that’s the case.” •

The Baton Rouge General has the only comprehensive burn center within a 250-mile radius. Many of its patients are driven—and in some cases flown by helicopter—to the facility from hours away.

# Best *of* care

*Baton Rouge General's  
Regional Burn Center impacts  
lives and families across the  
Gulf Coast with quality care*

By Jeff Roedel | Photos by Tim Mueller

Dr. Tracee Short meets with patient Lynel East Jr. at the Baton Rouge General Medical Center's Regional Burn Unit.







**I**t's just like a veteran doctor, a caregiver, to want to take an elderly patient by the hand before telling her something important.

Dr. Ernest Mencer looks like he wants to do just that as he listens to Betty Van Norman, now 88, recount her treatment in 2010 for severe, scalding burns.

With a knowing look in his eye, he leans closer for every word before cutting in when she pauses. These two fought a long war together, and the doctor stops short of physical contact to deliver a message not of sympathy, but admiration. After all, she has been through hell and back.

"You know," Mencer says softly. "You almost died—*twice*."

Van Norman does know. The nurses told her afterward. The first close call was early during recovery when her heart nearly stopped. Not long after, her breathing halted, too.

The spirited octogenarian who looks a decade younger than her years—she makes it a point to complain about being called "Miss Betty" by strangers starting at around 60—had fallen into a whirlpool tub in her home off Bluebonnet Boulevard. She and her husband were New Orleans ex-pats robbed of their home and possessions by the flood of Hurricane Katrina.

Van Norman's husband Gene (he is now deceased) was watching Monday Night Football in another part of the house and didn't hear her screams. They'd never even used that bathtub before and didn't know that the water temperature wasn't calibrated correctly.

When Van Norman attempted to pull herself up she grabbed the only thing she could reach, the knob on the faucet. Only scalding hot water came flooding out. She was trapped, burning, and she nearly drowned.

"I'm here because of what [Baton Rouge General] did," Van Norman says. "They have a staff and doctors there that you would not believe."

Van Norman was brought to Baton Rouge General's Regional Burn Center, where residents throughout the Gulf South have received world-class care for burn wounds for more than 40 years.

She remained at the General throughout her recovery. It included a complex set of multidisciplinary treatments includ-

ing multiple surgeries, intensive nutritional, physical and occupational therapy, pressure wraps on her burns and skin grafts—hers were extensive across her mid section—and pain management. Three months all told, and two near-death experiences.

"I felt jubilant" upon returning home, she recalls. "I had been through this terrible thing and made it. But I tell you my story from Baton Rouge General is not unique. They've helped so many."

Van Norman helps now, too. She returns regularly to the Burn Center as a mentor. She visits with current patients, and even relays her most intimate details.

"I always felt comfortable sharing my scars," she says. "They get less and less every year, but they are still obvious. It seems to brighten the patients up. It helps them see that you really can recover."

Mencer attributes Van Norman's positive state of mind to the hundred or so doctors, nurses, specialists, staff, counselors and volunteers that have touched her life since her accident.

"Burn trauma is one of the most devastating things a person can experience," says Mencer, who recently stepped down as director of the Burn Center, though he still serves on staff. "A great deal of perseverance is required over many years. There's emotional and psychological damage there."

The General has the only comprehensive regional burn center within a 250-mile radius, so many of its patients are driven—and in some cases flown by helicopter—to the facility from hours away.

*"I felt jubilant" upon returning home. "I had been through this terrible thing and made it. But I tell you my story from Baton Rouge General is not unique. They've helped so many."*

—Betty Van Norman

According to the American Burn Association, 73% of treated burns occur, like Van Norman's case, in the home. "Many of our burn patients have experienced industrial accidents, but surprisingly, the majority of injuries are caused by things that could happen to any of us around the house, like mishaps with scalds, cooking, space heaters, fireplaces, electrical wiring, gasoline fires, and fireworks," says Beth

Veazey, president of the Baton Rouge General Foundation.

Of the roughly 700 adults and children admitted to the Burn Center last year, only about 100 were industrial-related injuries. The Burn Center includes partnerships with LSU and Tulane for





Dr. Ernest Mencer looks over a patient's chart at the Baton Rouge General Medical Center's Regional Burn Unit.

burn research and developing new imaging techniques, outpatient care for treating less severe burns, a telemedicine program for long-distance checkups and a fully staffed outpatient clinic for both adults and children.

Three years ago, as his father Antoine was making pasta during a Saints game at home, two-year-old Ace Landry reached up on the kitchen counter and pulled down a hot pot of noodles on top of himself. The scalding heat penetrated the holes in his game jersey, searing his chest, and his parents rushed him to what was—shockingly, they say—the nearest burn unit, an hour-and-a-half away in Baton Rouge.

“He was just screaming,” says Ace’s mother Chauvon. “And I couldn’t hug him like he needed. Like *I* needed.”

However, Landry says the staff was incredibly skilled and honest about the challenges ahead, and that reassured her. They

also made gestures that reminded the Landrys that Ace was a person, not just a patient. They brought him T-shirts to wear—in addition to the compression shirts he needed through much of his treatment—and there were special deliveries of meals, popsicles and lemonade.

The Burn Center has a toy room, too, and Ace’s trips to play were like grand adventures away from the pain.

“I don’t know how we would have gotten through that without these nurses that went above and beyond,” Landry says. “If they’d just done the basic job, and that’s it, we would have struggled a lot.”

Dr. Tracee Short, Mencer’s successor as director of the Burn Center, says her facility’s success is due in large part to her staff’s longevity. There has been very little turnover for the past several years, and that consistency is beneficial to the kind of extended,

continual care given to families working through burn accidents.

Patients don't cease to be patients when they walk out of the Burn Center doors. Depression, anxiety and grief can be common among burn victims, and the General makes sure these challenges are addressed.

"The effect on the family is huge," Short says. "Most children don't remember those events, but the emotions of the family, guilt of the parents, fears, those are the lingering things we help them work through."

Short's staff prides itself on creating a warm, supportive atmosphere through every minute of a patient's treatment. Patients suffering from burns often stay at the hospital 30 days or more. And even after going home, treatment and therapy continues for quite some time, depending on the severity and location of the burns.

"It's not in and out," Landry says. "It's a long haul. Ace spent Christmas there—but they let us bring in a little Christmas tree for him. That was special."

Ace Landry is 5 now. And with a shirt on, you could never tell he was burned. His mom says he's as energetic and fun-loving as ever.

Every Mardi Gras season since the accident, Chauvon Landry has baked homemade king cakes and brought them to patients she doesn't even know, and to their moms as well.

Like Betty Van Norman sharing her story and baring her scars, and Chauvon Landry bringing a little Big Easy cheer, many others who have walked or been carried through the doors of the Baton Rouge General find unique ways to give back to the burn unit and its current patients, even years later.

Not because they have to, but because they want to. Those who were cared for so well by professionals are compelled to care for strangers in return. And even this simplest act of caring turns strangers into family. They hug. They hold hands. Skin to skin.

"Their burns may have occurred 20 or 30 years ago but they stay connected to Baton Rouge General," Veazey says. "You really feel the family aspect at our center among the patients and the staff."

When the pain seems too much, and a family doesn't believe it can overcome an accident, Baton Rouge General's Regional Burn Center staff is there to tell them they are wrong. Because family is kind of like skin. Tragedy can strike a family, but families heal. It's what they do best. •



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# COVER

# F

or nine years, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and select donors have awarded the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. Named after Mr. Gaines, who is among the greatest writers of his generation, the award supports African Americans writing fiction. Each winner is chosen by an independent panel of judges who are writers and teachers; the winner receives a \$10,000 cash prize. All the winners have continued their work, writing novels and short stories and teaching the next generation of writers.

This year's winner is T. Geronimo Johnson, whose winning novel—his second book—*Welcome to Braggsville* was named one of the best books of 2015 by *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *TIME Magazine*, NPR and other media organizations. The book also was long-listed for the National Book Award.

Johnson accepted the award in January at the Shaw Center for the Arts and taught students during the week leading up to the celebration.

*Currents* contributing writer Greg Langley talked with Johnson about writing and his winning novel.

## **CURRENTS: WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO WINNING THE GAINES AWARD?**

**Johnson:** I was very pleased and I was very honored. I'm a big fan of Mr. Gaines' work and, being from the South, it meant a lot to me to be recognized by the Foundation, in particular. So yeah I was very excited and very honored and I don't use those terms loosely.



A man with a beard and mustache, wearing a brown fedora-style hat and a blue textured blazer over a brown polo shirt, is sitting and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

# T. Geronimo Johnson,

*in his own words*

**YOU ADOPTED THE VOICE OF A *WHITE GEORGIAN*, AND YOU'RE BLACK AND YOU'RE FROM NEW ORLEANS. WHERE DID THE INSPIRATION FOR THAT CHARACTER COME FROM?**

I don't know that there was a single source of inspiration. I had initially conceived the main character as being African-American, but in the early stages of the drafting process, that presented a couple of problems. The first was that it was going to become a story of racial becoming that would have been too similar to my first novel (*Hold It 'Til It Hurts*), and I didn't want to feel like I was writing my first novel a second time. Second, when I started working through the story, I had a difficult time piecing together an African-American character who would have drawn the same assumptions or have the same attitude toward the Civil War re-enactments.

It was not so much inspiration as attending to the needs of the novel. Part of that is because it's important for me to try to tell a story in a way that people can hear it.

**WHY DID YOU CHOOSE GEORGIA FOR YOUR SETTING RATHER THAN LOUISIANA? I KNOW A LITTLE BIT OF IT AT THE END IS IN LOUISIANA, BUT THE BULK OF THE STORY IS SET IN RURAL GEORGIA.**

I needed to pick a state with which I was familiar and about which I felt a fondness and an attachment. That was the first thing; it kind of had to be Georgia or Louisiana. It couldn't have been, say, Mississippi or Alabama, someplace where I never lived.

**SO, YOU HAVE LIVED IN GEORGIA?**

Oh yeah, I lived in Atlanta for almost 20 years. I had to pick someplace that I felt a strong attachment to, a state that I felt love for so that I could deal with the complexities, more so than succumbing to monolithic notions that people have about the South. If I had set it in rural Louisiana, then I would have had to introduce some different cultural concerns because Louisiana has a different cultural history than Georgia does—a very different cultural history.

**ONE OF THE JACKET BLURBS SAYS THAT THIS IS A COMING OF AGE NOVEL, A LITERARY COMING OF AGE; DO YOU SEE IT THAT WAY, A COMING OF AGE NOVEL?**

I didn't start to write a coming of age novel, and I don't necessarily think of it that way, but I understand why it would be read that way. I think of it as a novel about a period of intense trans-

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and select donors present the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence each January. The award honors Mr. Gaines, a Louisiana native who lives in Oscar. His *Lesson Before Dying* won the 1993 National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction. His novel *A Lesson Before Dying* is regularly included for reading in high school English classes. In addition, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, has become an undisputed classic of twentieth-century American literature and gave rise to the immensely popular, award-winning TV adaptation starring Cicely Tyson. Mr. Gaines is a Guggenheim fellow (1971), and a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation fellow (1993).

formation in someone's life. This one is set in the late teens, early 20s (of the main characters' lives). I picked that age because it's a difficult age when people are still making up their minds about the world in many ways, and the college environment is where people routinely take or are actually almost forced to take a kind of inventory of their life and to reconsider who they are and what they want out of life.



**RACE INFORMS YOUR WORK, THAT'S A CENTRAL COMPLICATION. YOU SAID YOU CHANGED D'ARON FROM AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN TO WHITE BECAUSE OF THE NEEDS OF THE NOVEL, YET IT'S A PARODY. ARE YOU AFRAID THAT SOME READERS MIGHT NOT GET THE IRONY, THEY MIGHT MISREAD IT?**

Yeah, definitely. I think that's a concern that I sit with a lot, and I don't know any way around it or any way to avoid it because I believe as a writer that if I'm not in that space where I feel a little bit uncomfortable, then I'm not pushing myself to do good work.

Being exposed in that way and having those concerns do bother me and it's not the best feeling in the world because, of course, I do not want someone to think that I've written an entire book that's a takedown of the South or that can be read as an endorsement of policies and beliefs that I'm trying to criticize.

And I don't want someone to think that I'm just writing a book, let's say, like a takedown of white people, because doing that is not going to create the kind of story that I think is worth reading either.

But having those concerns during the writing process is sort of how I'm able to check in with myself and keep my hands close to the fire and make sure that I'm working with the material that's hot and that matters to me.

**THERE WERE A LOT OF THINGS IN THE BOOK THAT HINGED ON SOMETHING CALLED PERFORMANCE. IS THAT SOMETHING THEY DO AT BERKELEY? DO THEY HAVE PERFORMANCE INTERVENTIONS?**

I want to say that it's something that's in the atmosphere but not necessarily in liberal or progressive corners only. It's become part of the broader discussion of how to address some social issues. So activism is kind of taking on this new face.

It's not just about the performance interventions but about the difficulty people have interpreting irony and knowing what's real or not, and so that, for me, was kind of the electrifying element. And performance intervention actually has a longer history; it comes out of the notion of the fear for the press and other types of theater games that are related to activism.

**YOU DON'T HAVE ANY QUOTATION MARKS IN THE BOOK. IS THERE A REASON WHY YOU USED THAT PARTICULAR STRUCTURE IN YOUR WRITING? DOES THAT KEEP THE READER IN THE FLOW?**

One of my concerns as a writer is not what people are saying and admitting publicly, but what they might be thinking and

not saying and even more so what people don't know they're thinking.

I'm very interested in that as a writer; the thoughts that you don't realize you're having are the thoughts that are often driving the car, right?

So in working with this character and then wanting to explore the process as sort of him unpacking himself and reassembling himself, I wanted the book to recite in this space where it's moving very freely between things he's thinking and not saying, things he's saying and things that he is not quite aware he's thinking. I'm trying to sort of push into his nascent consciousness.

In terms of the design of the book, it felt like these various elements, which are actually more or less private types of conversations, needed to have an equal sway, and we needed to be able to move freely between them in order for the story to actually work most effectively and to be the type of experience that, at the end of the reading experience, you would get as much as possible out of that emerging of his consciousness.

**HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE IN NEW ORLEANS?**

For high school—mostly for high school. I was born there, but I wasn't there for middle or elementary school too much. Later, I realized how critical those high school years are in forming your world view and your sense of the social order.

**WHEN D'ARON WAS TALKING ABOUT HIS MOM GOING OUT TO THE MARKET, HE SAID SHE WAS GOING TO "MAKE GROCERIES." THEY SAY THAT ONLY IN LOUISIANA, THAT'S NOT SOMETHING I'VE HEARD ANYBODY ANYWHERE ELSE SAY, BUT D'ARON SAID IT.**

I couldn't resist that. I realized that it was a kind of regional misfiring in a way because that's nothing that we say in Georgia, it's something we say down in New Orleans. But I love that usage, and I wanted to get it in just because I so enjoy the language of the South and the way we say things, and so you're right that I sort of tipped my hat there.

**WHAT ELSE ABOUT YOUR NEW ORLEANS YEARS HAS AFFECTED YOUR WRITING? DO YOU PERCEIVE ANY OTHER INFLUENCES FROM HAVING LIVED IN LOUISIANA?**

I do but it's hard to kind of pin it down. The thing is people from the South, in general, are friendlier. It's said to be a cliché, but they are a little bit more talkative, little bit more like social and definitely more verbal.

There is that sense of telling stories, there is that peculiarity of

language that people have there. The thing about New Orleans is that you may have five, six, ten really good friends or relatives who are all good storytellers, but they all may have their own particular ways of telling stories. There's something about appreciating idiosyncratic uses of language that I feel I developed more in the South.

For me as a listener, it's more important that I know what you mean than that you say it correctly. Because I find myself easily entranced by people who are telling stories or using language in ways that the mainstream might not consider acceptable or might not consider to be markers of intelligence. Living in the South kind of deepens my sense of the role that narrative plays in building community.

But it also sensitizes me more to class than if I had been in suburban Maryland all my life. But in terms of being a writer, this is going to sound strange, the first thing that came to mind, believe it or not, is this fact that you're in this French Quarter and you have all of these courtyards and so you have these blocks where from the outside it might appear like it's kind of a solid city block but then in the middle of the block you have this open space that might have a fountain and it might have a lush garden.

And so there's something about things being much more complicated than they may actually appear and looks being

deceiving. There's something special about it to me, thinking as a teenager about that relative to the architecture of that city in particular, thinking about the courtyards, the spaces that I can't see, the stories that aren't told, the histories that go undocumented.

#### **DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING YOU WANT TO ADD?**

At least for these first two books, one of the pressing questions that runs through my work I was able to articulate for the first time when I was watching the coverage of Katrina. I was in Atlanta watching the coverage and, of course, you remember we had looters and survivors and refugees and all of this confusion in the descriptions, and then we had a televangelist who said that New Orleans deserved to flood, to be submerged because it was a sinful city. I was watching all this and I started thinking about this question that I'd actually had for a long time but was finally able to voice: "How do people learn to care about others who are not like themselves?" And so that's one of the questions—or the biggest question probably—that is just churning through the water in *Hold It ('Til It Hurts)* and *Welcome to Braggsville*. •

*Greg Langley is a former book editor for The Advocate in Baton Rouge.*

Ernest Gaines, left, and T. Geronimo Johnson.

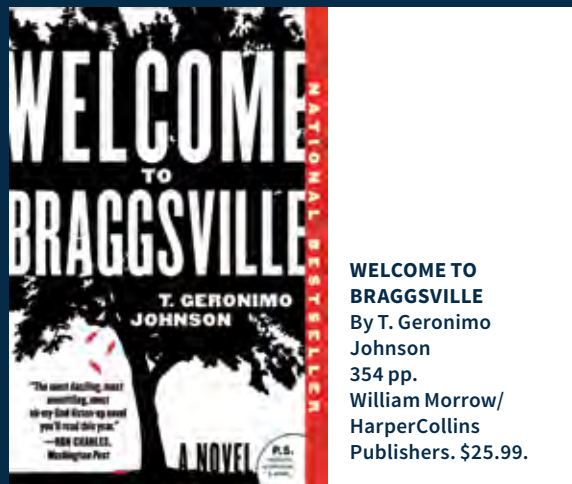




## ERNEST J. GAINES AWARD WINNER

If you have read *Welcome To Braggsville*, you are probably not surprised it has been awarded the 2015 Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence. T. Geronimo's rollicking parody blends humor and drama as the author spins a tale of culture clash, misunderstanding and tragedy. Along the way, this brilliant book skewers both political correctness and the cultural indifference that spawns it.

The protagonist of the book, 19-year-old D'aron Davenport, is a native of Braggsville, Georgia, a couple of hours from Atlanta. D'aron is a conflicted man, unsure



of his own identity and, in fact, a man of many identities whose list of nicknames reads like a progression through his own life story. By the time he gets out of high school, graduating as the valedictorian, what he wants to see most in the world is the town of Braggsville disappearing in his rearview mirror. He travels to the University of California at Berkeley—the most distant school that approved his admission application.

Once at Berkeley, D'aron finds himself a bit of an outcast, a loner. Things get better when he gets a Malaysian Chinese roommate named Louis Chang whose life's ambition is to become a standup comic—the next “Lenny Bruce Lee, kung fu comedian.” When the roomies go to a

“dot” party where attendees wear a dot where they want to be touched, they meet Charlie, a black athlete from Chicago, and Candice Chelsea, a blonde from Iowa who claims she is part Native American. The four bond during a confrontation with the self-appointed PC police at the party. They become fast friends who refer to themselves in the collective as “the Four Little Indians.”

In Candice's ethnically sensitive worldview, there is prejudice and discrimination to be confronted at every turn. The group shares a history course, and when D'aron lets it slip that his hometown holds an annual Civil War re-enactment, the whole class is shocked. “They'd heard tell of Civil War reenactments, but were they still occurring.”

If ever there was a cause for performance intervention, this was it. “You can force States' Rights to take a look in the mirror and they will not like what they see.”

Candice envisions a staged scenario that involves three of them dressing as slaves as the fourth pretends to whip them. There will be a staged lynching. It will all be recorded. The professor is all for it. D'aron, agog over Candice by this time, assures them that no harm will come to them in Georgia.

D'aron is afflicted with that curious directional vertigo that makes young people think they are running from something when they are actually sprinting full speed toward it. His vane is pointed to Braggsville, and that is where the Four Little Indians go with a plan in their minds and a cause in their hearts.

What happens when Berkeley meets Braggsville is the stuff of high humor. One of the blurbs on this book's dust jacket describes it as a “coming of age” tale. It's closer in tone to *Catcher in the Rye* than *A Separate Peace*, but the lesson the Indians intend to teach the re-enactors becomes something darker they must learn when things take a tragic turn.

—G.L.



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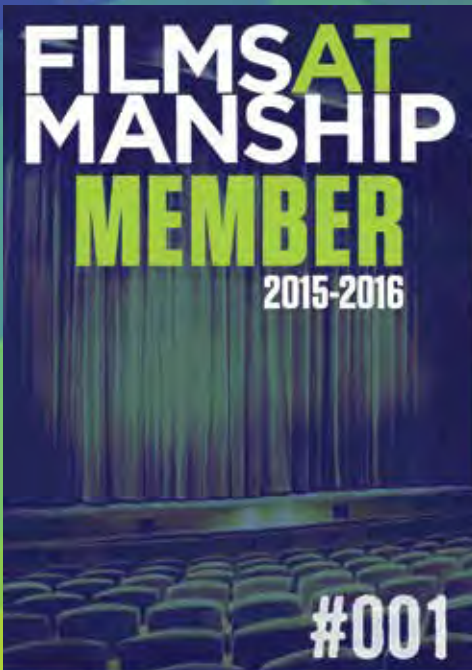


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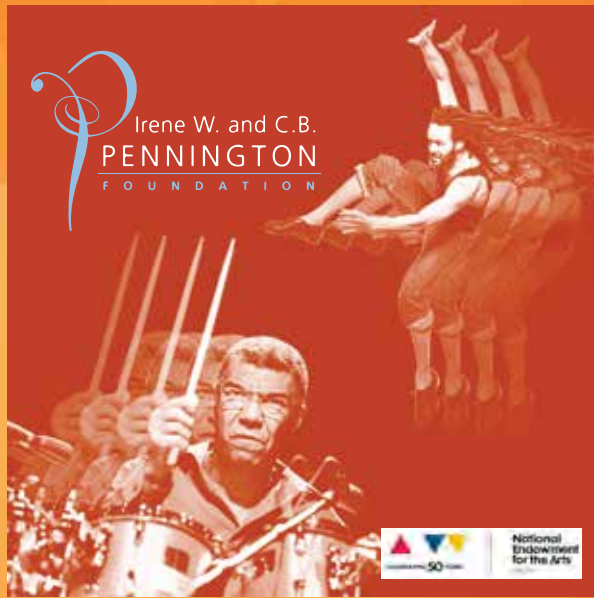
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LEGACY

*A conversation with*  
**John Noland**

By Sara Bongiorno | Photo by Tim Mueller





*You can't separate your life  
into separate compartments.  
What's right has to be right in  
every sphere of your life.*

—John Noland

**J**ohn B. Noland's office was stunning on a warm December morning. Floor-to-ceiling views offered a hard-to-beat view of downtown, the busy Mississippi and Baton Rouge's urban forest to the west.

Plain-spoken, witty and ferociously intelligent, the former chairman of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation has worked for decades to combat poverty through numerous organizations, including the faith-based Together Baton Rouge and the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority. *Currents* asked him to reflect on issues past and present in the city outside his windows.

**CURRENTS: RACIAL INEQUALITY HAS BEEN A BIG FOCUS OF YOUR CIVIC INVOLVEMENT FOR MANY YEARS. WHY?**

**JOHN NOLAND:** I'm 69 years old. I've got eyes and a brain. I've been involved in civic leadership for some 40 years. What my eyes, brain and experience have led me to conclude is that the greatest impediment to the health of Baton Rouge is its racial divide. In my view, there are two ways to deal with racial inequality at the institutional level. First is through education, by understanding the best way to educate desperately poor African-American children. We've made some progress there. Second is by addressing the poverty in our African-American neighborhoods. We cannot claim to be a healthy community if

we continue to allow that poverty to exist. Many would disagree with me that this is our biggest challenge as a community.

### **WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR DISAGREEMENT OVER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POVERTY AS A COMMUNITY ISSUE?**

We are desperately separate in Baton Rouge. As a community we don't integrate easily. When you don't have black friends and you don't drive through poor African-American communities as part of your daily life, it follows that you are isolated from the challenges in those communities. You might be the most sympathetic person in town, but if you are isolated from poverty you are going to lack understanding of what it takes to combat it and you won't feel an urgency to do so.

### **WHY IS AN INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH CRITICAL?**

We need big scale. Poverty is a confoundingly difficult problem. An institutional approach offers the only way we can hope to achieve meaningful change. For me, that institution is the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority. We won't fix poverty in a day, but the Redevelopment Authority allows us to get started by bringing subsidized investment to blighted neighborhoods. It lays the groundwork for additional private investment, which is essential. But you won't see that later private investment without early steps the Redevelopment Authority is uniquely able to make.

### **THE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY IS TREMENDOUSLY IMPORTANT TO YOU PERSONALLY. WHY IS THAT?**

I view it as a sacrament, in the sense that it is an outward response to an inward spiritual grace. It is also a tangible, practical response to multigenerational poverty and racism. We can't fix poverty and blight in North Baton Rouge overnight, but the RDA allows us to get started in a very real way by improving our communities through meaningful investments.

### **OVER THE YEARS YOU'VE BEEN OUTSPOKEN IN YOUR SUPPORT OF TAXES TO SUPPORT PUBLIC TRANSIT IN BATON ROUGE. HOW DOES THAT RELATE TO YOUR FOCUS ON THE COMMUNITY'S RACIAL DIVIDE?**

Our public transit system is the only option for many people to get to doctor's appointment or to their jobs. It is a miserable system, but it is all many people in Baton Rouge have. I believe we have a moral compulsion to help those most in need in our community, and one of the ways we can help is by supporting CATS. I don't know how you could fail to support public transit

given its role in the lives of the poorest members of our community. Some have criticized me for getting involved in "dirty politics," but my feeling is this is "clean politics." This was working for the betterment of the community as a whole, including its most vulnerable members.

### **THE PHRASE, "IT'S JUST BUSINESS" SEEMS LIKE ONE THAT WOULD BE AT ODDS WITH YOUR WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD.**

Absolutely. You can't separate your life into separate compartments. What's right has to be right in every sphere of your life.

### **YOUR FATHER WAS AN EPISCOPAL MINISTER. HOW DID THAT INFLUENCE YOUR OUTLOOK ON COMMUNITY WORK?**

The lessons that are read during services rotate on a three-year basis in the Episcopal church. So I've heard those lessons every three years in my 69 years. You can distill a lifetime of those lessons into the idea that you have got to feed your sheep. You need to care for the flock.

### **WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE YOU'VE SEEN IN BATON ROUGE?**

Without a doubt the rebirth of downtown. Downtown was dead. If you didn't work there, there was no reason to visit. Now at night you see people out enjoying music and places to eat. I expect to see more investment in downtown in the coming years. But North Baton Rouge remains blighted. We've seen only a few pockets of investment there, and we need more. We need to bring reinvestment to the neighborhoods that need it most.

### **YOUR VANTAGE POINT OF THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION'S HISTORY IS UNIQUE. WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR ITS IMPACT IN BATON ROUGE?**

I believe Baton Rouge is a uniquely fertile place for the work community foundations are designed to do. In a bigger city like Chicago or San Francisco, there would be so many more competing demands that would make it hard to be as effective. The city and the leadership at the Foundation fit together like a hand in a glove. It is unusual for a foundation to have the impact that it has to such a visible, real extent, and it functions to the great benefit of the community. It has been a great pleasure to be involved with it, and I look forward to enjoying the results of the work it continues to do. •



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# *The world according to Big Brown*

*A big-hearted UPS driver becomes  
an everyman philanthropist*

By Maggie Heyn Richardson | Photo by Tim Mueller





Students at Catholic of Pointe Coupee Elementary School in New Roads, with James “Big Brown” Joseph. He is affectionately known as Big Brown by all the school’s students.



In the summer of 2009, UPS driver James Joseph delivered a package to the home of an elderly Pointe Coupee Parish woman. South Louisiana's typical blanket of heat had descended on the community that day, and Joseph immediately noticed that his customer's house had no air conditioning. The door was cracked, and she sat inside, listless and miserable.

"I said from that point on, I was going to do something about it," says Joseph, whose physical stature and association with UPS has earned him the nickname Big Brown. "We started collecting ACs and fans for people who needed them."

The recipient of his first air conditioning unit was overjoyed by her home's new addition, recalls Joseph, who made sure it was installed safely and properly, and that it didn't exceed her outlet's electrical load. It was one of a few hundred units and fans he and a team of volunteers secured that year in a project that became known as Beat the Heat.

*"Everybody wants to help. That's the great thing about this state I love so much."*

—James Joseph

Thousands of air-conditioning units and fans later—along with school supplies, toys and holiday turkeys and emergency funds for people in distress—Joseph has become a one-man charity show, sniffing out community needs simply by paying attention. From the vantage point of his UPS route, which takes him to local schools, businesses and the front stoops of rich and poor, Joseph has his thumb on the pulse of the community.

He might be the visible front man, but Joseph doesn't work alone. Through his charm and gift of gab, Joseph has successfully recruited both individual and corporate donors who have given thousands of dollars annually to his various projects.

A committee that includes Joseph decides which grants are made. A key source of money for the fund is Joseph's fellow UPS employees throughout South Louisiana. A growing number of them have elected to support Joseph's work through an employee

deduction program, says Namon Harris, business manager of the UPS Distribution Center in Baker.

"He's got a lot of reach and a lot of followers," says Harris. "People are very interested in helping him. They've seen what he does and they say, 'I want to give him money to help.'"

Harris laughs and adds, "It's hard to say no to him."

Joseph's presence is commanding. Friendly and effusive, he grew up in the Eden Park community in Baton Rouge where he says his mother, Lillie Joseph, was known for helping anyone who needed assistance.

"She was the neighborhood icon," Joseph says. "And she was a big influence on me."

While his mother and her commitment to philanthropy was a constant in his life, so was basketball. Joseph's skills on the court at Belaire High School were his ticket out of Eden Park, leading to college scholarships first at Grayson County College in Dennison, Texas, and later at Abilene Christian College.

After graduating, Joseph tried out unsuccessfully for the NBA, but while playing on a pro-am team in Los Angeles, he was recruited by the Harlem Globetrotters. For the next two years, Joseph performed with the legendary troupe. Living up to its nickname, the Globetrotters traveled worldwide and played an average of 300 dates over the course of a year.

"It was exhausting, and definitely a challenge," recalls Joseph. "Pretty often I didn't even know what city we were in because we played so much. But it was fun bringing enjoyment to people all over the world."

After the Globetrotters, Joseph played professional basketball in Peru, Brazil and Australia. Charity was never far from his mind, even if it came in small acts. While living in Peru, Joseph befriended a poor man who happened to wear the same size shoes that Joseph did. An avid collector of athletic shoes, Joseph happily passed on several pairs to his friend.

"I couldn't believe how much poverty there was," he says.

In 1995, Joseph retired from basketball and moved home to Baton Rouge, landing a job with UPS where he has worked since. A familiar face in Pointe Coupee Parish and beloved by children and the elderly, Joseph has focused his philanthropic work on emergency services. It's a simple, gut-level concept: He sees a need in the community, and he does something about it. Then he spreads the word, and gets others to give him a hand.

Beat the Heat was just part of his efforts. Joseph has also worked with several regional schools to help provide backpacks and school supplies for children in need. The local UPS Distribution Centers, which are now familiar with Joseph's efforts, make suggestions on which schools need help. They

spread the word to their employees about Joseph's efforts, and the employees, in turn, donate money to help buy school supplies. Local businesses often chip in, too. In the fall of 2015, the Big Brown Reaching Back Fund donated \$7,500 worth of school supplies for children in need.

The Big Brown Toy Drive is a special holiday project that supplies Christmas presents to children whose parents are undergoing difficult times, says Joseph. He specifically seeks out families who are the victims of domestic violence, or who may have a parent in prison. Hospitalized children are also a priority, he says.

Harris, who has known Joseph for nearly 20 years, says that his energy for helping people seems limitless, and that he has inspired numerous UPS workers and community members to give back.



## BIG BROWN REACHING BACK FUND

James Joseph, aka Big Brown, initiated a donor advised fund at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in April 2015. The Foundation manages money in the fund, issues grants on behalf of Brown's organization and handles all paperwork. The fund issued more than \$30,000 in grants in less than a year. Donations to the fund can be made by calling 225.387.6126.

"I think what you see James do is just scratching the surface on the kind of effect he has on the community," says Harris.

For his part, Joseph says he's tapped into a universal desire among people everywhere to look around and make life better for others in need.

"Everybody wants to help," he says. "That's the great thing about this state I love so much. Everybody wants to pitch in." •

# First helping

*LSU food incubator provides equipment, knowledge to infant businesses*

By David Jacobs

During the late 1980s, sisters Karen Daigle and Linda McAdams made cakes, candies and other sweets and sold them to family and friends. In 2013, McAdams, after losing her job and struggling to find another, asked Daigle if she wanted to revive their old hobby and make it a full-time business.

Truly Scrumptious Candies & Confections officially launched that year. By “pounding the pavement,” they got their products into a half-dozen stores, McAdams says. But it was hard to grow the business when their factory was a home kitchen and they could only make one or two pounds of their goodies at a time.

About 18 months ago, they began using the LSU AgCenter Food Incubator, letting them make batches of 12 or 13 pounds in a stainless steel, government-approved commercial kitchen. Business is sweeter. They’d produced more than 5,000 pounds of their addictive, savory White Chocolate Pretzel Crunch snacks. You can buy their goods at 59 stores.

Beyond the equipment and connections with retailers that the incubator provides, James McAdams, company co-owner and Linda’s husband, says the advice has been extremely valuable. Tenants consult with AgCenter food scientists and get business plan guidance from LSU’s Louisiana Business & Technology Center experts.

“We make a lot of other things too,” Daigle notes while bagging Pretzel Crunches in the incubator’s kitchen. “When we found out about the food incubator, we had to pick one product. It’s been hugely successful for us.”

Production at LSU AgCenter’s Food Incubator more than doubled to 44 tons in 2015 from 21 tons the year before. The incubator has 29 tenants and a waiting list of 20 more. The incubator opened in 2013. Tenants include Hanley Foods, Southern Art Sauces, City Gelato, Whoo Doo Creole BBQ Sauce and Alvin Ray’s Bayou Best Pickles. A long-term ambition is to grow into an “innovation center” capable of doing large projects for major food corporations like Kellogg’s.





Gaye Sandoz studied nutrition and food service management. She worked in food service for a while before joining Cajun Injector, where she was director of research and development and QVC account manager.

“I fell in love with this career of product development,” she says. In fact, she sells her own product, the Clever Kitchen Microwave BBQ Chicken Roaster, on QVC.

Sandoz left her job at Edible Enterprises, another incubator for food businesses in Norco, to become the AgCenter incubator’s founding director in 2013. “When we opened the doors, we literally had five tenants waiting,” Sandoz recalls. “Within a year, we had 20 tenants.”

The incubator has 29 tenants and a waitlist of about 20 more, the AgCenter says. More than 44 tons of food products were produced there in 2015, compared to 21 tons in 2014.

Hanley’s Foods, which makes all-natural salad dressings, is the first “graduate,” although the company still returns when they’re working on a new product, Sandoz says. Other tenants include Re:, which makes dressings and marinades; City Gelato; Ruth’s Recipes, makers of hummus; and Alvin Ray’s Bayou Best Pickles.

She says local retailers like stocking the local products, and says the Associated Grocers distributor generally buys from the tenants once they grow to a certain point. “It’s funny when they drive up to AG,” she says. “They have to go in the middle of the night, normally, and there are these big 18-wheelers, and here they come in their little cars with a pallet on the back.”

The incubator only accepts new tenants four times a year. Sandoz gives quarterly presentations about the incubator, which she says are generally attended by 40 to 50 people who are exploring the option.

Tenants pay administration, application and hourly rental fees. The costs of liability insurance, permits, UPC codes and the like are all borne by the business owners.

It’s still much less expensive than launching a business on their own, of course, and incubator officials stay on the lookout for ways to pay expenses and avoid tapping university funds. This year, they began hosting workshops focused on product development, marketing, pricing and food safety. They recently landed a \$2.5 million federal grant, most of which will go to new equipment.

They also make deals with companies that might have their own manufacturing plant, but want to contract with the incubator to develop a new product. Marsh Dog, which makes dog treats from nutria meat, recently partnered with the AgCenter on a project to extend their product’s shelf life, Sandoz says.

AgCenter food scientist Luis Espinoza, who describes himself as the incubator’s technical director, says sometimes such companies simply pay fees to the AgCenter and retain 100% of the rights to the product. In other cases, the two sides form a partnership whereby LSU potentially shares in the product’s sales revenue.

Espinoza was a chemical engineer in Honduras who found himself in a managerial position overseeing production of both

*“We like them to graduate. To go from an incubator to a co-packer is a large step. They go from making 200 gallons in the incubator in a day to a co-packer that wants them to produce 900 gallons in a day.”*

—Gaye Sandoz, director of LSU AgCenter Food Incubator

chemicals and food, even though the latter wasn't really his field of expertise. He came to LSU to earn a Ph.D. in food science; after finishing the degree, Sandoz hired him as the incubator's second employee. The incubator now has three food scientists on staff, a graduate assistant and a non-Ph.D. food technologist who used to work for Whole Foods, Sandoz says.

Safety is Espinoza's foremost concern. The incubator works to ensure its businesses are up to date with federal Food and Drug Administration and Department of Health and Hospitals regulations. He says DHH gets the incubator's production schedule, and state officials are free to inspect at any time.

He says new tenants often have misconceptions about food safety.

“I've had two or three tenants say that just because it has vinegar, it's safe,” he says. “They want to use raw produce and fruits, without any thermal processing.”

As part of a tour of the facility, Espinoza shows off a vacuum tumbler with a capacity of 100 pounds. He mentions that a client is considering using the tumbler to make olive salad.

Normally, they let the product sit for a week to ensure the flavors are fully infused. The tumbler might allow them to do it in 15 minutes.

Many new incubator tenants have only made their products in small batches for family and friends. They're used to using fresh ingredients, and they're very protective of their recipes. They often don't understand what it takes to make a commercially viable, consistent product with a decent shelf life, Espinoza says.

“It's probably not going to be the same, but it's going to be very close,” he says. “We have to meet in the middle, where you're OK and I'm OK. I'm OK if it's safe and good quality, and you are OK if it is still your product.”

Truly Scrumptious Candies & Confections wants to get some new products out there soon. They'd like to produce gluten-

free Pretzel Crunches at some point, but gluten-free pretzels are expensive.

Now that they're in most of the Associated Grocers stores in the region, they hope to make inroads with the Associated Wholesale Grocers group, which includes Rouses. Like many incubator entrepreneurs, they aspire to work with a co-packer, which is basically a manufacturer that makes and packages products for companies too small to own their own factories.

“We like them to graduate,” Sandoz says. “To go from an incubator to a co-packer is a large step. They go from making [for example] 200 gallons in the incubator in a day to a co-packer that wants them to produce 900 gallons in a day. So there's a bridge they need to cross.”

Hanley's will be using a co-packer, she says, while Bayou Best Pickles sells about 6,000 jars a month and is ready to make the leap but hasn't yet found an appropriate manufacturer.

As for the incubator itself, officials are hoping to find a larger space. Sandoz says the long-term ambition is to grow into an “innovation center” capable of doing large projects for major food corporations like Kellogg's. The Food Innovation Center at Ohio State University, for example, involves more than 380 faculty members, staff and graduate students and has attracted almost \$9 million since opening in 2010, the university says.

As for short-term growth, Sandoz says she can probably accommodate up to 35 tenants without losing the hand's-on customer service she currently offers.

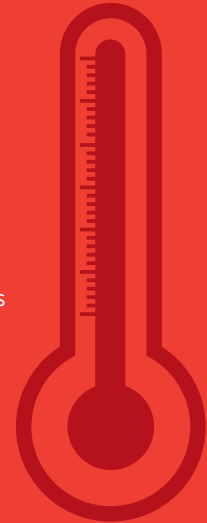
“Some of the owners come in without jobs,” she says. “They've lost their jobs, and they maybe can't find a job. They're retired. Just to see the joy on their faces when they become successful is very rewarding.” •



**FIRST INTERNET SALE** The first Internet transaction was in 1994. In August of that year, Dan Kohn sold a CD of Sting's Ten Summoner's Tales to a friend for \$12.48, plus shipping costs. It was the first encrypted transaction. Twenty years later, more than 8% of U.S. retail sales are conducted online.

## IT'S LOUISIANA HOT

LSU scientist Shane Stadler might have been inspired by Louisiana's heat. He invented a solid state material that could replace gases in air conditioning systems. Baton Rouge firm Magnetic Cool has been formed to test Stadler's invention, which uses less electricity for cooling and does less harm to the environment.



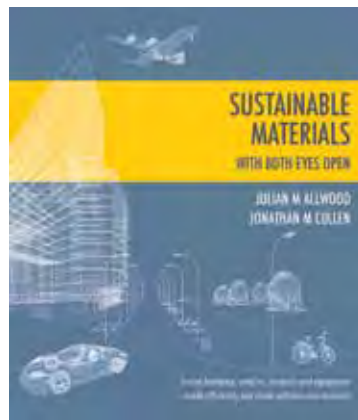
## WHAT BILL GATES IS

**READING** The richest man in the world spends his spare time giving his money away and reading books. Here are three of his favorite books from 2015.

*Sustainable Materials with Both Eyes Open*, by Julian M. Allwood, Jonathan M. Cullen, et al. The authors, scientists all of them, look closely at the materials that humans use most, with particular emphasis on steel and aluminum, and show how we could cut emissions by up to 50% without asking people to make big sacrifices.

*Eradication: Ridding the World of Diseases Forever?*, by Nancy Leys Stepan. The book gives a good sense of how involved the work can get, how many different kinds of approaches have been tried with-out success, and how much we've learned from our failures.

*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, by Carol S. Dweck. Through clever research studies and engaging writing, Dweck illuminates how our beliefs about our capabilities exert tremendous influence on how we learn and which paths we take in life.

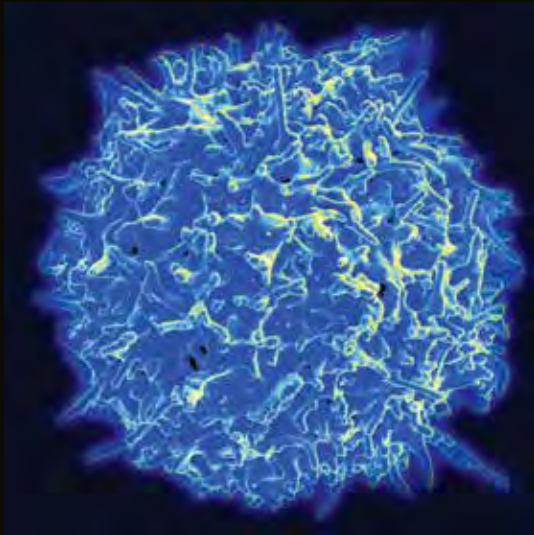


## UBERBUS

Uber is the mad scientist of mobility. The company that turns ordinary motorists into taxi drivers is testing a version of a privatized bus service in Seattle. People with vans and other large vehicles pick up passengers for a \$5 fee, but riders must walk to a designated spot determined by Uber's software. The service runs at peak times and advances Uber's goal of replacing personal car ownership.



**FEED YOUR HEAD** 2016 is the year of VR. The first virtual reality headset is on the mass market. Built by Samsung Electronics and Oculus VR, the \$100 headset is an accessory for the Samsung Galaxy smartphone. More powerful versions will be introduced by Oculus, Sony and Microsoft. The new headsets avoid a problem with earlier iterations. They don't make people queasy. Games are the first app, but the uses are many, including distance medicine, watching videos and shopping in 3-D online stores. Critics say the headsets will have limited use because virtual reality exhausts the brain.



**CANCER CURE?** Once a generation, researchers trumpet a cure for cancer. This time, it might actually be true. Researchers have genetically engineered T-cells—armies of the immune system—to seek and destroy cancer cells. Now a French biotechnology company has proved the idea can be done cheaply by saving a little girl with cancer. Collectis' therapy advances the technology. Removal, alteration and growth of T-cells in the lab is no longer required. The firm's T-cell therapy works on any patient with a certain type of leukemia, saving time and money. Collectis will begin early-stage cancer trials next year. Pfizer is a partner.

**I WANT TO RIDE MY BICYCLE** An app was designed to make you rethink riding bicycles. Named Bike Citizens, the app tells cyclists how far they can pedal in only five minutes. The goal is to show that riding a bike sometimes is better than driving a car or taking a bus. "Waiting for public transport or searching for a vacant parking lot can take a lot longer than five minutes," says Johanna Kolb, project manager for the Austria-based Bike Citizens, in a published report. "So we also wanted to show that in this time you could already cover a considerable distance by bike." The organization is rolling out the app with U.S. maps.



## CITIES

### COPENHAGEN SHOWS THE WAY

Copenhagen keeps figuring out new ways to remain a leader in quality of life. The city is replacing 20,000 outdoor lights with smart LEDs that can be dimmed or turned off from a command center. The transformation is predicted to reduce energy consumption by 57%.



**LAUNDRY MARVEL** A modern washing machine consumes about 40 gallons of precious water per load. MIT students have invented a filter that removes detergent and dirt—there's only a teaspoon of grime in each load—for reuse by washers. Named AquaFresco, the filter will let the same batch of water be used for up to six months. Hotels are testing the filter and NASA is interested in the technology for the space station.

**SOLAR ENERGY FOR AFRICA** Putting up poles and stringing power lines to supply African villages can cost billions. An African firm is bypassing electric grids by offering distributed power to people in villages for a tiny amount of money. M-Kopa has signed up 275,000 customers toward its goal of 1 million homes in East Africa by 2017. For \$35 upfront and 50 cents a month, the company provides a small solar system that powers three lights, five USB connections and a portable radio. Customers can finance the upfront costs and, once that's repaid, buy more products, such as fuel-efficient stoves.





# CODA



## **IMPOSSIBLE? COMPLETED.**

The rebirth of downtown continues with the completion of the IBM Building by Commercial Properties Realty Trust, which manages the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's real estate assets. CPRT and the Foundation moved into the top floor in December. **Our new address is 100 North Street, Suite 900, Baton Rouge, La., 70802.**

A second tower has 85 apartments, and more than half of them were leased in January.

The IBM complex continues the Foundation's commitment to transform downtown. More than \$2 billion has been invested by private developers and public agencies in downtown since we underwrote Plan Baton Rouge, a master plan for the city center.





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