

CURRENTS

first quarter 2020 | BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION | braf.org

GREAT LAKES BATON ROUGE

*Transformation of the lakes will create the premier
outdoor destination for our region*







A new sculpture on the Mississippi River is delighting people who visit downtown. A gift from the Rotary Club Baton Rouge, it was assembled in December. The rest of the story on page 58.

PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER



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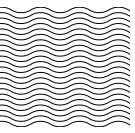
LSU collaborates with Pennington to change sports science. That teamwork rarely happens elsewhere.

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eeing is believing.

Like the blossoming of some great, repellent flower, a months-old algae bloom has left no room for doubt: The time to save our lakes has come.

The Foundation, with support from our members and donors, had produced a \$1 million master plan in 2016 to preserve the University/ City Park lakes. The plan was designed to solve a serious problem that was unfolding out-of-sight. Season after season, bottom-dwelling plants were growing prolifically, then dying and decaying, piling up layer upon layer of sedimentary mud. Unseen, the bottom of the lakes was rapidly rising and the water was growing shallower.

Last year's hot summer brought a slick, green scum coating to the surface to City Park Lake, manifesting for all to

see the troubles predicted by our master plan's research: Now less than 3 feet deep, the lakes were slowly turning to mudflats. The algae persisted throughout a warm fall and continued, well into winter. Residents, runners and picnicking park-goers were revolted by the sickly, stinking bloom and complained that no one was taking action.

Meanwhile at the Foundation, we were nearing a final arrangement with state and local government agencies for funding the implementation of the lakes master plan. With algae fouling the waters well beyond summer, the partners in the project decided there was no more time to waste: Reviving and preserving the lakes—a crowning jewel among Baton Rouge's public places—must happen now. Public officials signed a memorandum of understanding that dedicates \$50 million to the project.

For their commitment, I thank our partners: Mayor Sharon Weston Broome and the Metro Council; Gov. John Bel Edwards and the people overseeing state agencies; BREC commissioners and Superintendent Corey Wilson; LSU President/Chancellor F. King Alexander, LSU Athletics Director Scott Woodward and LSU Real Estate and Facilities Foundation.

We provide details about the project in this issue's cover story. But, first, it's worthwhile to consider a little background on how it all came about, because this initiative offers a window into how



"...this initiative offers a window into how we select our projects for the common good."

we select our projects for the common good.

The Foundation is a place-based organization, one among 700 community foundations making grants; a handful of them, including ours, are specially committed to improving life for all people in their regions through civic projects. Our service region is the Baton Rouge metropolitan area, with affiliates in Covington and Lake Charles covering the rest of South Louisiana. New Orleans has its own community foundation, as does Lafayette.

The Foundation's civic projects originate from ideas brought to us by our donors or from requests by government leaders. For example, city-parish government asked the Foundation to lead and underwrite the Baton Rouge Health District master plan. It is now being executed through a nonprofit

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 three 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. Three, we provide consulting services to nonprofits. For more information, contact Mukul Verma at mverma@braf.org.

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led by top officers of local health care providers.

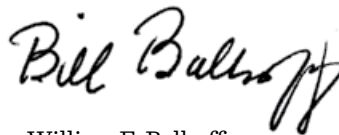
The lakes project, meanwhile, was prompted by data and observations. We knew the lakes were increasingly shallow, devolving into the swamps from which they'd been created. Unless steps were taken to fix the problem, Baton Rouge would lose an iconic public landmark. This was of special concern to us since one of the declared goals of the Foundation is to build more civic spaces where all are welcome, like our revitalized downtown. Such places allow residents to encounter their neighbors from all strata of society and, sometimes, to become friends. At the very least, sharing public places with diverse populations serves to level some of the walls that otherwise divide us.

The lakes already do this, drawing people together from all quarters of the parish. Restoring and enhancing the lakes within City Park will attract even more people to this civic green space where they can enjoy a stroll or a jog; photograph migratory pelicans within a larger bird sanctuary; push their children on swings at a newly built park on Dalrymple; rent kayaks along City Park Lake and row under a new bridge connecting to University Lake; or simply enjoy a sunny spring day alongside each other.

The crisis in our lakes, so long hidden below the surface, is now evident and

measurable. The restoration project will remedy it. But for the Foundation, the project will also have value that's harder to quantify: It will affirm our donors' faith that, working together, we can build shared civic spaces that benefit everyone. When it's completed and residents can look out across clear, sparkling lakes and beautiful new parklands, the next big project for the common good will become that much easier to accomplish. After all, seeing is believing.

Sincerely,



William E. Balhoff,
Chair

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.

*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation accomplishes its mission in three ways:

1 We connect fund donors—philanthropists—to worthwhile projects and nonprofits. Over 55 years, our donors have granted more than \$500 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.

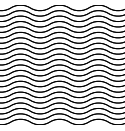
2 We conduct civic leadership initiatives that change the direction of the Baton Rouge region and South Louisiana. Members support these projects, which solve fundamental problems. Tax-deductible memberships range from \$200 to \$25,000.

3 We offer strategic consulting services to nonprofits.

Key Civic Leadership Projects

THE NEW MOBILITY: The Foundation is trying to make it easier for people to get around the parish. We are participating with local and state government on several projects that give residents transportation choices. Engineers say that more choices reduce the burden on roads. The projects include a train connecting Baton Rouge to New Orleans and a bike sharing system that launched last year.

BATON ROUGE HEALTH DISTRICT (BRHealthDistrict.org): The parish asked the Foundation to pay for a master plan for the Bluebonnet, Perkins and Essen Lane corridor, where most of the health care assets are located. The plan has been adopted by the parish, and an independent nonprofit—the Baton Rouge Health District—is implementing the plan.



The main park at the Water Campus will be ready in July, as will 20 lofts named 200 Water Street, seen on left. 200 Brickyard Lane, a 90,000-square-foot building with Stantec as a tenant and a cybersecurity center to open this year, is opposite the apartments.

WATER CAMPUS FIRST PHASE READY IN SUMMER

BY LATE SUMMER, THE FIRST PHASE of The Water Campus will be completed. Apartments and the main park on the campus will be ready. Road and sidewalks are reopening in spring.

200 Water Street—the apartment building—will have 20 units on a park whose main attraction will be a water feature that runs its length. The Campus is a collaboration of Baton Rouge Area Foundation and Commercial Properties Realty Trust, the real estate management affiliate of the Foundation.

The campus has been described as a “Water Cooler,” where scientists and engineers from research organizations and business can gather to offer adap-

tations for living with higher seas and vanishing wetlands. On the campus are The Water Institute of the Gulf, Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, LSU’s Center for River Studies, Stantec Engineering and, opening this year, a cybersecurity center.

Meanwhile, Baton Rouge’s Tin Roof Brewery is expanding into 5401 North in Raleigh, North Carolina, another project of the Foundation and CPRT. Partnering with Acme Food and Beverage, among the most successful restaurateurs in North Carolina, Tin Roof is opening Heyday Brewing, a mixed-use neighborhood on 400 acres in Raleigh.

Heyday will provide students in Wake Tech’s craft beer classes access to commercial brewing equipment, classroom and lab space. Wake Tech has a campus next to 5401 North. Heyday will also serve produce grown in 5401 North’s Purple Martin Community Farm.

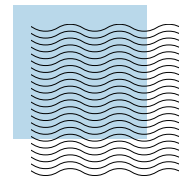
CPRT develops and manages real estate assets of the Wilbur Marvin Foundation, which is a supporting nonprofit of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. In Baton Rouge, CPRT takes on projects in challenging areas with a goal of sparking redevelopment. The Water Campus and downtown projects are examples. CPRT develops in more profitable markets, like Raleigh, to offset risk of redevelopment projects at home base, Baton Rouge.



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Foundation Finances 101

Or why can't the Foundation just pay for big projects on its own?



TO SOME, THE FOUNDATION'S FINANCES can be confounding. To answer some of the

questions about our finances, *Currents* sat down with John Davies, president and CEO, and Debbie Pickell, chief financial officer. They also took a measure of the accomplishments from last year.



PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER

Currents: The start of a new year is a time to measure the year that has passed and what's to come. What are some of the Foundation's 2019 accomplishments that fulfill the mission?

John Davies: Reflecting on previous accomplishments is always challenging for us. We are institutionally focused on project execution and then moving on

to the next challenge. Our foundation's culture does not value individual celebration of community successes.

Having said that, our Civic Leadership work in 2019 resulted in significant community wins.

Currents: Such as?

Davies: Our projects were big in scope, and personal too. A grant from the MacArthur Foundation let us expand an existing program to divert people with mental illness from jail. People charged with misdemeanors but who could not make bail, even \$100 in bail, would spend up to two months in jail before their case was heard by a judge.

Through our work, an expedited process was put in place so that people charged would appear before a judge within a week. A greater sense of justice has been introduced into the booking and charging function at our jail, which we call Parish Prison. As a result of the MacArthur-funded work, supported by City-Parish funding as well, the daily census at the jail has dropped dramatically, saving the parish significant money. Both projects will move forward at an accelerated pace in 2020, with the opening later this year of a crisis intervention center known as the Bridge Center for Hope.

Currents: Any other accomplishments?

Davies: I'm encouraged about two other projects that will also transform how we live in Baton Rouge and give us pride in what we can accomplish together. One is the preservation of the lakes, a project that started only five

years ago. The other is a quiet story that you'll read about more and more. New Schools for Baton Rouge, started by the Foundation but now a stand-alone organization, has recruited the best nonprofit schools in the U.S. to open and grow schools here. In less than five years, schools supported by NSBR will educate more than half the public school students in the parish.

Currents: Is it possible that Baton Rouge will have among the top performing public school systems in the country?

Davies: The smart money believes that's the case. Successful businessmen that include the chairman of Netflix have contributed tens of millions to New Schools. They expect that the model will be so successful that it will be replicated around the country. To our parish's benefit, superior schools will give every child an opportunity to succeed. We believe more parents will choose to raise their children here.

Currents: Education reform. It's a very long-term project.

Davies: Yes, and that's the strength of a place-based foundation like ours. We can persist with a project until it gets done. Our work is not limited by two- or four-year political terms.

Charter operators, nonprofit schools now, were a challenge. More than 15 years ago, we failed on our first try but gave it a second try with new ideas. The strategy created by New Schools—that is to identify and recruit the best nonprofit schools, support them and hold them accountable—will produce nonprofit schools that are graded A and

B by Louisiana's rigorous Department of Education.

Currents: NSBR and the lakes are among your civic projects. The other part of the Foundation's work is managing philanthropic dollars. How does that work?

Debbie Pickell: It works much like an investment account for doing good. People open charitable accounts at the foundation. We manage the funds. Our donors ask us to make grants to nonprofits, and we fulfill the intent of our donors. The Foundation charges 1% of the fund's value to manage the accounts, though the fee is lower for funds that surpass \$1 million. The fees cover our costs—accounting, making and evaluating grants, managing investments and meeting federal rules. Most important, we offer what our national competitors cannot: intelligence about local issues and nonprofits to produce the greatest results for our community on behalf of donors.

Currents: How much does the Foundation grant each year?

Pickell: Our total grants since 1964, when the Foundation was started, are over \$535 million. We are still tallying the final amounts for 2019 grants, but the total should surpass \$35 million. Our donors make grants around the world, but about 90% of the total is issued to nonprofits in our region. We raised more than \$39 million last year as well, which places us among the larger community foundations in the Southeast.

Currents: How does the Foundation measure its operating efficiency? What benchmarks are used in assessing operating efficiency?

Pickell: Assets are our benchmark. We compare our operating budget—our expenses—to 10 community foundations of our asset size, which was \$657 million last year. We make the comparison to make sure that we are good stewards of our operating budget. Of community foundations with similar asset bases, our operating budget of \$5.4 million was the third lowest of the 10 we surveyed. Our expenses include \$1.4 million for staffing civic projects, such as the lakes and justice reform. Most community foundations don't spend operating fund dollars to conduct civic projects, which we believe solve fundamental problems.

Currents: Are there other projects funded by the operating budget?

Pickell: Yes, the Foundation also provides another service, mostly for free. We help nonprofits with strategic plans and fundraising. As an example, last year, our Strategic Consulting staff created a fundraising strategy for Connections for Life, a nonprofit that helps formerly incarcerated women return to society and productive lives. The plan dovetails with our justice reform efforts.

Currents: Internal controls within nonprofits have been in the news. How does the Foundation make sure that someone on the inside does not abscond with money?

Pickell: We contracted external auditors to do a deep dive into our internal controls to ensure that nothing like that can happen at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. We hired LaPorte to assess our internal controls. The assessment is being overseen by our Finance Committee. The Foundation also is transparent with finances. Our independent annual audits are posted

on the Foundation website, along with our IRS 990 form.

Currents: One more. People in the community wonder why the Foundation doesn't just, say, pay for the entire lakes project when it has nearly \$700 million in assets? Why do you need outside funders?

Davies: The simplest way to answer this question is to note that the term "foundation" is a misnomer for our organization. We are really a donor services company with a think tank and leadership component attached. Most of the assets that we report are either in donor advised funds or they're restricted assets that respond to the interest of our 800 donors. They can only be used for specific purposes. When we explore projects and ultimately provide our leadership energy to them, we need to make the case to our donor population that they should invest in those discreet projects. Because we get the emotional and intellectual commitment of our donors along with their financial investment, we end up with the human capital necessary to see projects through to a successful conclusion. ■

Your finances and philanthropy, SIMPLIFIED.

Under the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's new program, you can open a charitable account with us **while keeping your own financial advisor**. Your advisor manages all your funds, and you can make grants to nonprofits through the Foundation.

Find out how the Foundation has simplified giving to the causes you care about. Please contact Elizabeth Hutchison at (225) 387-6126 or ehutchison@braf.org for more information.

*Baton Rouge
Area Foundation*

The logo for the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, featuring the organization's name in a serif font with a decorative flourish underneath.



COMPLETING THE SQUARE

The downtown Baton Rouge library will open in March. The branch was approved about a decade ago. A few loud opponents fought against it, and construction troubles delayed the opening to this spring from fall 2018. The \$19 million library will complete Baton Rouge's Town Square. On the square are public buildings, restaurants, a park, outdoor stage and new streetscapes connecting to the riverfront.

PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER



INFILL HOUSING

EBR Housing Authority and Partners Southeast will build lofts near the Foundation and Commercial Properties’ Water Campus in spring. Designed by RHH Architects, the 18,650-square-foot building will have 19 units. The complex will be at the corner of Oklahoma and Duane streets, between Highland Road and Nicholson Drive. Around the corner, the authority has built housing and apartments on Highland Road.

WILL WALK FOR FOOD

Widening the interstate between downtown and the I-10/I-12 split will also bring improvements to the Perkins Road Overpass area. The state Department of Transportation and Development will eliminate the exit at Perkins Road and build parking and paths around the overpass, making it easier to navigate by foot among the dozens of popular restaurants and shops there. On the downside—the state will have to demolish a few retail buildings and housing for the widening. The widening will start in segments later this year.



HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

The Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge has started a \$2.6 million renovation of a building on St. Ferdinand for its new headquarters. The space will have an arts center, gallery, theater and rooftop gathering place. The Saurage family donated \$1 million for renovations and Foundation fund donors have pledged additional funding.





Bryan Washington

Winner of The Foundation's Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence for 2019



BRYAN WASHINGTON'S STORIES have appeared in the *New Yorker* and *Paris Review*. At the age of

25, his debut collection of stories, *Lot*, was selected by the *New York Times* among its 100 most notable books of 2019. And *Lot* was also selected by an independent panel of judges to win the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, which has been presented by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation for 13 years.

The award honors Mr. Gaines, who died in November, and supports promising young African-American writers of fiction.

Washington accepted the \$15,000 award January 30 at the Manship Theatre. Several previous winners attended the ceremony to share how Mr. Gaines inspired their own work. The event also featured a short documentary of Mr. Gaines' life.

Washington lives in Houston and teaches at Rice University. We asked him a few questions for this Q&A ahead of the Gaines Book Award ceremony.

Which Gaines book is your favorite and why?

Every book in his oeuvre is essential, but *Mozart and Leadbelly* especially meant and means a good deal to me. He just seemed like the most wondrous guy.

Tell us about your short story collection, *Lot*.

I think of it, mostly, as a series of stories

about some very specific neighborhoods in Houston, and a handful of the folks that are just trying to live their lives in them. You could probably also get away with calling it a series of failed love stories set around Harris County.

Do you prefer the short story form?

Not really. I generally lean on whichever form feels necessary for the content. Sometimes, that means something super short, and sometimes it doesn't.

What is your favorite book from childhood and why?

LaBelle Cuisine, by Patti Labelle, meant a ton to me as a kid, especially the story about her sister and the entire worlds that a grilled cheese sandwich can hold. Enid Donaldson's *The Real Taste of Jamaica* did, too. The ways each author combined food and memory and narrative was something that I never really got over.

Did you have someone who inspired you to start writing?

Joanna Leake and Mat Johnson told me to keep going.

Who are some of your favorite writers and books now?

Lord, there's so many—Nafissa Thompson-Spires, Helen Oyeyemi, Haruki Murakami, Jia Tolentino, Ocean Vuong, Tommy Orange, Rachel Khong, Frank Shyong, Hanif Abdurraqib, Vinson Cunningham, Ling Ma, Nicola

Yoon, Min Jin Lee, Mira Jacobs, Danny Chau, Doreen St. Felix, Alejandro Zambra, Tracy K. Smith, Hiromi Kawakami, Weike Wang, Adnan Khan, Jay Caspian Kang, and Yoko Ogawa are just a few.

In terms of process, do you start with an idea, a character? Do you start with the final passages in mind, or do you start writing and let the story go where it takes you?

I usually start with a conversation, and then I just follow it. Sometimes I'll have the ending in mind, but it usually sneaks up on me. I'm still always shocked when it does.

What are you working on now?

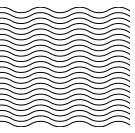
I've got a novel coming out at the end of the year. I'm slowly working on another thing. I'm too superstitious to talk about it.

Some writers wake up early in the morning to write. Others prefer the evenings. Some write for hours, others count the words they have written and stop to edit. When and how do you write?

I try to write pretty early in the morning. And I can edit whenever. The place doesn't matter much for me, but I don't mind a quiet airport.

What books are on your bedside table?

Kiley Reid's *Some Fun Age* and E.J. Koh's *The Magical Language of Others*. ■



GRANTS

THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION GRANTED \$10,000 to the Mental Health Association of Greater Baton Rouge to support the group’s annual conference in Baton Rouge in April. Conference theme is policies for moving behavioral health into mainstream health care. More at mhagbr.com/conference.

The award was among a total of \$6.5 million in fourth quarter 2019 grants. Grants by organizations are listed below. We publish all grants in our annual report.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation makes grants on behalf of people who open and fund charitable accounts with us. We manage donor assets and provide insight into local issues and nonprofits. If you are interested in learning more about opening a charitable fund at the Foundation, please call Elizabeth Hutchison at (225) 387-6126.



GRANTS / 4TH QUARTER 2019

100 Black Men of Metropolitan Baton Rouge \$50,500
 ABBA Fund Inc. \$500
 Academic Distinction Fund \$46,069
 Academy of the Sacred Heart New Orleans Foundation Inc. \$3,000
 Acadiana’s Hope For A Cure Society \$1,000
 Acts of Love Inc. \$4,500
 Adaptive Sports Foundation \$100
 AFS Intercultural Programs Inc. \$250
 Agenda for Children Inc. - New Orleans \$16,667
 Alliance Francaise de la Nouvelle Orleans \$1,500
 Alzheimer’s Services of the Capital Area \$32,100
 America Achieves Inc. \$100,000
 American Civil Liberties Union Foundation \$100
 American Heart Association Inc. - Greater Southeast Affiliate \$32,478
 American National Red Cross - Headquarters \$5,000

American National Red Cross - Louisiana Capital Area \$18,109
 American Shakespeare Center \$7,500
 AMIkids - Baton Rouge \$2,500
 AMIkids Foundation Inc. \$30,000
 AMIKids Inc. \$20,000
 Angels Place Inc. \$2,500
 Ars Lyrica Houston \$4,000
 Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$6,608
 Arts Council of New Orleans \$10,000
 Ascension Parish Sheriff’s Office \$1,000
 Atchafalaya Basinkeeper Inc. \$100
 Auckland Foundation \$40,000
 Barnstable Land Trust Inc. \$1,000
 Baton Rouge Area Foundation \$100,000
 Baton Rouge Area Kids Fore Golf Foundation \$1,000
 Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre Inc. \$500
 Baton Rouge Blues Foundation \$2,500
 Baton Rouge Christian Education Foundation Inc. - The Dunham School \$2,952

Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center Inc. \$3,798
 Baton Rouge Gallery Inc. \$8,500
 Baton Rouge Green Association Inc. \$5,473
 Baton Rouge High School Foundation \$3,000
 Baton Rouge Opera Guild \$1,877
 Baton Rouge Regional Eye Bank Inc. \$20,000
 Baton Rouge Youth Coalition Inc. \$110,000
 Ben Blanchard Memorial Foundation \$250
 BENOLA / Black Education for New Orleans \$75,000
 Beth Shalom Synagogue \$26,800
 Bevill State Community College \$1,500
 Beyond the Badge \$1,000
 Black Teacher Collaborative Incorporated \$62,500
 Blue Ridge Mountains Health Project Inc. \$750
 Boy Scouts of America - Istrouma Area Council \$168,500
 Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$66,250
 BREADA - Big River Economic & Agricultural Development Alliance \$11,350
 BREC Foundation \$5,000
 Bridge Agency Inc. \$3,500
 Bridge Center for Hope \$55,000
 Brothers of the Sacred Heart Foundation Inc. \$2,000
 Butterfly Society \$3,500
 C.E. Byrd Foundation \$250
 Cajun Navy Relief Inc. \$1,000
 Calcasieu Parish School Board - J. J. Johnson Elementary \$800
 Camelback Ventures Inc. \$12,500
 Cancer Services Inc. \$55,228
 Capital Area Animal Welfare Society \$809
 Capital Area CASA Association \$1,600
 Capital Area United Way \$115,500
 Caroline Darby Christmas Wish \$1,000
 Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans \$17,000
 Catholic Charities Bureau \$5,000
 Catholic Foundation of the Archdiocese of Mobile Inc. - St. Thomas by the Sea \$1,000



Catholic High School Foundation \$8,451	Inc. \$14,341	Friends of City Park \$5,000
Center for Planning Excellence Inc. \$14,500	Downstream Project \$250	Friends of Hilltop Arboretum Inc. \$4,850
Center for the Innovative Training of Youth Inc. / STEM NOLA \$25,000	Dream Day Foundation \$500	Friends of KGLT Inc. \$100
Centre for the Arts \$16,988	Ducks Unlimited Inc. \$100	Friends of Louisiana Public Broadcasting Inc. \$26,180
Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc./McMains Children's Development \$2,500	Dyslexia Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$609	Friends of Magnolia Mound Plantation Inc. \$3,250
Chanson, Inc. \$2,500	East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office \$102,060	Friends of New Orleans \$5,000
Child Advocacy Services Inc. \$2,500	East Baton Rouge Parish Council on Aging Inc. \$300	Friends of Rosedown Inc. \$150
Children's Cup \$1,200	East Baton Rouge Parish Library \$2,982	Friends of the Animals BR Inc. \$500
Chinese Christian Church of Baton Rouge \$287	EBRPSS - Capitol Middle School \$500	Friends of the Baton Rouge Zoo \$1,000
Christ the King Parish and Catholic Center at LSU \$15,656	EBRPSS - Park Forest Middle Magnet School \$750	Friends of the Louisiana State Archives \$1,000
Church of the Good Shepherd \$6,000	EBRPSS - Southeast Middle School \$1,000	Front Yard Bikes \$500
City Year Inc. - Baton Rouge \$22,000	EBRPSS - Tara High School \$1,000	GaitWay Therapeutic Horsemanship \$43,000
Clearview Church of Christ Inc. \$5,000	EdNavigator Inc. \$175,000	Gardere Community Christian School \$5,000
College Foundation of the University of Virginia \$1,500	Educare New Orleans \$2,500	Gary Sinise Foundation \$1,000
Community Foundation Sonoma County \$10,000	Education Trust Inc. \$25,000	General Health System Foundation \$12,000
Community Initiatives Foundation \$5,000	Emerge Center Inc. \$17,864	Georgia Tech Foundation Inc. \$5,000
Community School For Apprenticeship Learning Inc. \$1,000	Epilepsy Foundation of Louisiana \$6,000	Girl Scouts - Audubon Council Inc. \$300
Companion Animal Alliance \$54,682	Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion \$7,500	Girlie Girls Mentoring Program \$1,000
Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge \$54,613	Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge \$41,122	Global Hunger Project \$150
Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge Foundation \$4,812	Evans, Christopher \$1,500	Grace Episcopal Church \$8,412
Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge Foundation Fund \$95,000	Face to Face Health & Counseling Service Inc. \$5,000	Grambling State University \$500
Connections for Life \$25,000	Family Life Federation \$500	Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership Inc. \$132,250
Contemporary Arts Center \$5,000	Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$500	Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership Inc./YEA \$5,000
Council of French Societies of Greater New Orleans \$1,000	Family Service of Greater Baton Rouge \$5,000	Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank Inc. \$10,500
Covenant House New Orleans \$5,000	First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge \$9,839	Habitat for Humanity International Inc. \$1,000
Crippled Children's Foundation \$500	First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge Foundation \$100	Habitat for Humanity of Greater Baton Rouge \$3,500
Cristo Rey Baton Rouge \$5,000	First United Methodist Church \$26,100	Hannah's Klozet \$1,800
Delta Upsilon Lambda Foundation Inc. \$1,500	Foundation for a Better Louisiana \$3,700	Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society \$1,000
Delta Waterfowl Foundation \$12,500	Foundation for Excellence in Louisiana Public Broadcasting \$2,000	Haven Inc. \$1,000
Dialogue on Race Louisiana \$4,000	Foundation for Historical Louisiana Inc. / Preserve Louisiana \$24,754	Healing Place Church \$13,000
Dillard University National Alumni Association Inc. \$2,000	Foundation for Woman's \$34,478	Healing Place Serve / Empower 225 \$1,000
Domus Pacis Family Respite Inc. \$200	Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University \$2,000	Heritage Ranch \$24,500
Douglas Manship Sr. Theatre Complex Holding	Friends of a Studio in the Woods \$5,000	Holy Family Catholic Church \$13,811
		Holy Ghost Catholic Church \$1,000
		HOPE Enterprise Corporation \$20,000
		HOPE Ministries of Baton Rouge \$11,000
		Hospice Foundation of Greater Baton Rouge

\$42,049	Louise S. McGehee School \$500	LSU Foundation - School of Art Gallery Support Fund \$200
Humanities Amped \$8,500	Louisiana Architectural Foundation \$7,100	LSU Foundation - School of Music \$150
Iberville Foundation for Academic Excellence \$5,773	Louisiana Art and Science Museum Inc. \$20,745	LSU Foundation - School of Social Work \$500
Iberville Rehabilitation Services Inc. \$500	Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations Inc. \$426	LSU Foundation - Shreveport \$1,000
Interfaith Federation of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$100	Louisiana Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministries \$1,000	LSU Foundation - University Lab School Foundation \$4,100
International Game Fish Association Inc. \$1,000	Louisiana Children's Museum \$25,000	Luke's House - A Clinic for Healing and Hope \$2,500
International Hospitality Foundation LSU \$576	Louisiana Construction Education Foundation \$250,000	Manners of the Heart \$10,000
International Rescue Committee Inc. \$2,650	Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities \$100	Mantle of Mary Inc. \$1,000
ISKCON of Mississippi Inc. \$6,000	Louisiana Key Academy \$2,500	Map 1040 \$1,500
Jackson, Audia \$2,500	Louisiana Parole Project Inc. \$5,000	Marion County Veterans Helping Veterans Inc. \$2,500
Jesuit High School of New Orleans \$8,000	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College \$1,500	Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center \$92,500
Jewish Children's Regional Service \$100	Louisiana Superintendents Academy \$25,000	Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center Foundation \$15,000
Jewish Federation of Greater Baton Rouge \$8,250	Louisiana Symphony Association / Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra \$12,489	Mary's Shelter \$1,000
Jolie Berry Memorial Fund \$1,500	Louisiana Tech University Foundation Inc. \$2,500	Mayor's Healthy City Initiative \$1,000
Jones County Junior College \$2,500	Louisiana War Veterans Home \$100	McMains Family Fund \$700
Jubilee Pioneers \$4,000	Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation \$100	McNeese State University Foundation \$5,000
Junior Achievement of Greater Baton Rouge and Acadiana \$5,500	Louisiana Wildlife Federation Inc. \$100	Membership - BRAF \$87,750
Junior League of Raleigh \$25,000	Louisiana Youth Sports Network \$1,000	Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center \$100
Junior League of the Emerald Coast Inc. \$5,000	Loyola University \$2,500	Memorials/Honorariums - BRAF \$800
Kappa Kappa Gamma Foundation \$2,000	LSU Alumni Association \$1,600	Mental Health Initiative Project \$25,000
Karnival Krewe de Louisiane Inc. \$1,000	LSU Foundation \$228,460	Mercy Ships \$3,873
Kemper and Leila Williams Foundation - Historic New Orleans Collection \$6,310	LSU Foundation - College of Art and Design \$1,000	Metanoia Inc. \$6,000
Kids' Orchestra Inc. \$14,000	LSU Foundation - College of the Coast and Environment \$1,000	MetroMorphosis \$50,000
King of Kings Ministries Inc. / King of Kings Community Jerusalem \$750	LSU Foundation - Department of Libraries \$1,150	Miami Suns Youth Development Inc. \$26,464
Kingsley House Inc. \$2,500	LSU Foundation - E.J. Ourso College of Business \$2,500	Mighty Moms \$500
Knock Knock Children's Museum Inc. \$29,000	LSU Foundation - Friends of French Studies \$100	Miller, Nicole \$3,262
Kudvumisa Foundation USA Inc. \$1,500	LSU Foundation - LSU Ag Center Botanic Gardens at Burden \$6,500	Most Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church \$500
LA Sports Academy Basketball \$1,000	LSU Foundation - LSU Museum of Art \$6,000	National Audubon Society Inc. - Audubon Louisiana \$5,150
Lakewood Church \$1,000	LSU Foundation - Manship School of Mass Communication \$2,500	National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives Baton Rouge Chapter \$4,000
Lamar Institute of Technology \$60,000	LSU Foundation - Paul M. Hebert Law Center \$7,650	National Underground Railroad Freedom Center Inc. \$100
Life Action Ministries \$300		National World War II Museum Inc. \$18,950
Life of a Single Mom \$5,000		Nature Conservancy - Louisiana \$181,500
Living Water Christian Fellowship of Springfield \$1,500		Needserv \$5,000
Living Word Church of Muskegon \$600		
Longue Vue House and Gardens \$1,750		



New Orleans Airlift \$25,000	Phillips Exeter Academy \$2,000	\$10,000
New Orleans Ballet Association \$10,000	Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast Inc. \$2,500	Spacetaker / Fresh Arts \$500
New Orleans Career Center \$50,000	Porrazzo, Joshua \$1,500	Special Olympics Louisiana Inc. \$500
New Orleans Center for Creative Arts Institute \$1,000	Powell Group Fund/Baton Rouge Subfund \$10,000	St. Bernard St. Francis Food Pantry \$4,978
New Orleans Film and Video Festival Inc. \$10,000	Preservation Alliance of New Orleans \$1,200	St. Alban's Chapel \$15,000
New Orleans Museum of Art \$1,850	President and Fellows of Harvard College - David Rockefeller Center for Latin Am \$30,000	St. Aloysius Catholic Church \$15,000
New Orleans Musicians Assistance Foundation \$15,000	Propel America \$100,000	St. Aloysius Catholic School \$3,250
New Pathways NOLA INC \$50,000	Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana Inc. \$1,500	St. Andrew's - Sewanee School \$500
New Schools for Baton Rouge \$17,549	Rally Foundation Inc \$5,000	St. Anne Catholic Church \$1,998
New Schools for New Orleans Inc. \$350,000	Raphael Village \$5,000	St. Augustine Church \$951
NexusCity \$14,507	Rebuilding Together \$1,000	St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and School \$2,000
NexusCity Fund \$4,000	Rebuilding Together Baton Rouge Inc. \$49,250	St. Francis Chapel \$500
Night of Champions Fund \$8,750	Red Shoes Inc. \$7,200	St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church \$2,500
NWEA \$125,000	Reliant Mission Inc. \$1,500	St. Francisville Area Foundation Inc. \$100
O'Brien House Inc. \$8,500	Rising Foundations A Non-Profit Corporation \$2,500	St. George Catholic Church \$10,500
Ochsner Clinic Foundation \$1,000	Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge \$132,472	St. George's Episcopal School \$250
Ochsner Health System \$5,000	Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge - Bishop Ott Works of Mercy Trust \$189	St. Gerard Majella Church \$10,500
Of Moving Colors Productions \$3,350	Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge - Bishop's Annual Appeal \$6,500	St. James Episcopal Church \$31,500
Old State Capitol Foundation Inc. \$700	Roots of Music Inc. \$15,000	St. James Episcopal Day School \$65,500
Ollie Steele Burden Manor Inc. \$355	Rotary Club of Baton Rouge Inc. Foundation \$300	St. Joseph Cathedral \$78,574
Opera Louisiane Inc. \$6,200	Russell Domingue Ministries Inc. / Blue Flames Ministries \$750	St. Joseph the Worker Church \$6,168
Operation Restoration \$2,500	S S C Progression Corp - St. Stanislaus College \$1,000	St. Joseph's Academy \$7,500
Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church \$21,424	Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church \$1,000	St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Inc. \$5,200
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church \$38,161	Saint Joseph's Abbey and Seminary College \$1,750	St. Jude the Apostle Catholic School \$1,000
Our Lady of the Lake Foundation \$56,000	Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana \$3,500	St. Lillian Academy \$1,000
Our Voice Nuestra Voz \$75,000	Shotgun Cinema \$7,500	St. Luke's Episcopal Church \$8,675
Outstanding Mature Girlz Organization \$2,000	Shriners Hospital for Children \$5,500	St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church/ St. Thomas Chapel \$1,000
Ozanam Inn \$3,000	SJA Foundation \$3,500	St. Mary Parish School Board - Franklin High School \$1,000
Pahara Institute \$62,500	South Africa Development Fund Inc. \$10,000	St. Mary's Catholic School \$100
Park County Environmental Council \$2,200	Southern Poverty Law Center Inc. \$2,000	St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church \$1,000
Particular Council of St. Vincent de Paul of Baton Rouge Louisiana \$11,200	Southern University and A&M College \$1,500	St. Paul's Holy Trinity Episcopal Church \$200
Pat's Coats for Kids \$1,000	Southern University System Foundation	St. Theresa of Avila Middle School \$6,414
Patrons of the East Baton Rouge Parish Public Library \$100		St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School \$14,655
Paul Quinn College \$39,500		Strength for Today \$2,600
Pearl River Community College \$1,500		Stuart Hall School Foundation \$100
Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation \$64,500		Sunshine Foundation Inc. \$10,000
		Swine Palace Productions Inc. \$1,200


GRANTS

Teach For America - Greater Delta: Mississippi & Arkansas \$2,250	Trinity Episcopal Church - Baton Rouge \$6,394	YMCA \$150
Teach For America Inc. - South Louisiana \$218,000	Trinity Episcopal Church - New Orleans \$1,500	Young Aspirations-Young Artists Inc. \$2,500
Terrebonne Parish School Board - Oaklawn Middle School \$1,000	Trinity Episcopal Day School \$500	Young Leaders' Academy of Baton Rouge \$100
The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund \$16,750	Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York \$11,250	Young Life - Baton Rouge \$5,000
The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund - Tulane Cancer Center \$1,000	Tulane Alumni Association \$1,144	Youth Oasis \$100
The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund - Tulane University Law School \$500	Union for Reform Judaism \$100	Zachary High School \$1,200
The Arc Gateway \$5,000	United for a Good Cause Inc. \$5,000	
The Ascension Fund Inc. \$13,797	United States Holocaust Memorial Council \$100	
The Billfish Foundation \$1,000	University Baptist Church \$500	
The Breakthrough Collaborative Inc. \$1,000	University of Florida Leadership and Education Foundation Inc. \$5,000	
The Cahoon Museum of American Art Inc. \$2,500	University of Houston \$2,500	
The Christian Outreach Center of Baton Rouge Inc. \$1,339	University of Louisiana at Lafayette \$500	
The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee \$500	University of Mississippi Foundation \$2,000	
The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina Inc. \$2,000	University of Mississippi Medical Center \$1,000	
The Corporation of Mercer University - Grant Opera House \$5,000	University of New Mexico Foundation Inc. \$1,000	
The Cotuit Library Association \$1,000	University of New Orleans Foundation \$300	
The Foundation for Outdoor Advertising Research and Education \$5,000	University of Richmond \$250	
The Friends of the Rural Life Museum Inc. \$3,000	University of Texas Foundation \$1,500	
The Hargrove Foundation \$10,000	University of the Cumberlands Inc. \$750	
The Mental Health Association for Greater Baton Rouge \$100	University of the South \$25,000	
The Original Richland Library Restoration Society Inc. \$811	University Presbyterian Church \$25,700	
The Salvation Army - Baton Rouge \$12,000	Upturn Arts \$2,500	
The Salvation Army - New Orleans Area Command \$1,000	Vail Valley Foundation Inc. \$1,000	
The Suffolk Community Foundation \$8,000	Vandebilt Catholic High School \$3,000	
The Troy Andrews Foundation \$717	Video Veracity Inc. \$2,500	
The Walls Project \$1,611	Volunteers In Public Schools Inc. \$7,250	
Three Peaks Scholarship Fund \$250	Volunteers of America Inc. \$28,806	
Thrive Foundation \$5,000	Wellington College \$6,990	
Tiger Athletic Foundation \$5,000	West Baton Rouge Foundation for Academic Excellence \$6,171	
Tostan Inc. \$5,000	West Feliciana Historical Society \$500	
	Williams, Sha' Melba \$1,200	
	Wounded Warrior Project Inc. \$1,000	
	WRKF Public Radio Inc. \$14,660	
	Yale University \$1,000	
	YMCA of the Capital Area \$700	
	YMCA of the Capital Area - A.C. Lewis Branch	

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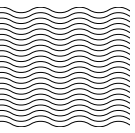
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CIVIC PROJECTS



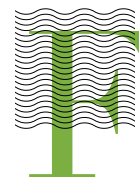
Located one block from the intersection with Mohican Street, the Plank Road Food Hub is envisioned as a mixed-use site with a grocery, pharmacy, residential units and space for local food entrepreneurs. Build Baton Rouge currently owns the majority of the proposed site, making it a prime development opportunity.



Due North

Plank Road master plan implementation has begun

BY MAGGIE HEYN RICHARDSON



Few streets in the Baton Rouge community are as historically important—and imperiled—as Plank Road. For more than two centuries, the 4.3-mile thoroughfare has been a significant transportation corridor, a road once literally made of planks and built by enslaved people. In the 19th century, the north-south route helped connect a train depot in nearby Clinton to downtown Baton Rouge. Later, after ExxonMobil forerunner Standard Oil selected the Capital City as the site of its southern expansion in the early 1900s, Plank Road and its environs became home to scores of plant workers and their families. By mid-century, the working class district hummed with everyday life as children attended schools, adults went to work and families shopped and worshipped nearby.



TIM MUELLER



THERE'S A LOT OF MOMENTUM AND A LOT OF EXCITEMENT FOR DOING SOMETHING POSITIVE ALONG PLANK ROAD. THE GOOD THAT HAPPENS THERE WILL BENEFIT THE ENTIRE BATON ROUGE COMMUNITY."

—Chris Tyson, President and CEO of Build Baton Rouge



But in the second half of the 20th century, decline and neglect crept into Plank Road and its surrounding neighborhoods. Baton Rouge's development energy shifted to the east and southeast, where growing numbers of suburban housing and retail developments took root. At the same time, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System's struggles with desegregation engendered significant white flight from the city's urban core. Crime rates increased along Plank Road, and so did blight and abandoned properties. Today, the area is still home to many, but it has struggled for decades with poverty, unemployment and social fragmentation.

Now, Plank Road could see a new beginning—a chance to hit the reset button—thanks to a recently completed community-led master plan coordinated by Build Baton Rouge, originally named the East Baton Rouge Parish Redevelopment Authority. In 2018, the organization received \$100,000 from JP Morgan Chase and \$15,000 from ExxonMobil to support the creation of a master plan for Plank Road. Build Baton Rouge hired planning firm Asakura Robinson, which has offices in Austin, Houston and New Orleans, to facilitate it.

Completed in fall 2019, the Imagine Plank Road master plan is a guiding document calling for new housing and retail as well as carefully coordinated social and transit services that address the needs of neighborhood residents. It's intention, says Build Baton Rouge President and CEO Chris Tyson, is to bring equitable development to north Baton Rouge. Conducted with significant community participation, the plan expresses five benchmarks: to amplify the culture and history of neighborhood institutions; to sustain and grow commerce and access to jobs; to protect and grow community wealth; to build streets and neighborhoods that connect people to opportunity; and to strengthen public spaces and infrastructure to

improve health and safety outcomes.

Tyson says that the planning process for Plank Road is long overdue.

"We've allowed Plank Road to decline so long that it's hard for many people to envision what it can look like. The idea seems to challenge our imagination, even as we have seen what can be accomplished with a master planning process in downtown Baton Rouge and Mid City," he says.

"But I just outright reject that," Tyson continues. "We need to deliver something viable and implementable for Plank Road, and not let our imagination be cut off at Florida Boulevard."

While recruiting new investment to Plank Road might face hurdles, two simultaneous initiatives are providing momentum to the project. The first is the Plank Road to Nicholson Drive Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line, which will span Plank Road, turn west on Florida Boulevard and ultimately connect to Nicholson Drive and to one of the city's biggest employers, LSU. In early November, Baton Rouge Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome announced a \$15 million federal grant to support the creation of the new BRT line, which will be combined with another \$17 million in local matching funds. The project, conducted in partnership with the Capital Area Transit System, will boost opportunities for north Baton Rouge residents, who have one of the highest rates of bus ridership in the City-Parish.

A BRT line isn't just any bus line. BRT lines provide faster, more efficient travel since the buses have traffic signal priority. BRT buses feature Wi-Fi and stop at large, modern shelters with comfortable seating and real-time updates on digital signage. The stops, generally one mile apart from one another, often become mini-transit hubs where riders without cars can connect with rideshare apps like Uber and Lyft, or bikeshare programs, like Gotcha, which began in Baton Rouge in summer 2019. Gotcha



COURTESY WHIC ARCHITECTURE

A proposed civic center across from the Food Hub (page 24) will have a transit station. Near the intersection of Mohican and Plank, the 22,000-square-foot multiuse space will be designed to accommodate social services, conference facilities, classrooms, or a public library.

bike stations are already installed in and around LSU and Southern University, with more to come as demand increases.

Secondly, the Plank Road plan's chances of moving from idea to reality is also energized by Build Baton Rouge's land bank. Over the last several years, the redevelopment authority has acquired 85 parcels of blighted, adjudicated properties along or near Plank Road. Magnets for illegal dumping and drugs, these neighborhood nuisances are now primed for redevelopment.

Build Baton Rouge has also secured an \$860,000 line of credit from the Capital Area Finance Authority to support development of these parcels and other locations.

Tyson says the plan has pinpointed a handful of initial catalytic developments designed to bring resources and ameni-

ties to the neighborhood while having the power to ignite additional future investment. One is a planned pocket park at Plank and Myrtlelawn Street, just north of Prescott. The small park will provide safe recreational greenspace for neighborhood residents, and also serve the site of future pop-up retail activities for neighborhood micro-enterprise entrepreneurs.

"In looking at our inventory," says Tyson, "we asked 'how could we best develop this corner spot?' Brick-and-mortar developments were planned in other places, but this allows us to bring some variation to the corridor."

Another catalytic project is a planned mixed-use development at Plank Road between Oswego and Calumet streets, which hold parcels already acquired by Build Baton Rouge. Here, the vision is to

build a two-story mixed-used building that will include first-floor space for a YWCA early childhood learning center, as well as space for Build Baton Rouge's future offices. The development would also include 15 affordable housing units on the building's second floor. The site is located just two blocks from a planned BRT station at Plank and Winbourne Avenue, creating a significant boost for working parents who need both child-care and transportation.

Tyson says the developer for the project will be a community-based organization called the Plank Road Area Investment Corporation, which is made up of neighborhood residents. "This fulfills a key component of the plan," says Tyson, "ensuring that residents are not just recipients of positive change, but also agents in the process."



COURTESY STUDIO ZEWDE

The plan proposes transforming an existing building at Plank and Myrtlelawn into a pop-up retail space and community gathering place. Entrepreneurs could test their retail ideas in the space.

The plan also calls for a Plank Road Food Hub, a mixed-use development on Plank and Mohican Street. The vision for this key corner, where Build Baton Rouge owns the majority of parcels, is to create a three-story development that



FOUNDATION FACT

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has supported redevelopment of disinvested areas for more than 25 years, starting with a revival plan for downtown Baton Rouge that ultimately led to the creation of Build Baton Rouge with parish and state leaders. The Foundation appoints one member of the BBR board.

includes a grocery store, pharmacy and space for local food entrepreneurs. It will also include residential units. The proposed project is adjacent to an existing CATS bus stop that could be transformed into a BRT stop, linking future residents and users of the site to efficient public transportation.

Across the street from the site is another planned signature neighborhood project: a 22,000-square-foot civic center that could accommodate public events, social services, conferences, meetings, classrooms or a public library. Pedestrian-friendly amenities would be installed to ensure safe crossing of the street as users walk from one site to the other.

Finally, another game-changing project for the area has been identified for Plank between Iroquois and Duke streets, where the Society of St. Vincent

de Paul operates a men’s shelter, student uniform program and thrift store. The project represents an exciting possible public-private partnership between Build Baton Rouge and St. Vincent de Paul, which could work together to leverage resources for expanding the nonprofit’s work while adding new transit-oriented developments, such as affordable housing and retail or complementary social services.

Now that the plan is finished, Build Baton Rouge is turning its attention to implementation, says Tyson, with the initial focus on funding for the pocket park and the mixed-use development at Plank and Oswego.

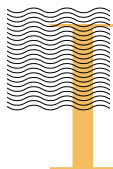
“There’s a lot of momentum and a lot of excitement for doing something positive along Plank Road,” says Tyson. “The good that happens there will benefit the entire Baton Rouge community.” ■



With the tide

Water Institute-Tulane complete first phase of landmark project in Argentina

BY MAGGIE HEYN RICHARDSON



It's one of the most important questions vexing coastal communities around the globe: How can a waterfront city fulfill the needs of its citizens while balancing the challenge of rising seas? How can a community welcome development while mitigating flood events that have become more frequent?

A joint research project conducted by The Water Institute of the Gulf and the Tulane University School of Architecture for the waterfront city of Quilmes, Argentina, may offer new insight into this problem by offering design recommendations that encourage working with water, not against it.

In 2019, the Water Institute and Tulane's School of Architecture were asked by local officials to begin work in Quilmes, a city with a population of

about 580,000 south of Buenos Aires.

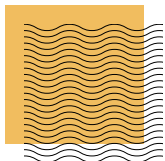
Located on the Río de la Plata and situated in a complex floodplain, Quilmes is a place that needs answers. The city is located with the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, where a commercially successful and well-established riverfront has subsequently sparked development interest in the Quilmes riverfront to the south. But leaders in Quilmes believe new development needs to be balanced with existing ecological and social issues, including recurrent flooding, water pollution, a lack of affordable housing and poor drainage.

Led by Tulane School of Architecture Dean Iñaki Alday and supported by a \$75,000 research grant from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the Quilmes project aims to create an initial blueprint for the community on how to

better control flooding in advance of new development. The recently completed Urban, Water and Social Integration Plan for Quilmes is a first-phase, broad-strokes look at balancing the regular intrusion of water against the ongoing need for economic development and affordable housing.

Alday and his team worked with the Water Institute's Director of Human Dimensions Scott Hemmerling and Civil Engineer Brett McMann to create the plan, which recommends flood controls and planning strategies that could rewrite the relationship between residents and water.

Regular flooding takes place in Quilmes for two reasons, rainfall and a seasonal weather phenomenon called sudestada, in which changes in wind speed and direction cause a surge of



FOUNDATION FACT

The Water Institute of the Gulf was formed by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. It's an independent applied research and technical services institution with a mission to help coastal and deltaic communities adapt to rising seas and vanishing wetlands.



Iñaki Alday

ocean water. Over the years, Quilmes has attempted to resolve flooding through concrete walls that block the flow of water through the community. But these measures have only worsened the impact of flooding. The situation is seen most urgently in the way that two smaller rivers, or arroyos, have been restricted. With nowhere to go, water breaches their banks, flooding communities, especially where vulnerable populations have put up off-the-grid housing with no formal infrastructure.

The Water Institute-Tulane team conducted on-the-ground research in Quilmes in August 2019, taking a careful look at the city's hydrological systems, existing infrastructure and green spaces, as well as social issues like a high incidence of water pollution and contamination. Hemmerling led a team that gathered community input, but instead of corralling residents into a single room or creating an online portal to capture public opinion, Hemmerling used an innovative technique called spatial video geonarrative.

"It allows us to document and record conversations while mapping them with GIS at the same time," says Hemmerling. "That enables us to add some narrative depth to each site we visit."

Spatial video geonarrative is a simple but valuable tool that allows environmental and social researchers to contextualize issues by recording interviews onsite and linking comments to plot points on the map. Deploying audio and visual recording equipment, the Louisiana research team interviewed Quilmes leaders and local residents while visiting sites vulnerable to flooding. There, they heard stories of the real life impact, including devastating loss of property, recurrent community hazards and water pollution. The SVG technology and accompanying software helped the team create a dynamic database in which valuable feedback was neatly linked to physical locations.

One of the issues that has emerged

from the team's work is that water in Quilmes has long been regarded as a problem, not as a source of beauty or development opportunity. Routine flooding, made worse by overdevelopment, has created the perception that water is to be repelled. Complicating matters further is a lack of public infrastructure, which has caused the arroyos to become common dumping grounds for public waste. One strategy, suggests the research team, is to re-naturalize areas along the arroyos so that water is better absorbed, retained and released during flooding events.

"To the extent possible, it may make sense to reconnect existing streams and lagoons so that they can store the water as it floods, and then let it out slowly as it recedes," says McMann. "There are a lot of parallels between Quilmes and the Louisiana-Texas Gulf Coast."

Re-naturalizing existing channels will not only better absorb flooding, but also encourage a return of wetland plant species that can aid in the removal of nutrient pollutants while providing aesthetic value. Quilmes is a community with a lower than average rate of civic green space, so introducing attractive waterfront parks or gathering places would be seen as a valuable byproduct of flood mitigation.

As for the waterfront, the plan recommends a series of berms and hydraulic systems that would keep the city safe from flooding while creating amenable spots for development. The plan also suggests updated building codes to ensure sustainability.

Hemmerling says the plan was presented to Quilmes local elected officials in November. The research team is on standby; municipal elections brought in a new administration in December, but they're hopeful work will continue. These kinds of global planning projects are in keeping with the Water Institute's charge of conducting research that benefits coastal and deltaic communities. ■

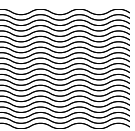
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GREAT LAKES BATON ROUGE

Transformation of the lakes will create the premier outdoor destination for our region

BY MUKUL VERMA



he men came armed with pickaxes, saws and shovels. During the Great Depression, the federal government dispatched nearly one-thousand unemployed laborers to Baton Rouge and tasked them with turning swamps into lakes. They cut down thousands of cypress trees and muscled out tons of mud to create the lakes. LSU grew up around the water bodies, and people built homes along their scenic shores. »

Added greenspace with new promenade on Sorority Row

Expanded Milford Wampold Memorial Park on Stanford Avenue with bigger beach and more open space

A deeper lake will allow more boating.

Deepening the lakes will improve water quality, a prime directive of the project.

Cyclist and pedestrian paths around South Lakeshore Drive





University and City Park lakes, along with four smaller ones, became the most popular gathering place for folks in East Baton Rouge Parish. And that's a problem.

The lakes were not designed for how they are enjoyed today. Runners, walkers, cyclists and birdwatchers crowd the banks and dodge each other on narrow pathways. Vehicles get dangerously close to pedestrians in places where there are no paths at all.

At our annual meeting in 2014, marking the Foundation's 50th anniversary, CEO and President John G. Davies announced that your community foundation would underwrite a master plan for a renewal of the lakes—a thank-you gift to the public for their support.

Led by SWA Group and Carbo Landscape Architecture, the first goal of the \$1 million master plan was to deepen the lakes and improve their failing water quality. But what's to be done with the material dredged up from the bottom?

Because it would cost tens of millions of dollars to truck the muck elsewhere,

planners sought community input and quickly recognized a valuable resource; after all, in South Louisiana, land is too precious to waste. So, to match the needs and uses of the lakes today, dredged mud will be used to construct separate paths for cyclists and pedestrians. It will also go to expand Milford Wampold Memorial Park on Stanford Avenue, to add a promenade to Sorority Row, and to build a new park at May Street and Dalrymple Drive.

The Foundation's civic leadership initiatives staff spent three years searching for money to implement the plan. The staff succeeded in November, when Gov. John Bel Edwards announced that state and local partners had dedicated \$50 million to save the lakes, and the project quickly gathered momentum.

The next month, the partners—state and city-parish government, BREC, LSU and the LSU Athletics Department—signed a memorandum of understand-

ing to proceed with the initiative. Next, they picked the LSU Real Estate and Facilities Foundation, which oversees development for the university, to serve as the conduit for their combined efforts. The partners each have a representative in the advisory group guiding LSU REFF.

Finally, LSU REFF invited firms to apply to oversee the endeavor. In January, from a pool of six applicants, the partners chose a joint venture of Brailsford & Dunlavy of Washington, D.C., and CSRS of Baton Rouge to manage the project going forward. The project advisor will assist with the next step: selecting a builder to turn the master plan into construction documents and to do the work.

Dredging should begin within 12 months. ■





RENDERINGS COURTESY SWA GROUP

DALRYMPLE PROMENADE

A promenade from the interstate on Dalrymple would be a gateway to LSU. Safety first, as cyclists and walkers/joggers would get their own paths and the street would be lined with trees.

LSU PROMENADE *(left)*

Sorority Row has a walking path and strip of green along the shore. With dredged materials, the area will be expanded. The plan recommends the new area be turned into a promenade, where people can relax, picnic and get closer to the water.



LAKES AT I-10

Gardens that filter water would be built at the water's edge, as seen here at I-10.



EAST LAKESHORE

The master plan has separate walking and biking paths for pedestrian and cyclist safety, and sitting areas, as seen here on East Lakeshore.





MAY STREET PARK

Dredged materials would deepen the lakes to improve water quality and materials would be used to build amenities, such as a new park on May Street. An iconic bridge would let boaters row between the two lakes.

Bridge would let boaters row between the two lakes





Q&A

Kinder Baumgardner, Baton Rouge lakes lead planner

FIVE YEARS AGO, SWA Group's Kinder Baumgardner led landscape architects, environmental engineers, historians and others to create the master plan for the University/City Park lakes. An independent panel chose his firm after an open and transparent process, which included a call for applications, public input and presentations by three finalists. Among SWA's credentials was the transformation of Buffalo Bayou, a neglected Houston waterway, into an award-winning park.

Baumgardner already knew much about the Baton Rouge lakes and our city. He grew up here and graduated from LSU's Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture, which is ranked the No. 1 program in the country. After Gov. John Bel Edwards and partners announced a financing plan in November to implement the master plan, *Currents* asked Baumgardner a few questions.

Your firm designed the Buffalo Bayou Project in Houston, which took an ignored water body and turned it into a draw for recreation. How did that project change the people of Houston and the city's perception outside it?

The Buffalo Bayou project has been an amazing catalyst for so many things that are happening in Houston. It has become the image of Houston, both

here at home and nationally. When you google "Houston Texas," you used to get images of freeways with our skyline in the background; now you get images of the bayou with our skyline in the background. And the bayou is full of Houstonians and visitors doing things that they never expected to do in our city. They are riding bikes to work, kayaking, attending concerts and learning about nature and habitat in the heart of the fourth largest city in the U.S. It not only changed the image of Houston, but the image of what Houstonian's think of themselves.

Has the Buffalo Bayou project sparked other recreation projects in Houston?

After the success of the first phase of Buffalo Bayou, the Houston Parks Board convinced our residents to pass a bond measure that would build 150 miles of trails and linear parks along the citywide network of bayous. I think that people saw the Buffalo Bayou project and wanted those amenities and access to open space brought into their own neighborhoods. The project has also sparked a continuation of the park along the Bayou north of downtown, and a new flood control project called the North Canal that will mix flood control infrastructure with public space. Like the main Buffalo Bayou Park project, both of these new projects are being



“

ULTIMATELY, WE WILL FIND BATON ROUGE RESIDENTS USING THE LAKES IN WAYS THAT THEY NEVER CONSIDERED, AND IN TURN NEW ATTITUDES ABOUT THEIR CITY WILL EMERGE.”

—Kinder Baumgardner,
SWA Group



led by the Buffalo Bayou Partnership.

When completed, what effect will the LSU/City Park Lakes project have on the people of our parish?

I think that the lakes project will have similar effects on the people of Baton Rouge and visitors to the city, as Buffalo Bayou Park did to Houstonians. Your lakes already offer spectacular views and are well used by residents from across the parish—but the surrounding streets and open spaces were never designed for the types of uses that they receive, so a lot of conflict has resulted. The master plan calls for the resolution of much of that conflict and, as a result, people will be able to make much better use of the lake system. Water quality improvements will ensure healthy populations of fish and migratory birds; wetlands and native plantings will introduce biodiversity to the heart of the city; and new trails, bike paths and park spaces will result in people using the lakes in a more robust way, and with more harmony. Ultimately, we will find Baton Rouge residents using the lakes

in ways that they never considered, and in turn new attitudes about their city will emerge.

What benefits can we expect to see from saving and enhancing the lakes?

The idea of the lake as a park is the essence of the master plan. The opportunity is a new kind of park for the people of Baton Rouge; an open space amenity with the restored Baton Rouge Lakes at its heart. A place of health, wellness and equity illustrated by the renewed waters and ecosystems of the lakes, paired with fantastic views and new activities on the lakes and along their shores

Were there some surprise results from the Buffalo Bayou project that we may see in Baton Rouge as well?

I think the biggest surprise we saw was how Buffalo Bayou Park became the park that Houston never knew it needed. The bayou was always there, and there were open spaces along its

banks, but by repositioning the bayou and its lands as a robust park designed specifically to accommodate new uses and activities, everyone just seemed to say, “of course.” The result seems so simple and obvious, but it was the result of rigorous research, design thinking and public engagement.

Another important surprise was how much private investment grew out of the park. More than \$2 billion worth of development has occurred within a three-block radius of the park. Of course, the Baton Rouge Lake system is largely surrounded by residential uses and that won’t change. But the important thing about this metric is that open space has been proven to be a big driver of the evolution of cities, and that evolution ripples through the city in new and unexpected ways. In the case of Baton Rouge, it will likely result in people thinking about themselves and the city differently, and this new kind of public space will complement the many new urban opportunities happening in Downtown Baton Rouge and its surrounding neighborhoods.



Map Showing Proposed Extension of City Park Lake Baton Rouge, La..

John P. D'Amico
Engineer



Completion of City Park Lake, 1929

HOW THE LAKES CAME TO BE

HISTORICALLY, LOUISIANA State University and City Park lakes have, together, shaped our city.

LSU started out in downtown Baton Rouge where the Louisiana Capitol is now located. By the turn of the 20th century, the university had grown and university leaders searched for a new location for a larger campus. They selected the Gartness Plantation and adjacent land, well outside the city then. Construction of the present campus began in 1922, with classes starting three years later. The growing university's new location pulled more and

more residents into its orbit; the Garden District grew up as Baton Rouge's new, far-flung suburb.

In 1923, parish taxpayers voted for a bond issue to finance the purchase of land for a new City Park near LSU. Park planners transformed a neighboring patch of marsh into City Park Lake in 1929. But that wasn't enough; the surrounding swampland was perceived as a menacing place, especially because LSU was now nearby. A newspaper report of the time described the swamp as "a breeding place for mosquitoes (that) was overrun with all

kinds of reptiles and animals. It was not a pleasant place."

Meanwhile, the stock market crashed in 1929, marking the start of the Great Depression. By the early 1930s, Baton Rouge was suffering through the worst unemployment in the state, after New Orleans. Thousands of men needed work, and the Chamber of Commerce recognized opportunity for them in that swamp. In 1933, chamber leaders hatched a plan to drain the Old Perkins Swamp, as it was known then, and to create lakes from it. Funding for the project was expected to come from



WPA workers grading City Park Lake, 1936



Old Perkins Swamp (Bayou Duplantier), 1936



Looking out over University Lake, circa 1935

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's back-to-work programs.

Four generous donors who owned Old Perkins Swamp donated the property to LSU, but with an important stipulation: the university was obligated to turn the swamps into lakes and parks for public use, and to keep them so forever.

John Munding, a civil engineer appointed to the Chamber's lakes committee, planned the entire project and supervised it throughout its five-year construction phase. The lakes were designed to vary in depth from a few inches at the edges to nine feet in the middle, with "step-off" holes dug in various places, reaching a depth of more than 20 feet.

A ceremony on July 7, 1933, commemorated the launch of this monumental civic project. Baton Rouge's leaders waxed poetic about the dramatic changes

that would follow for the city when "the swamp and all its snakes, frogs, herons, turtles, and wood ducks had fled; when the underbrush and trees had been cut away; when the 273-acre expanse has become a shimmering, beautiful lake."

Roosevelt's WPA employed 900 men for the enormous job ahead. Using saws, axes and shovels, those men wrestled lakes from the wild swamp within a few short years. But they also left behind an unseen artifact of the Old Perkins Swamp: thousands of big cypress stumps below the water's surface.

So many trees were cut down that a for-profit sawmill was built next to the swamp. Cypress logs suitable for lumber were sorted and stacked around the banks of the lakes, which were beginning to take shape. The job of clearing the swamp generated an estimated one million board feet of lumber.

The workers also built a drainage and sewer system that allowed LSU to claim land for Sorority Row, and they formed new land for roads that surround the lakes. The backbreaking work of those 900 laborers removed the threat of malaria-bearing mosquitoes and created a public greenspace that would be cherished by generations of residents from all parts of the parish.

Soon after the project was completed, journalists and others offered a glowing assessment of the beautiful new public amenity for East Baton Rouge Parish's increasingly urban population. In a 1938 *Advocate* article, Orene Muse wrote:

"No magic wand was waved. No genie appeared on the scene. Instead, the present lake is a symbol of community leaders' foresight, and it represents the work of thousands of hands.... Though it



The view from University Lake, circa 1940



Control structure, 1937



Canoeing on City Park lake, circa 1940

was born of travail, the new lake boasts a beauty that has no kin with plebeian need. Shimmering beauty covers the 273-acre tract on a sunshiny October day. Leafy trees mark niches of beauty along the five-mile driveway. Impressive homes have sprung up along its banks. Sailboats may be glimpsed there on a windy day. And, now and then along the banks, a fisherman with a full catch is silhouetted against the sun.”

But those cypress stumps, forgotten beneath the surface, would serve as a silent reminder that the lovely new manmade lakes were once swamps, and man can never fully overcome nature. As soon as the lakes were finished, nature began her slow, relentless attempt to reclaim what was once hers. By 1942, invasive plants had become a problem. Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries spent ten weeks removing water hyacinths from the lakes that year.

The plants returned less than a decade later, and the shallow bottom of the lake continued to rise with sediments.

In the 1980s, local government took action to counter the gradual degeneration of the lakes. A company was hired to dredge University Lake but, before long, the firm was stumped. Literally. After discovering so many cypress stumps on the bottom, dredging faltered and the job was abandoned before the whole lake was properly dug out. But the project was not a complete loss; the work that was completed has held up, and University Lake remains much deeper in areas around Stanford Avenue where the stumps were pulled up and the bottom was successfully dredged.

Learning from history, current designers have crafted a master plan for saving the lakes. The stumps will be removed

and the lakes deepened, but this time the plan recognizes and respects the natural processes at work in the lakes, guided by a human hand. Plants along the shoreline will filter runoff, reducing sedimentation, and the lakes—six of them—will be shaped, with various depths, to provide breeding habitats for fish. The lakes will be deep enough this time, and there will be methods for removing sediment to keep them deep and healthy for decades to come.

Closely wedded in their history, the LSU campus and the lakes around City Park truly transformed Baton Rouge for the better in the first part of the 20th century. The early years of the 21st century will be remembered as a time when Baton Rouge decisively revived and preserved this historic treasure for the city’s future.

—By Mukul Verma, adapted from a history of the lakes by Suzanne Turner Associates for the 2016 lakes master plan.

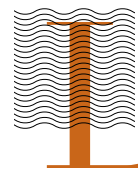




Her beat goes on

*Accomplished professor,
pianist leaves a surprise
gift to Foundation*

BY SARA BONGIORNI
PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER



Laurabeth Henderson Hicks, PhD, spent her elementary years inside a segregated, one-room school in Depression-era Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The teacher was Laurabeth's mother, who had moved her family to the New Mexico desert from Galveston, Texas. She taught Laurabeth and seven other African American children subjects from math to piano.

Outside of class, Laurabeth explored the desert with her brother. She learned to patch chinks in the walls of the family's adobe house with mud.





Vickie Casanova-Willis with photos of her aunt

“

SHE WAS A REALIST BUT ALSO AN OPTIMIST WHO SAW A HALF-FULL GLASS AND WONDERED HOW SHE COULD FILL IT A LITTLE MORE.”

—Vickie Casanova-Willis, on her aunt, Laurabeth Henderson Hicks



Las Cruces was a formative chapter in an extraordinary life shaped by family, music and scholarship, one that ended in October with Dr. Hicks' death at 99.

She punctuated the end of her life with a \$70,000 gift to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, whose work she followed in the newspaper each morning after greeting the day by listening to the birds and looking out at the trees surrounding her home in Baker.

The Foundation first learned of the gift from Hicks' niece, Vickie Casanova-Willis. “She believed that you share what you have,” Casanova-Willis said. “She was a realist but also an optimist who saw a half-full glass and wondered how she could fill it a little more.”

Teacher, educational psychologist, counselor and researcher, Hicks was a leader in educational psychology at Southern University and elsewhere who also analyzed education policy for the U.S. government.

Hicks was instrumental in estab-

lishing the counseling center at Southern, where she was the Lab School's counselor. She was the first African American president of the Louisiana Counseling Association and the first counselor at the University of Minnesota's lab school.

Titles of her scholarly articles are resonant decades after she wrote them. A 1977 article for Educational Leadership, for instance, posed the question, “Schools Children Like: What Do They Say About Them?”

Hicks broke ground alongside her husband of 55 years, Dr. William R. “Bill” Hicks, former dean of the school of education at Southern and a World War II veteran who served in Europe and the Pacific.

The couple met at a USO-style gathering for soldiers returning from the war, work in which Laurabeth's mother was deeply involved. Together the Hicks earned doctorates from the University of Minnesota while working and living in Port Arthur, Texas, where Laurabeth had her first teaching job after graduating from Prairie View A&M University.

Each summer for years, the couple packed up the car and drove to Minnesota to complete coursework, then returned to Texas for the school year.

The Hicks were the first African American couple to complete their doctorates together at the University of Minnesota.

They broke ground outside of academia, too. The Hicks helped develop the Parkwood Terrace subdivision in Baker, where Laurabeth Hicks remained in the couple's longtime home until the final weeks of her life.

She was in the business of encouraging young people, and she changed Baton Rouge for the better, off and on the Southern campus. Hicks helped found the DeBose Foundation, named in honor of the university's legendary professor of piano, Tourgee DeBose.

The arts organization hosts a national

piano competition in Baton Rouge each year.

Piano was a great love, and Hicks played more or less every day for most of her life, including in the weeks before her death five months shy of her 100th birthday. She liked jazz and hymns. “How Great Thou Art” was a favorite.

Her quiet humor, sharp mind and keen interest in other people made her a beloved presence in every circle— aunt, friend, neighbor. Her laughter was like music. Her favorite way to spend her free time mirrored the focus of her distinguished professional life.

“Talking to people, without a doubt,” Casanova-Willis said. “She could sit down with anybody from any walk of life and have a great conversation about football or music or politics. She was comfortable in her own skin, and she believed in the good in people.”

She loved to share stories, especially about her mother and the years in Las Cruces. She loved listening even better.

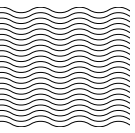
Hicks let others set the pace of conversation with patience and quiet observation that she credited to playing the piano during church services as a teenager in Las Cruces.

“Those were skills that were important to her later work that she developed during the services where she played,” Casanova-Willis said.

She never forgot her roots and didn't want to. She retained the conversational Spanish she learned from Mexican playmates in Las Cruces. She sent money for the rest of her life to an organization that supports Native American communities in the Southwest.

Like her husband, Hicks had opportunities to work and teach across the country. She chose Baton Rouge and Southern and its important role as a historically black university.

“She always contributed to the benefit of children and young people,” Casanova-Willis said. Her gift to the Foundation “is a chance to continue that work.” ■



Yes, they CAAN

New organization turns ambitious autism report into results

BY SARA BONGIORNI | PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER

Steve Whitlow opened a custom T-shirt shop in Central to provide hands-on work experience to his son and other young people with autism as they moved toward adulthood.

An attorney specializing in industrial defense, Whitlow opened the nonprofit shop three years ago because there was no place providing similar training for his now 19-year-old son and others about to transition out of the structured, sheltered school environment.

“People describe graduating from high school as going over a cliff,” Whitlow said. “Services disappear for people with autism.”

Whitlow continues to advance transition services as part of the Capital Area Autism Network (CAAN), the newest element of a Baton Rouge Area Foundation initiative to expand regional services for families impacted by autism spectrum disorder.

The Foundation formed CAAN in response to earlier autism-related work. In 2014, the Foundation partnered with the Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation on a comprehensive study of autism resources in the capital region.

The study’s publication in 2016 provided a detailed analysis of existing—and lacking—autism services. It was a formidable document on a number of counts, starting with its length—303 pages—and its inclusion of findings and recommendations from 18 months of meetings with community stakeholders.

The study wasn’t just a catalogue of existing and needed resources. It was also a call to action. It laid out 25 specific recommendations for action to build regional autism resources over time—a “massive undertaking” in the study’s own words.

Its recommendations vary in focus and complexity. They include boosting awareness of autism “red flags” among preschool teachers, creating

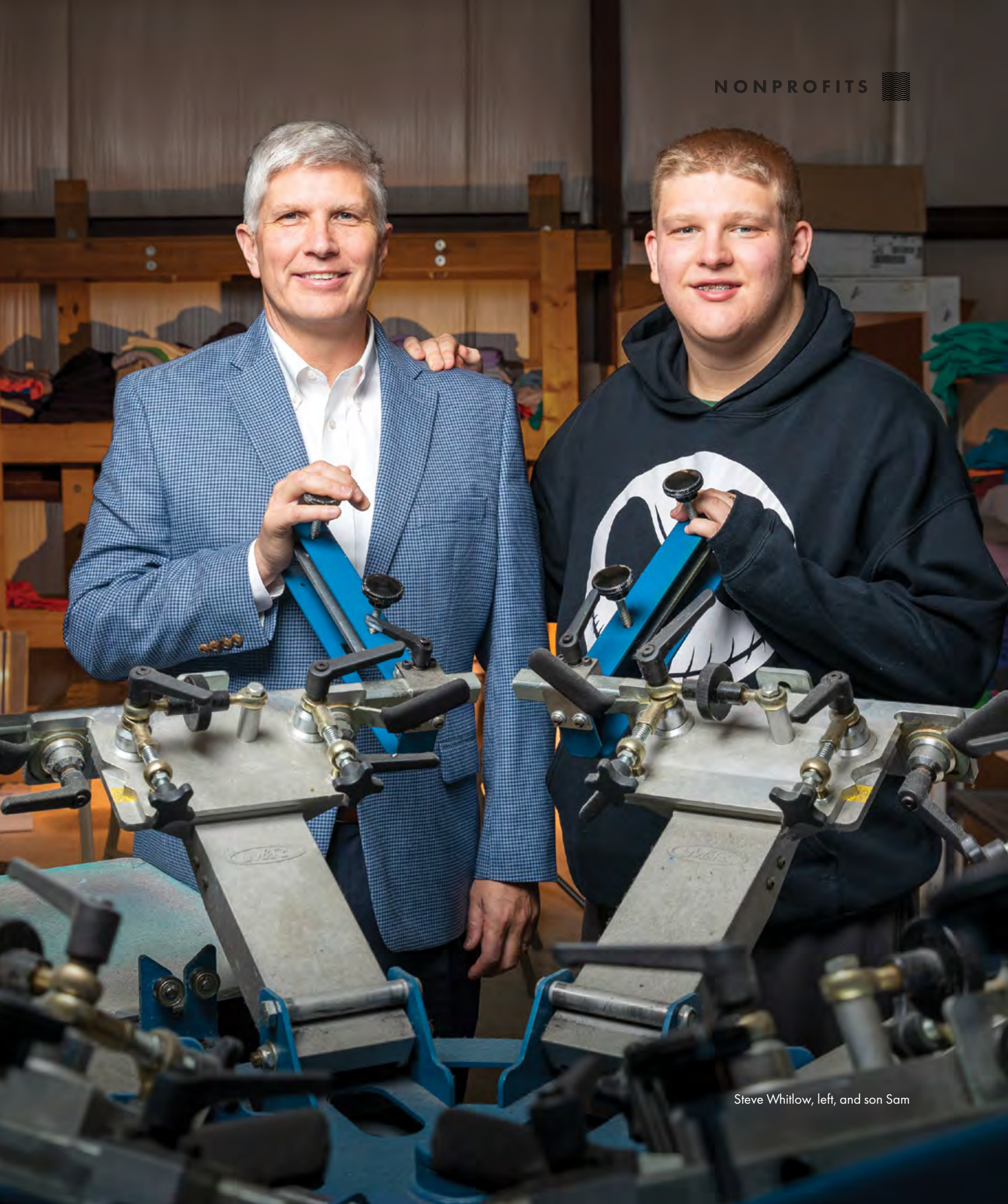
special autism identification cards in collaboration with public-safety agencies and building Baton Rouge into a national center on autism research and treatment.

The Foundation’s response to the call-to-action was two-fold. One, it



FOUNDATION FACT:

A plan to improve autism services led by the Foundation is among several blueprints that are being implemented to improve lives in our region. Other plan-driven initiatives include restoration of the Baton Rouge Lakes and formation of the Baton Rouge Health District. They follow a successful pattern that began with Plan Baton Rouge, the Foundation’s blueprint for downtown revival.



Steve Whitlow, left, and son Sam

developed a groundbreaking website to help families identify and access resources across Louisiana. The launch of ExceptionalLives.org provided an answer to one of the 25 action items on the study's to-do list. Two, the Foundation formed CAAN to get started on tackling the 24 remaining items. "The last thing you want is to let a study just sit there," said John Spain, Foundation executive vice president.

see," said Felix, a pediatrician with Our Lady of the Lake and member of CAAN's implementation team and its task force on services for individuals and families.

The lack of a guiding organization was a top frustration identified in the 2016 study and a reason CAAN was organized.

"BRAE providing a structure to communicate and collaborate is huge," said Teresa Harlan, director for autism

they were approved they were no longer children," Harlan said.

While the region still lacks providers of Applied Behavior Analysis, the best form of early intervention, Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University recently began offering certification in the therapy at its Baton Rouge campus.

Our Lady of the Lake will begin offering ABA therapy at its Goodwood Boulevard clinic in 2020 after hiring a neuropsychologist and board-certified behavioral therapy analyst.

The 2018 opening of The Emerge Center school is the best-known example of more education options for children with developmental disabilities. "If you aren't getting the services you need at School A, you could get the services at School B," Whitlow said. "Educational opportunities have opened up."

Meanwhile, Merakey of Philadelphia acquired the print-screening shop a year ago and hired Whitlow to work full-time on building a broader, integrated pathway to ready young people for adulthood and a life of maximum independence.

In early 2020, Merakey, which provides behavioral therapy, will open an eight-person transitional housing facility for young adults with autism—the first in the state—adjacent to the Central T-shirt shop started by Whitlow.

"There's been progress," said Felix.

Still, Felix, Whitlow and Harlan are clear-eyed about the work ahead. Harlan notes that many families remain unaware of changes in the Medicaid-waiver system that allow families to get help quicker than in the past.

"Communication remains a big challenge," Harlan said.

Whitlow adds that while regional autism services have expanded, they remain out of reach for many families due to restrictions in funding and other factors. "There are still huge needs, including lack of access," he said.

CAAN's implementation teams are moving as quickly as they can.

The public awareness and family



"WE WANT FAMILIES TO HAVE A PATHWAY TO INDEPENDENCE. WE WANT THEM TO BE ABLE TO SEE THAT PATHWAY LEADING WHERE THEY WANT TO GO."

—**Steve Whitlow**, parent of a child on the spectrum and CAAN member

The work is a marathon, not a sprint, and CAAN's approach to the long race is systematic. Volunteer task forces in education, transition services and other areas focus on one recommendation at a time, some doable in a year, others expected to take years to complete.

An implementation team meets monthly to discuss progress and provide support. A stakeholder group of medical experts and service providers also meets regularly.

CAAN serves as a hub of autism information and guidance for the region, where services are scattered among providers. The organization holds yearly town hall-style community meetings to update attendees on the work of the task forces and gather feedback on next steps and priority projects.

Its first community meeting in 2019 included calls for more opportunities to participate in events like school dances or outdoor music events, said Dr. Steven Felix, chair of CAAN.

"We want to hear what parents and others who interact with individuals with autism on a daily basis want to

services at Families Helping Families' resource center and the mother of a son on the autism spectrum. "In forming CAAN, they are giving us a push to get things done that are essential."

There is cause for optimism as CAAN gets to work. Its members have witnessed meaningful changes in the state and region in recent years, developments in which many of the same advocates that make up its ranks played key roles.

Insurance providers must cover the cost of autism diagnosis and treatment until age 21, for instance, the result of seminal legislation championed by La. Sen. Franklin Foil several years ago.

More recently, the state in 2018 reconfigured its Medicaid-waiver program to speed assistance to families with urgent need for disability assistance, including autism.

Before the change, families often spent a decade or longer on the first-come, first-served waiting list. That meant many children missed the chance for treatment in early childhood when therapy is most effective. "By the time



support task force is focused on communication training for law officers and other first responders in 2020. CAAN's education task force is developing new training for teachers for before- and after- school programs in local public and private schools. Another is explor-

ing how to boost Medicaid reimbursement rates for certain therapies, an undertaking that may take several years.

As head of CAAN's transition services task force, Whitlow is working with the CATS transportation agency, Baton Rouge Community College and govern-

ment housing organizations, among others.

"We want families to have a pathway to independence," said Whitlow. "We want them to be able to see that pathway leading where they want to go." ■

DISABILITY RESOURCE: ExceptionalLives.org

AN INTERACTIVE WEBSITE HELPS FAMILIES quickly locate resources after a diagnosis of autism or another developmental disability. ExceptionalLives.org is part of a Foundation initiative to improve developmental disability services across the Baton Rouge region.

There is almost nothing else like ExceptionalLives.org, which generates customized lists of resources for families in jargon-free format.

The site includes about 1,000 resources from across Louisiana. Parents, caregivers and other users can search for resources by ZIP code, type of insurance coverage, age of the child or type of disability.

The site's use peaks after midnight, a reflection of the lives of parents looking for answers during rare, quiet hours when their children are sleeping.

More than 35,000 unique users have visited the free public site since its 2017 launch in partnership with Matt and Sherri McKay of All Star Automotive, longtime supporters of educational opportunities and services for children with developmental disabilities.

What's striking about ExceptionalLives.org is its simplicity. The site's how-to guides are produced by users, who get custom resources they need by reading FAQs or answering questions. There is a chat box and phone number so users can get additional help if they need it.

"If you get stuck at any point, there is help," says Sarah Gardner, who manages

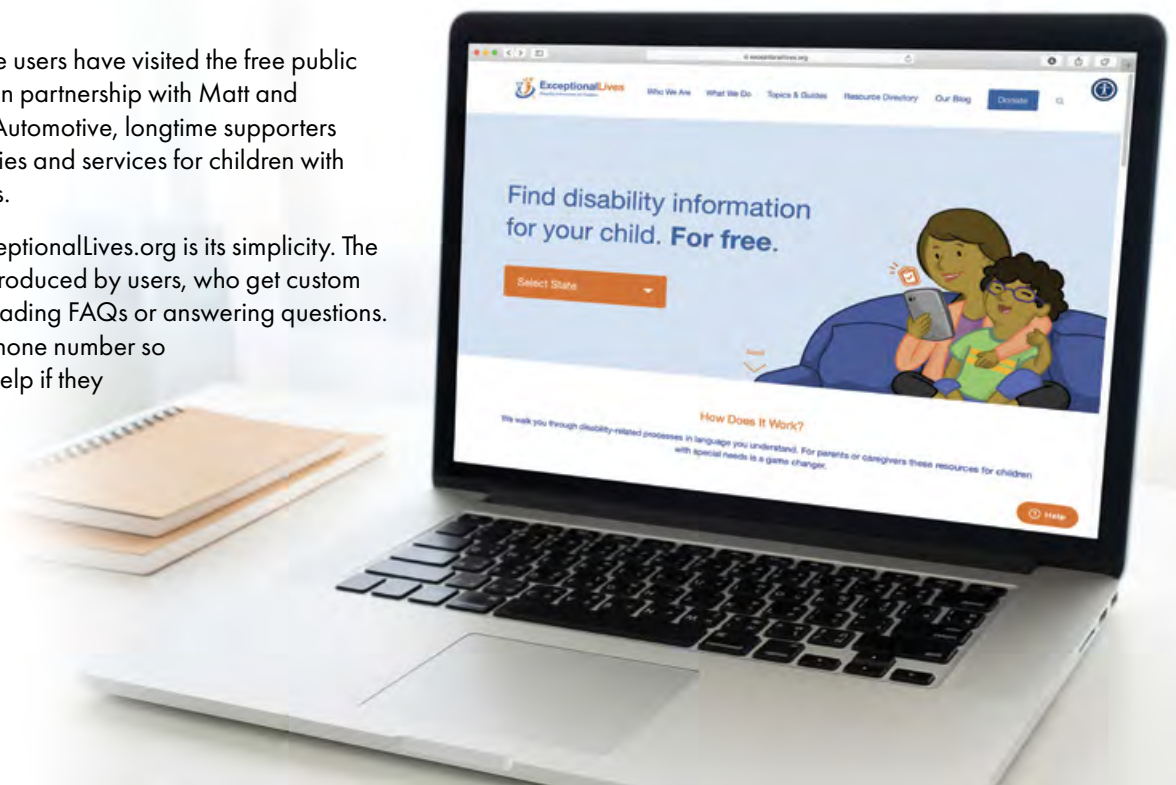
the program for the Foundation.

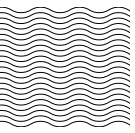
The site lists physician specialists and therapists but also summer camps and dentists for children with developmental disabilities and information on how to contact them.

Exceptional Lives verifies the resources quarterly to make sure information is up to date. It recently added a Spanish-language resource directory funded by the Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation.

Physicians, libraries and disability-service providers in Baton Rouge have started putting the site on computers in their lobbies to expand its use, says Gardner. "It's a time efficient tool and people are really using it."

—Sara Bongiorno





No. 1 in this, too

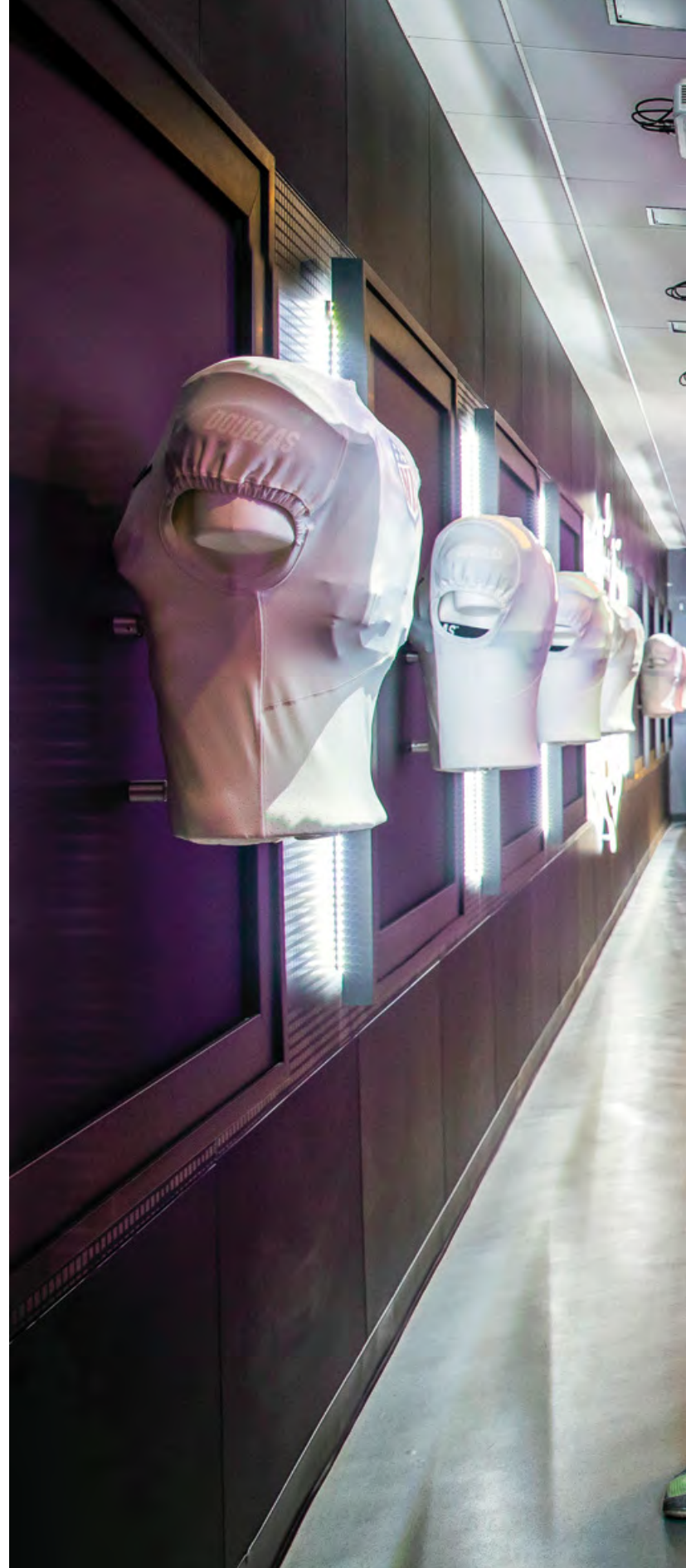
LSU collaborates with Pennington to change sports science. That teamwork rarely happens elsewhere.

BY SARA BONGIORNI
PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

Sports-science research is accelerating inside LSU's football program and changing injury-prevention strategies on the field in Baton Rouge and on campuses nationwide. Driving the research is a highly unusual collaboration among LSU kinesiologists, athletic trainers and scientists from Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

This is not standard stuff. Coaches by tradition don't want athletes taking part in time-consuming and possibly distracting studies. Universities may not want to see data about athlete health impacts like concussions.

But at LSU, researchers have become sideline fixtures. Pennington runs studies on athletes' blood in its labs, and its researchers study members of the tennis, swim and soccer teams.





Dr. Neil Johannsen, Kinesiology professor at LSU and faculty member at Pennington Biomedical, collaborates on exercise science research with Shelly Mullenix, the LSU Athletics Senior Associate Athletic Director of Health and Wellness.

Football is directly involved with Pennington, with head coach Ed Orgeron pitching an idea for a study. Four of his players lived for 12 hours each in Pennington’s metabolic chambers because the coach wanted to learn more about their metabolic health and how to help them lose weight.

One new Pennington study considers the potential influence of sickle-cell trait on muscle trauma. Another looked at the impact of over-training on athletes’ immune function.

The studies require athlete participation that rarely happens at other universities. “We talk to people at conferences and the first thing they want to know is how we get access to athletes,” said Neil Johannsen, a kinesiology professor at LSU and member of Pennington’s



SENSORS INSIDE PLAYERS’ MOUTHS CAPTURE THE FORCE OF HELMET COLLISIONS. WIDE RECEIVERS WEAR GOGGLES TO MEASURE PUPIL DILATION AS THEY RACE FOR A CATCH WHILE DIGESTIBLE ELECTRIC PILLS TRACK THEIR BODY TEMPERATURE.

preventive medicine team who is a driving force in the collaboration.

Johannsen and other researchers deploy futuristic technology to gather data about athletes. Sensors inside players’ mouths capture the force of helmet collisions. Drink dispensers in the just-renovated football operations building adjust sodium and sugar levels according to players’ hydration needs.

Wide receivers wear goggles to measure pupil dilation as they race for a catch while digestible electric pills track their body temperature. “Our main goal is to help the athletes,” said Nathan Lemoine Jr., whose job as sports science research associate is to facilitate collaborative studies—itsself a highly unusual post.

Arguably no university athletic program has embraced athletic-performance and injury-prevention research like LSU. *The New York Times* describes an “arms race” for sport-science data at LSU and other elite sports programs such as Oklahoma, Alabama and Clemson.

The NYT put the Tigers out front. “Few places have been as willing to experiment as LSU,” the paper wrote in a Sept. 14, 2019, story. “When the Tigers find something they like, a result can be a full-blown makeover.”

Research to address concerns about athlete health and performance has become a core part of athletic operations at LSU in recent times, a development that has taken place largely out of view.

The research started at LSU before the collaboration with Pennington. Head athletic trainer Jack Marucci began collecting data on football player collisions several years ago after noting that concussions spiked during summer training and its two-a-day practices.

Marucci used helmet sensors to record the force, number and direction of hits players experienced. The data from several years indicated that repetitive “micro traumas” of the intensive summer schedule made lineman

particularly vulnerable to concussions.

The program scaled back summer practices to one a day in response to Marucci’s findings. Marucci also shared the data with the NCAA, which in 2016 banned two-a-day practices at programs across the country. “Our data was very compelling,” Marucci said. “The games were not the issue. It was the (effect of) repetitive hits of training camp that was being missed.”

On-campus collaboration between athletic trainers and researchers in the university’s kinesiology department began about five years ago.

That’s when kinesiology’s Johannsen sat down with Marucci and longtime trainer Shelly Mullenix to talk about how they could help each other. Turns out, they could help each other plenty.

At the time, the trainers were seeing high rates of cramping among football and soccer players. They wondered how to correct it. Johannsen and his team put patches on the athletes’ skin to monitor how much sweat—and sodium—athletes were losing during sweltering afternoon practices to determine if that might contribute to the problem.

The data revealed the culprit: extremely high rates of sodium loss. The so-called sweat study prompted a series of changes. Food in the cafeteria got saltier. Trainers bumped up sodium intake in other ways; one tennis player was instructed to consume salty canned soup.

The study has had other lasting impacts, including the 2019 installation of drink machines that dispense beverages with more or less sodium depending on athletes’ nutritional needs.





Pennington Biomedical researchers are using their equipment to test LSU athletes. The VO2 Max test measures the maximum amount of oxygen an athlete can use during intense exercise.

Bringing in Pennington was the next step after the sweat study. Its sport-science assets include 3D body-composition scanners, the metabolic chambers, functional MRI equipment and the expertise of researchers in metabolism and other pertinent areas.

The joint research is applied research, with ideas for studies emerging from the real-world concerns of coaches and trainers. Findings from most of the studies are published, but the turn-around time for putting findings into practice is compressed. That's because while basic science advances slowly, LSU trainers and coaches look for mid-season adjustments to better protect individual players from injury or illness or improve competitive performance right away.

"You need to be able to see long-term benefits of the work, but I also need immediate feedback on how to

keep these guys and girls healthy," said Mullenix. "We need to balance those two worlds—research and publishing but also immediate adjustments to help athletes."

Mullenix heads a broad new initiative on long-term athlete well-being that includes mental health in her new position as senior associate athletic director of health and wellness.

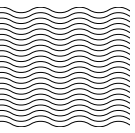
Marucci views the holistic initiative and ongoing research as an opportunity for LSU to differentiate itself from other programs, one that may even aid recruiting. "There are many guarantees in life and one of them is that you're not going to play football forever," Marucci said. "So we need to develop players to be on track to have a career and life after football."

There are potential advantages for nonathletes in the mix. Pennington

post-doctoral researcher Timothy Allerton is conducting a study into the effect of watermelon juice in boosting blood-vessel dilation, for instance. The findings could provide new insight into ways to control blood pressure.

To date, study participants in the kinesiology labs on the LSU campus have been normal, healthy people—regular people, not athletes. But Allerton is planning a second phase of research that will consider whether watermelon juice might help athletes rehydrate after profuse sweating. The findings could suggest watermelon be added to sports-recovery drinks in the future, something that has not yet happened.

The next phase of research will involve LSU athletes. "We will look for ways to improve their health and performance with watermelon juice," Allerton said. "It's an important question." ■



SPARK BRIEFS

ELECTRIC IDEA

Los Angeles is bolting electric car chargers directly onto light poles. The simple solution is part of Mayor Eric Garcetti's goal to have at least 100,000 electric vehicles in the city by 2025. Motorists pay \$2 per hour to charge their cars but parking is free. Apartment dwellers who don't have charging stations at home are the target market.



COURTESY BETTERBIN.NYC



NOT TRASHY

New York City is getting new trash cans. Group Project's winning waste bin design has an outer, crescent-shaped shell that anchors it to the street. Sanitation workers flip-up a wraparound lid and use handholds to lift an inner bin that is half the weight of the old steel trash cans, with a plastic liner that's recyclable when it wears out. The winning can beat out more than 200 designs.

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▶ **HEALING CUT**

Editing genes with CRISPR has cured sickle cell disease and beta thalassemia in tests, with no side effects. Biotech companies Vertex and CRISPR Therapeutics say they used CRISPR to repair the single gene that cause the diseases. Clinical trials are next. Vertex, meanwhile, has also produced a breakthrough drug combo that lets 90% of cystic fibrosis patients manage the disease, as diabetics do with insulin. Cystic fibrosis patients can live full lives on the medication instead of dying in their 40s. CRISPR uses a protein to cut and paste a gene or clusters of genes, allowing scientists to cure genetic disorders and create new life forms.



▶ **LIGHT FANTASTIC**

The LightSail 2 has been orbiting Earth since June at a speed of nearly 17,000 miles per hour. Fuel for the 18-foot wide sail are photons from the sun that bounce off the thin mylar. The Planetary Society wants inventors to advance the design to produce an inexpensive spacecraft that can reach planets and nearby stars.

CHARLOTTE'S WEB

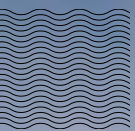
Spider silk is lighter than all synthetic fibers and stronger than steel. Two Taiwanese scientists wondered about another spider silk property—why it resists decay. Researchers Wang Pi-Han and Tso I-Min of Tunghai University believe an impenetrable layer protects the proteins, but they don't know the structure of the layer. "Once it is has been elucidated, though, the discovery should pave the way for artificial antibacterial materials that do not use antibiotics to keep the bugs away."



A boathouse at Tulsa's new park is another reason to live there.

TULSA'S MOVE

Tulsa offered \$10,000 for people to relocate there. More than 10,000 remote workers applied, and 100 were accepted in 2018. The economic development program was expected to take 300 transplants in 2019. "This program's core focus is on creating the most vibrant and inclusive Tulsa possible, to aid future generations who are looking for opportunities," says Aaron Bolzle, a program manager at the George Kaiser Family Foundation, which paid for the first round of the program.



A REFLECTION ON GRATITUDE

Already, it has a nickname: “The Little Bean,” a nod to the large reflective sculpture in Chicago’s Millennium Park. But their bean is not our bean; Baton Rouge’s mirror-like sculpture is a work of art all our own. It’s just as bright and shiny, but it features more dimensions, and ours sings the song of the Mississippi in the river’s own voice: the notes it plays are a varying reflection of the speed of the current. Still, Baton Rouge’s sculpture does share something with the Chicago bean: people are pulled to it, irresistibly drawn to see themselves—and the city they call home—reflected in new ways.

Our community’s sculpture is a gift of the Rotary Club of Baton Rouge on its 100th anniversary, which prompts us to reflect on what binds us together: gratitude. —Mukul Verma

PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER



Giving LESSON

The nation is watching Baton Rouge, where New Schools is recruiting and supporting the best charter schools. Philanthropists nationwide are investing in New Schools. They believe successes here could offer lessons for transforming schools across the nation.

Donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation were with New Schools from the beginning. They provided startup funding to give schoolchildren the opportunities they deserve.

If you want to pursue a cause or two you care about, you can do so by opening a donor advised fund at the Foundation. Our Elizabeth Hutchison at (225) 387-6126 and ehutchison@braf.org is available to guide you.

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TOMORROW IS BUILT BY WHAT WE DO TODAY

Lemoine is proud to partner with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation in a shared vision to improve the community where we live and work. Together, we are all constructors of our community, builders of our future.



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