

# CURRENTS

second quarter 2022

BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION

[braf.org](http://braf.org)

# local HEROES

Misti  
Brynnly  
Chad  
Al  
Jenni  
Danny  
Eric

BROUSSARD  
BROUSSARD  
HUGHES  
MOREAU  
PETERS  
PLAISANCE  
ROMERO





South Louisiana is closer to regular passenger train service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. In April, Gov. John Bel Edwards rode an inspection train with leaders of Amtrak, the Federal Railroad Administration, Kansas City Southern and Canadian Pacific. The Foundation has led a project to start intercity rail between the cities. Service could begin within 24 months.

PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER







Front Yard Bikes is one of four nonprofits that are converting a former church in Mid City into the Youth City Lab.

PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER







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chair

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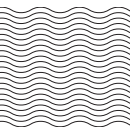
SPARK BRIEFS

50

CODA

**Youth City Lab**





**All these success stories started out with the serious business of strategic planning. Now those projects shine as an enduring part of who we are in Baton Rouge.**

Thanks to our donors and members, the Foundation has delivered many projects that are solving fundamental problems. We celebrate some of them in this issue, as well as local heroes who are faithful to making Baton Rouge better, one day at a time.

We also mark a decade of remarkable progress. Back in 2012, a nascent Companion Animal Alliance was finding its stride. The nonprofit had taken on a daunting task at its founding: turning around a parish animal shelter that was saving too few animals. Of all the dogs and cats that were dropped off or taken to the shelter each year, only 1 in 5 ever found a home.

But CAA envisioned a more humane solution to the problem of homeless animals in Baton Rouge. The nonprofit, with support of our fund donors, built its own \$12 million shelter and is finding homes for 90% of dogs and cats.

Two other remarkable things happened in 2012. The Foundation formed nonprofits to address seemingly

intractable challenges. New Schools for Baton Rouge dedicated itself to improving education in EBR, while The Water Institute of the Gulf began to study how we live with water amid a changing climate and eroding coasts, not only here but around the globe.

Both are celebrating 10-year anniversaries.

New Schools has launched more than two dozen schools that are educating more than 11,000 public school students in East Baton Rouge Parish. To support this work, the organization raised more than \$90 million from around the country to recruit and support exceptional schools and educators. It has become a national model for other cities seeking to transform educational opportunities for children and families in their communities.

Meanwhile, the Water Institute has earned a worldwide reputation for excellence in water sciences. Scientists and staff at the institute number more than 70. Their work is being used by

**T**his quarter, we will celebrate at our annual meeting, a time for Foundation members and fund donors to reflect on our impact and imagine the future together. This year is especially memorable: We turn the page to envision the Foundation's next chapter of leadership and service for realizing the best version of our community and state. By year end, we will unveil a new strategic plan that is being written with community conversations and transformative ideas and partnerships necessary to unlock limitless opportunities for all.



## Baton Rouge Area Foundation

100 NORTH STREET, SUITE 900  
BATON ROUGE LOUISIANA 70802

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Nicklos S. Speyrer  
Karen R. Williams, MD  
Morgan K. Almeida, *Forum 225*

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

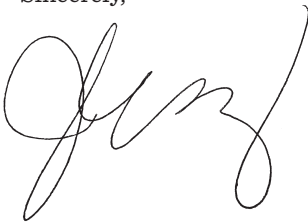
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Houston and Charleston to adapt to climate change. They are writing the Virginia coastal plan and helping to preserve groundwater in the Baton Rouge region. The Institute's backlog of work is nearly twice its \$4 million in revenues in 2012.

All of these success stories started out with the important work of strategic planning. Now these ideas have become valuable institutions that shine as an enduring part of who we are in Baton Rouge.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Eplett Reilly,  
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 \$600 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.

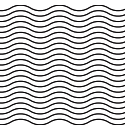
**2** We conduct civic leadership initiatives that change the direction of the Baton Rouge region and South Louisiana. Members support these projects, which solve fundamental problems. Tax-deductible memberships range from \$200 to \$25,000.

**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.



RENDERING COURTESY GUY A. AVELLONE/WMLC



The Health District wants to build gateways at Bluebonnet Boulevard, Perkins Road and Essen Lane. It has requested money for the improvements and for much more in a federal grant.

## Health District and partners finalist for big grant

THE BATON ROUGE HEALTH DISTRICT and the New Orleans BioInnovation Center submitted their grant application to develop and scale the health sciences industry in Southeast Louisiana. As collaborators named the Gulf Coast Health Sciences Corridor, the two had already won \$500,000 to advance their proposal to the final round.

They are competing for grants from the \$1 billion Build Back Better Regional Challenge from the Economic Development Administration. Sixty of 529 applicants advanced to the final. Thirty are expected to win grants, with the largest award up to \$100 million.

The EDA is expected to announce

winners by September.

The joint proposal for Southeast Louisiana requests \$75 million. With \$18.75 million in local matches, it approaches \$94 million. Included in the proposal is \$25 million to build a Center or Innovation and Implementation Science on the Pennington Biomedical Research Center and a shared biotech research and commercialization facility in New Orleans. Each of those projects include \$6.5 million in local matches.

The partners also request \$5 million to improve infrastructure in the Essen Lane, Bluebonnet Boulevard corridor, where most health care assets are clustered.

The coalition has committed to a

focus on addressing acute, infectious, and chronic disease by creating economic opportunity through specialized workforce development with a focus on women, residents in rural areas and people of color.

Further, it intends on strengthening the regions' research development and commercialization pipeline through new infrastructure and collaborative efforts to leverage industry expertise and promote startup creation and investment.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is among coalition partners. The Foundation also led and paid for a master plan that created the Baton Rouge Health District.



## EXCEPTIONAL LIVES

A WEBSITE THAT POINTS people to local services for children with developmental disabilities continues to set new marks. Exceptional Lives surpassed 1.2 million page views in February after operating for six years in Massachusetts and more than four years in Louisiana.

The website is a result of a Baton Rouge Area Foundation project to improve access to autism services. The Foundation contracted with Exceptional Lives, a nonprofit, to build the statewide resource. It offers clear information to help parents of children on the autism spectrum with developmental disabilities and lets them search for services near them. Much of the site's content is available in Spanish, too.

Exceptional Lives expanded the site to become a statewide resource and is branching to other parts of the country.

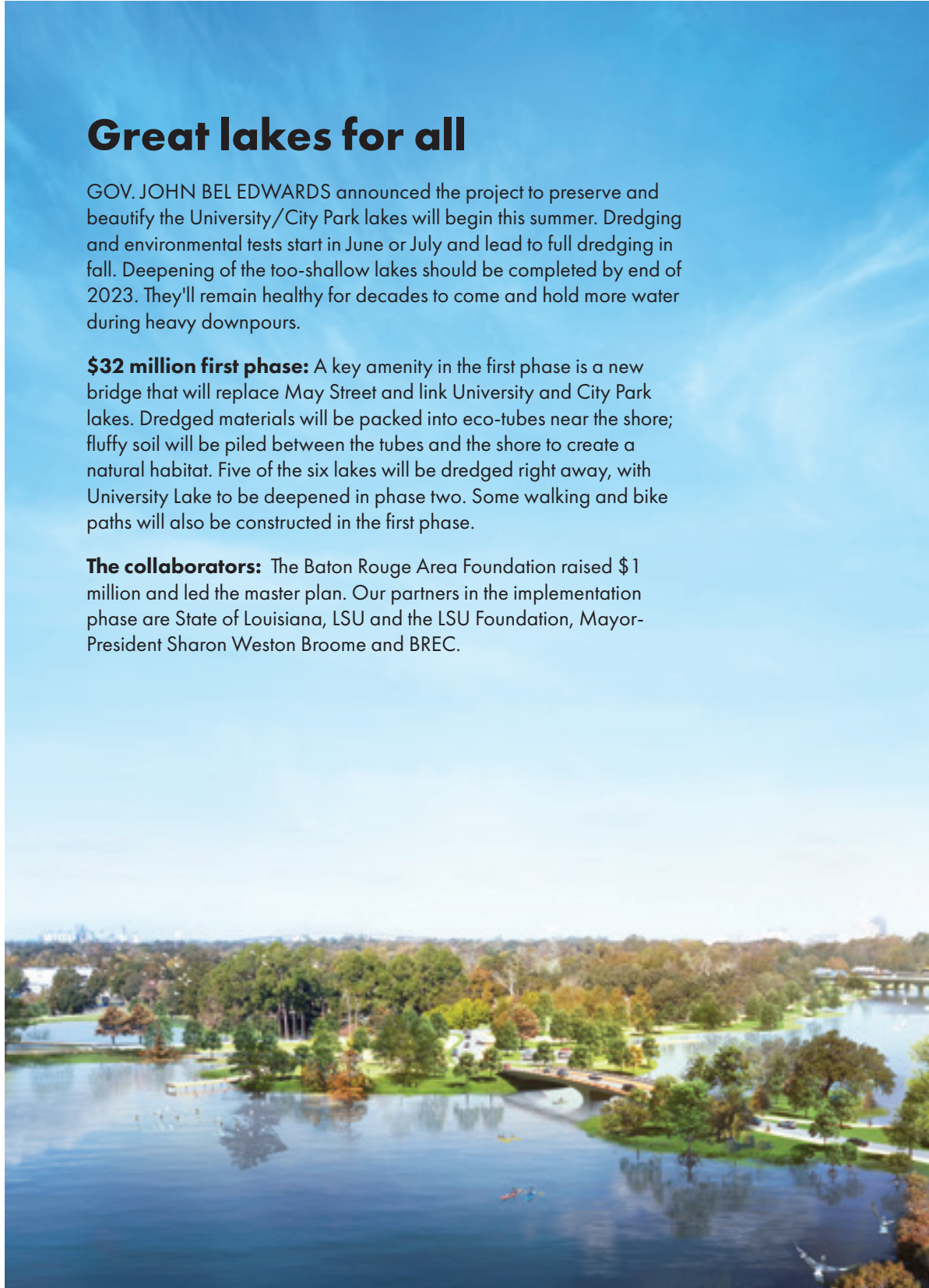
The organization has a multi-year contract with Louisiana Department of Education to build-out education-specific content and has partnered with Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation to curate webinar series for families of color.

## Great lakes for all

GOV. JOHN BEL EDWARDS announced the project to preserve and beautify the University/City Park lakes will begin this summer. Dredging and environmental tests start in June or July and lead to full dredging in fall. Deepening of the too-shallow lakes should be completed by end of 2023. They'll remain healthy for decades to come and hold more water during heavy downpours.

**\$32 million first phase:** A key amenity in the first phase is a new bridge that will replace May Street and link University and City Park lakes. Dredged materials will be packed into eco-tubes near the shore; fluffy soil will be piled between the tubes and the shore to create a natural habitat. Five of the six lakes will be dredged right away, with University Lake to be deepened in phase two. Some walking and bike paths will also be constructed in the first phase.

**The collaborators:** The Baton Rouge Area Foundation raised \$1 million and led the master plan. Our partners in the implementation phase are State of Louisiana, LSU and the LSU Foundation, Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome and BREC.











## Pennington breakthrough, new surgery center

A BUSY NEWS CYCLE for Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

In April, researchers said a protein, BAM15, could help older obese people lose weight and gain strength. The discovery is the first evidence that the compound prevents sarcopenic obesity, or age-related muscle loss accompanied by an increase in fat tissue. BAM15 produced an 8% increase in muscles, 40% increase in strength and more than 20% fat loss even while mice were fed fatty diets.

“Older adults with sarcopenic obesity suffer accelerated muscle loss,” said Pennington’s Christopher Axelrod. “They become less active. As a result, they are at high risk for falls, stroke, heart disease, poorer quality of life and

premature death.”

Axlerod authored the study with Dr. John Kirwan, head of Pennington, and Wagner Dantas, who works in Kirwan’s lab. Dantas was lead author.

Pennington also opened a 10,000-square-foot bariatric and metabolic surgery center. Dr. Phil Schauer leads the center, which is named The Metamor Institute. The \$2 million facility has 12 exam and 10 consultation rooms.

People from around the world travel for bariatric surgery by Schauer, who is an innovator in the field. Louisiana Economic Development estimates Metamor will have an economic impact of more than \$100 million over the next four years.

### FOUNDATION FACT

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and our donors have granted millions to Pennington Biomedical Research Center, including providing funds to start operations more than 30 years ago.



## A road runs through it

A NEW ROAD WILL OPEN 200 acres to build the Ardendale community. The Metro Council was expected to approve a design contract for the thoroughfare in April or May. The estimated \$4 million road will link North Ardenwood Drive to Lobdell Avenue.

The street design includes sidewalks and bike paths, says Travis Woodard of CSRS, which is managing infrastructure projects under MOVEBR, the parish's \$1.2 billion infrastructure plan. Nine months of construction should begin next summer, with the road open in early 2024.

With a \$29.5 million federal grant, the EBR Housing Authority will build new mixed-income housing to replace much-older apartments nearby, among other things. The YWCA has planned an early childhood center on North Ardenwood.

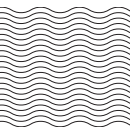
Ardendale began as a Baton Rouge Area Foundation project after Hurricane Katrina, when demand for workforce housing was high. The Foundation purchased the land from several nonprofits and donated the acreage to Build Baton Rouge, the parish redevelopment authority. BBR is selling or donating parcels for the mixed-use, mixed-income community.

In Ardendale, on Lobdell, a Foundation project helped to build a career high school, as well as Baton Rouge Community College training centers for automotive repair and allied health.

### GOOD THINGS

- ▶ THE LSU AGCENTER has won a \$500,000 EPA grant to start removing a mountain of trash from the watershed at the Burden Center. Trash washes into Ward Creek from other areas of the parish. Burden will use the money to research best methods for capturing litter and to set up demonstration projects.
- ▶ A \$12 MILLION INVESTMENT by Our Lady of the Lake will help Baton Rouge Community College build a 95,000-square-foot allied health building on its Florida Boulevard campus. Expected to open in 2023, the center will serve up to 1,200 students. BRCC will train nurses, sonographers, surgical technicians and medical assistants there. It will also add programs in respiratory care, physical and occupational therapy and athletic training.





# GRANTS

**THE BATON ROUGE AREA FOUNDATION GRANTED \$6.6 million in the first quarter of 2022.** Grants are listed below by organization. We publish all grants in our annual report. The Foundation makes grants on behalf of people who have charitable accounts with us. We also make grants from a pool of unrestricted assets.

If you wish to know more about opening a charitable fund, please contact Edmund Giering at (225) 387-6126 or [egiering@braf.org](mailto:egiering@braf.org).



## GRANTS / 1ST QUARTER 2022

Acts of Love Inc. \$4,000  
 Agenda for Children Inc. - New Orleans \$16,667  
 Ainsley's Angels of America \$2,052  
 Alpha Kappa Psi Foundation \$300  
 Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association Inc. \$500  
 Alzheimer's Services of the Capital Area \$4,504  
 American National Red Cross - Headquarters \$6,000  
 American National Red Cross - Louisiana Capital Area \$259  
 Anchored in Christ Ministries/Next Level Church \$3,270  
 Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$16,000  
 Ascension Parish School Board - Dutchtown High School \$1,000  
 Ascension Parish School Board - Oak Grove Primary School \$2,446

Ascension Parish School Board - Prairieville Primary School \$2,300  
 Ascension Parish School Board - St. Amant High School \$2,500  
 ASPA - Louisiana Chapter \$1,000  
 Attic Trash and Treasure \$36,440  
 Auckland Foundation \$119,000  
 Baton Rouge Christian Education Foundation Inc. - The Dunham School \$13,383  
 Baton Rouge Community College \$2,000  
 Baton Rouge Community College Foundation \$5,000  
 Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center Inc. \$4,424  
 Baton Rouge Gallery Inc. \$15,000  
 Baton Rouge Green Association Inc. \$41,100  
 Baton Rouge Opera Guild \$3,563  
 Baton Rouge Progressive Network \$1,000  
 Baton Rouge Sponsoring Committee \$2,500  
 Baton Rouge Youth Coalition Inc. \$42,000

Bayou Community Foundation \$332,594  
 Beechgrove Baptist Church of Reserve \$3,270  
 Berean Christian Fellowship Church \$3,270  
 Bethesda Church / LifePoint Church \$3,270  
 Beyond the Badge \$828  
 Black Teacher Collaborative Incorporated \$166,666  
 Blue Engine Inc. \$100,000  
 Board of the University of Alabama \$3,500  
 Board of Trustees of the St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery Fund \$10,000  
 Bridge Center for Hope \$14,186  
 Calcasieu Parish School Board - Washington-Marion Magnet High School \$600  
 Cambiar Education \$133,333  
 Camelback Ventures Inc. \$16,667  
 Camp Van Dorn World War II Museum \$250  
 Cancer Services Inc. \$5,000  
 Capital Area Animal Welfare Society \$259  
 Capital Area CASA Association \$16,000  
 Capital Area Family Violence Battered Women's Program \$3,000  
 Capital Area United Way \$20,000  
 Capital Area United Way - 225 Gives \$50,000  
 Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge Inc. \$15,000  
 Catholic High School Foundation \$16,392  
 Center for Planning Excellence Inc. \$2,500  
 Central Community School System - Central Intermediate School \$2,151  
 Centre for the Arts \$1,000  
 Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc./McMains Children's Development Center \$7,000  
 Change Lives Now \$1,000  
 Chi Omega Foundation \$250  
 Children's Cup \$1,800  
 Children's Water Safety Awareness \$2,000  
 Chippin' in for St. Jude \$4,000  
 Choate Rosemary Hall Foundation Incorporated \$50,000  
 Christ the King Parish and Catholic Center at LSU \$14,515



City of Ruston \$1,000	Education Trust Inc. \$44,444	\$33,000
City Year Inc. - Baton Rouge \$22,000	Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence \$500	Gardere Community Christian School \$2,000
Clean Pelican \$5,000	Emerge Center Inc. \$28,356	General Council of the Assemblies of God / Community Worship Center \$3,270
Color of Change Education Fund Inc. \$1,000	Empower 225 \$4,500	General Health System Foundation \$139,500
Community Bible Church of Lafourche Inc. \$3,270	Episcopal High School of Baton Rouge \$110,200	Gideon Christian Fellowship \$3,270
Community Center of Pointe Coupee \$500	Episcopal Relief and Development \$2,000	Girls on the Run South Louisiana \$2,500
Companion Animal Alliance \$14,500	Families Helping Families of Greater Baton Rouge \$200	Global Hunger Project \$150
Congregation B'nai Israel of Baton Rouge \$7,000	Family Values Resource Institute Inc. \$2,500	Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church \$3,270
Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere Inc. \$50,000	Fellowship of Catholic University Students / FOCUS \$4,000	Govern For America \$16,667
Criminal Justice Coordinating Council \$5,500	Film Makers Collaborative Inc. \$150,000	Grace Community Church \$3,270
Delhi Dixie Youth Baseball \$1,000	First Assembly of God of Raceland \$6,541	Grace Life Fellowship \$7,500
Destiny Christian Church \$3,270	First Baptist Church Gramercy \$3,270	GracePoint Church \$3,270
Doctors Without Borders USA Inc. \$2,500	First Baptist Church Hammond \$3,270	Grambling State University \$500
Douglas Manship Sr. Theatre Complex Holding Inc. \$12,038	First Baptist Church LaPlace \$3,270	Greater Baton Rouge Economic Partnership Inc. \$20,000
Ducks Unlimited Inc. \$136	First Baptist Church of Albany \$3,270	Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank Inc. \$5,250
Dyslexia Association of Greater Baton Rouge Inc. \$712	First Baptist Church of Avondale \$3,270	Greater Golden Grove Baptist Church \$3,270
East Baton Rouge Truancy Assessment Inc. \$3,000	First Baptist Church of Golden Meadow \$3,270	Greater King Triumph Baptist Church of Lutchter Inc. \$3,270
EBRPSS - Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts \$2,648	First Baptist Church of Houma / Covenant Church \$3,270	Greater Mount Canaan Baptist Church \$1,000
EBRPSS - Baton Rouge Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet School \$2,450	First Presbyterian Church of Baton Rouge \$500	Greater New Orleans Educational Television Foundation \$1,200
EBRPSS - Baton Rouge Magnet High School \$3,650	First United Methodist Church \$143,300	Habitat for Humanity of Greater Baton Rouge \$2,000
EBRPSS - Capitol Middle School \$2,700	First United Methodist Church of LaPlace \$3,270	Harvest Time Impact Center Church \$3,270
EBRPSS - Cedarcrest-Southmoor Elementary School \$1,000	Fletcher Technical Community College Foundation Inc. \$127,451	Healing Care Ministries \$20,000
EBRPSS - Glen Oaks High School \$3,000	Forum 35 Inc. \$2,500	Healing Place Church \$750
EBRPSS - Glen Oaks Park Elementary School \$2,000	Fostering Hope Louisiana \$12,372	Helping Other People Excel Now \$88,000
EBRPSS - Park Elementary School \$1,500	Foundation for East Baton Rouge School System \$90,411	Hogs for the Cause \$8,000
EBRPSS - Park Forest Elementary School \$1,000	Foundation for Woman's \$2,731	Holy Family Catholic Church \$17,476
EBRPSS - Parkview Elementary School \$7,500	Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University \$5,000	Hope Chapel of Montegut \$10,000
EBRPSS - Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School \$3,693	Friends of Louisiana Public Broadcasting Inc. \$15,620	Hope Church St. Charles \$3,270
EBRPSS - Southeast Middle School \$2,686	Friends of Magnolia Mound Plantation Inc. \$1,000	Hope Community Church \$10,000
EBRPSS - Tara High School \$600	From My Heart to Yours Ministry \$3,270	Hope Landing Inc. \$2,000
EdNavigator Inc. \$333,333	Front Yard Bikes \$2,000	HOPE Ministries of Baton Rouge \$1,500
	Gadsden State Community College \$1,500	Howard University \$1,000
	GaitWay Therapeutic Horsemanship	Humanities Amped \$19,500
		Hunters for the Hungry A Non Profit Corporation \$5,000



Iberville Foundation for Academic Excellence \$6,704  
 Iglesia Bautista Getsemani \$3,270  
 Inner-City Arts \$1,500  
 Insight LA Inc. \$2,500  
 International Center for Journalists Inc. \$2,500  
 International Hospitality Foundation LSU \$453  
 International Rescue Committee Inc. \$14,150  
 Isidore Newman School \$2,500  
 Joyce Theater Foundation Inc. \$10,000  
 Juniper Table \$1,000  
 Kappa Delta Foundation Inc. \$250  
 Kids' Orchestra Inc. \$1,000  
 King David Baptist Church \$3,270  
 King of Kings Ministries Inc. / King of Kings Community Jerusalem \$1,200  
 Knock Knock Children's Museum Inc. \$2,000  
 Kosciuszko Foundation Inc. \$10,000  
 Kudvumisa Foundation USA Inc. \$1,500  
 Leadership Ascension Foundation \$15,000  
 Leona Tate Foundation for Change Inc. \$1,000  
 Liberty in Christ Christian Church \$3,270  
 Life Action Ministries \$600  
 LINE 4 LINE \$10,000  
 Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church of Gonzales \$3,270  
 Livingston Parish Public Schools - Eastside Elementary School \$2,500  
 Lockport Volunteer Fire Company \$23,786  
 Louisiana Americana and Folk Society \$3,000  
 Louisiana Art and Science Museum Inc. \$23,349  
 Louisiana Budget Project \$22,000  
 Louisiana CASA Association \$5,000  
 Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities \$2,000  
 Louisiana Key Academy \$6,000  
 Louisiana Lagniappe Womens Rugby \$350  
 Louisiana Lions Eye Foundation Inc. \$6,165  
 Louisiana Lions League for Crippled Children Inc. \$1,000

Louisiana Parole Project Inc. \$5,000  
 Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra \$10,000  
 Louisiana Public Health Institute \$65,000  
 Louisiana Resource Center for Educators \$750  
 Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College \$16,500  
 Louisiana State University at Alexandria Foundation Inc. \$100,000  
 Louisiana Symphony Association / Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra \$500  
 Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services Inc. \$1,000  
 Loyola University New Orleans \$500  
 LPPS - Albany Lower Elementary School \$4,711  
 LSU Foundation \$17,900  
 LSU Foundation - College of Human Sciences and Education \$2,500  
 LSU Foundation - College of the Coast and Environment \$5,000  
 LSU Foundation - E.J. Ourso College of Business \$7,000  
 LSU Foundation - LSU Museum of Art \$20,500  
 LSU Foundation - LSU Press \$15,000  
 LSU Foundation - Paul M. Hebert Law Center \$2,000  
 LSU Foundation - University Lab School Foundation \$600  
 Maison des Ami of Louisiana Inc. \$5,000  
 Many Youth Baseball and Softball Inc. \$1,000  
 March of Dimes Inc. \$1,000  
 Marigny Opera House Foundation \$10,000  
 Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center \$18,666  
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology \$500  
 Memory Project Productions Inc. \$10,000  
 Mercy Corps \$10,000  
 MetroMorphosis \$2,000  
 Miami Suns Youth Development Inc. \$23,770  
 Millsaps College \$300  
 Mission Foundation Inc. \$6,000  
 Missionaries of Charity Inc. \$5,000  
 Music Club of Baton Rouge Louisiana \$500  
 NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund

Inc. \$1,000  
 Nature Conservancy - Louisiana \$40,763  
 New Beginning Word Fellowship Evangelistic Ministry/Crossway New Beginnings \$1,000  
 New Foundation for Life Inc. \$3,270  
 New Hope Community Church \$3,270  
 New Orleans Career Center \$133,333  
 New Orleans Museum of Art \$2,000  
 New Orleans Opera Association \$5,000  
 New Schools for Baton Rouge \$200,000  
 New Schools for New Orleans Inc. \$583,333  
 New Subiaco Abbey and Academy \$2,500  
 Nicholls State University \$500  
 Nora's Gift Foundation Inc. \$5,000  
 Northwestern State University of Louisiana \$1,000  
 NWEA \$166,667  
 O'Brien House Inc. \$10,400  
 Ollie Steele Burden Manor Inc. \$416  
 Original Richland Library Restoration Society Inc. \$1,000  
 Orleans Sheriff's Office Foundation \$5,000  
 Our Lady of Hope Inc. \$35,000  
 Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church \$45,653  
 Our Lady of the Lake Foundation \$11,000  
 Pablove Foundation Inc. \$250  
 Pahara Institute \$111,111  
 Parkview Baptist School Inc. \$350  
 Particular Council of St. Vincent de Paul of Baton Rouge Louisiana \$5,000  
 Pastoral Center \$33,850  
 Pennington Biomedical Research Foundation \$40,500  
 Pepper Cevallos, Johan Alexander \$1,500  
 Pilots for Patients \$100  
 Pine Cove Inc. \$2,800  
 Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast Inc. \$60,000  
 Pointe Coupee Early Childhood Coalition Inc. \$1,000  
 Pointe Coupee Historical Society Inc. \$1,000  
 Pro Bono Publico Foundation \$2,500



Propel America \$166,667	\$12,000	The George Washington Foundation \$250
Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana Inc. \$500	St. Gabriel Catholic Church \$1,000	The Life Church of Houma \$3,270
Rebuilding Together Baton Rouge Inc. \$35,000	St. George Catholic School \$700	The Mental Health Association for Greater Baton Rouge \$17,000
Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge \$3,547	St. Helena Parish School District - St. Helena College and Career Academy \$2,000	The Original Richland Library Restoration Society Inc. \$852
Red Shoes Inc. \$8,500	St. James Episcopal Church \$200	The Pentecostals of Houma Church \$3,270
Regeneration Church NOLA \$3,270	St. James Episcopal Day School \$500	The Rectors and Visitors of the University of Virginia \$58,000
Reliant Mission Inc. \$1,500	St. Jean Vianney Catholic School \$4,886	The University of Texas at Austin \$1,500
Revelation Knowledge Outreach Center Inc. \$3,270	St. John Interparochial School \$1,188	The Walls Project \$10,000
Rhodes College \$2,500	St. Joseph the Worker Church \$7,489	The Writing Revolution Inc. \$8,333
Riverlands Christian Center Incorporated \$3,270	St. Joseph's Academy \$12,000	Tiger Athletic Foundation \$51,000
Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge \$140,397	St. Jude Catholic Church \$10,000	Together Rising \$2,500
Roman Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge - Bishop's Annual Appeal \$5,000	St. Jude the Apostle Catholic School \$1,696	Tostan Inc. \$12,000
Rotary Club of Baton Rouge Inc. Foundation \$500	St. Luke's Episcopal Church \$174,133	Trinity Baptist Church \$3,270
Rotary Foundation of Rotary International \$1,100	St. Luke's Episcopal Day School \$5,000	Trinity Episcopal Church - Baton Rouge \$4,500
Russell Domingue Ministries Inc. / Blue Flames Ministries \$750	St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church/ St. Thomas Chapel \$2,000	Trinity Episcopal Day School \$1,000
Saints Community Church \$3,270	St. Mark Baptist Church \$3,270	True Holiness Ministry \$1,000
Samaritan's Purse \$5,000	St. Mary African Methodist Episcopal Church \$1,500	Unified Jewish Congregation of Baton Rouge \$21,809
SEARCH Homeless Services \$1,000	St. Philip Parish \$4,522	United By BBQ Inc. \$1,500
Second African Baptist Church \$3,270	St. Theresa of Avila Middle School \$7,822	United States Fund for UNICEF \$2,000
Second Chance Dog Rescue \$300	St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Catholic High School \$17,532	United States Navy \$150
Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana \$5,000	St. Thomas Episcopal Church of Diamondhead \$500	University of Georgia Foundation \$100
Set Free Indeed Ministry Inc. \$2,500	STREB Inc. \$5,000	University of Louisiana at Lafayette \$1,000
Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response Center \$75,000	Tabernacle of Truth UPC \$3,270	University of Louisiana at Lafayette Foundation \$15,000
Sigma Theta Tau Inc. - Epsilon Nu Chapter \$2,000	TankProof \$5,000	University of Louisiana at Monroe \$2,000
SJA Foundation \$250	Tchoupitoulas Chapel \$3,270	University Presbyterian Church \$31,250
Songs of Survivors \$10,000	Team Red White & Blue Inc. \$300	Unlocking Autism \$2,200
Southeastern Louisiana University \$2,250	Terrebonne Churches United Foodbank Inc. \$15,000	Urban League of Louisiana \$16,667
Spirit of Liberty Full Gospel Church \$3,270	Terrebonne Parish Library \$1,000	Valero Energy Foundation \$70,000
Springville Baptist Church \$3,270	Texas A&M University \$1,500	Victorious Life Family Worship Center \$3,270
St. Aloysius Catholic Church \$10,000	The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund \$500	Voice of Truth Ministries / Voice of Truth Fellowship \$3,270
St. Aloysius Catholic School \$1,000	The Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund - Tulane University Law School \$100	Volunteers In Public Schools Inc. \$1,000
St. Augustine Church \$1,138	The Ascension Fund Inc. \$16,907	Volunteers of America Inc. \$500
St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church	The Awty International School \$12,000	Washington & Lee University \$100
	The Fourth District Missionary Baptist Association of Louisiana \$1,000	West Baton Rouge Foundation for Academic Excellence \$7,361
	The Friends of the Rural Life Museum Inc. \$2,750	West Baton Rouge Historical Association \$2,000





## GRANTS

West Baton Rouge Parish School Board -  
Caneview K-8 School \$4,145

West Baton Rouge Parish School Board -  
Cohn Elementary School \$1,000

West Feliciana Historical Society \$1,500

West Feliciana Parish Schools - Bains Lower  
Elementary School \$2,500

Williams Boulevard Baptist Church \$3,270

Witte Museum \$100,000

Woodlawn Foundation \$2,500

World Central Kitchen Inc. \$16,500

WRKF Public Radio Inc. \$24,500

Yale University \$1,000

YMCA of the Capital Area \$11,000

YMCA of the Capital Area - A.C. Lewis  
Branch YMCA \$10,000

YWCA of Greater Baton Rouge \$30,000

Zachary Community School District -  
Northwestern Middle School \$727



# 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.

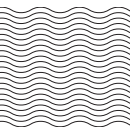
Donors of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation were with New Schools from the beginning. They provided startup funding to give schoolchildren the opportunities they deserve.

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. Please contact Edmund Glering at (225) 387-6126 or [eglering@braf.org](mailto:eglering@braf.org) to guide you.

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*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*





# A new SHINE

*Foundation project is restoring nine pieces of public art*

BY SARA BONGIORNI | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER



sculptor and art conservationist Andrew Baxter has traveled every year for 20 years to Evergreen Cemetery at Gettysburg to care for the bronze figure of a heavily pregnant woman who dug the graves of 91 men killed in the 1863 battle.

In her sculpted form, Elizabeth Thorn is tired. She wears petticoats and leans on a shovel. Her husband, the cemetery keeper, left to fight years earlier. In addition to digging in rocky ground, she cares for three young sons and her aging parents.

Baxter has restored works at the White House, National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian and worked on pieces by Auguste Rodin, Edgar Degas and Jasper Johns.

But he has a connection to the Thorn statue like no other and to the artist who created it at Evergreen. He is Ron Tunison, who Baxter worked with in the 1980s at Tallix art foundry in New York's Hudson Valley.

"We're proud of how it looks," Baxter said.

Baxter traveled to Baton Rouge in March to restore the bronze head of Oliver Pollock in Galvez Plaza by noted sculptor Frank Hayden.

Installed in 1979, the piece is the only known U.S. depiction of the Irish-born Pollock, a mostly forgotten New Orleans merchant who made the equivalent of \$1 billion available to the revolutionaries and inadvertently invented the dollar sign via hurried scribbles in his account books.

Baxter shared his techniques honed over 30 years with Baton Rouge conservator Susie Anders, who worked alongside him on a spring day when sunshine helped to ready the statue for new tinted wax by warming the metal surface. The











two stood atop a hydraulic forklift to reach the top of Hayden’s Pollock.

The restoration was funded privately through gifts to the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

We asked Baxter to share thoughts on his work, public art and a downtown Baton Rouge he had not seen since his last conservation work on the Pollock statue nearly 25 years ago.

**Currents: What’s special about bronze sculpture?**

**Baxter:** It’s been around since ancient Mesopotamia. The process of something called the lost- wax method has been around 6,000 years. It hasn’t

really changed other than mold materials that now include high-tech ceramics. You start with a wax model and make a mold around it with a kind of plumbing system. Eventually, the wax is “lost”—poured out when the model is over turned. You then pour in the bronze when it is still warm.

**What is patina? And are bronze sculptures supposed to turn green?**

It’s metal oxidation. It’s a deterioration. Bronze is primarily copper, and when it’s chipped out of the mold it’s a golden color. The dark “statuary bronze” color is induced mostly through weak acidic solutions and blow torches. The







Left: Susie Anders; above: Andrew Baxter



#### FOUNDATION FACT

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has raised private donations to restore public art. With partners, we are restoring up to nine pieces, an expansion of a project that refurbished the Martin Luther King, Jr. sculpture last year. We thank our partners: Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome, the Metro Council, the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge and its Art in Public Places Advisory Committee, and the Downtown Development District.







Martin Luther King Jr. sculpture  
in Rhorer Plaza

green corrosion is essentially a combination of moisture and atmospheric pollutants. With the Hayden piece, it was maybe 50% green and 50% brown, especially in sheltered areas. It was in good shape. There was still tinted wax from the restoration in 1998.

**How do you start the restoration of a bronze like the Oliver Pollock head? What happens first?**

I make a visual assessment of the statue's condition. I used photos for this conservation treatment. But until you see the bronze in person, you don't really know the condition of the piece until you start the application of the chemicals. You get butterflies.

**What are the next steps?**

You first wash it with an anionic solution, which is chemically neutral and biodegradable and doesn't hurt plants around the statue. We used Orvus, which is for washing horses and does a really good job on the bronze.

Next, we apply the corrosion inhibitor, BTA or benzotriazole in a 3% solution with ethanol. We actually use Everclear. It's much cheaper than buying ethanol from a lab for around \$150. A bottle of Everclear is maybe \$12.99. The BTA is brushed on and dries and bonds to the metal immediately. At this point, there's still not much of an appearance change.

The wax comes next. This requires preheating the metal with a blowtorch to allow for deep saturation of the tinted wax. There's no thermometer on monuments, so I constantly touch the metal to see if it's the right temperature. If it burns your hand, it's too hot. I touch it quickly—I'm not Superman. I told Susie, the sun was our friend because you have to heat the overall piece.

**Aren't you afraid you'll hurt the metal with the blow torch? Maybe melt it?**

It's always worrisome. This is a huge piece of metal whose pieces have been welded together. I always worry: Is it going to crack along one of those seams? But you won't diminish the green with-

out that heat and the tinted wax. The wax is what makes the green go away.

**How do you apply the wax?**

That's where the art comes in. Susie picked it up right away. It's a matter of hand-eye coordination, a touch, an eye. You are constantly varying the strength of the pigment. You dab it on. We applied it using a round brush like one used to brush butter on huge batches of bread in a commercial bakery.

The final step is buffing to get the shine. You want it to shine because that is what protects it from water. The initial buff is done with a brush with nylon bristles. The next buff is with a cotton cloth. In the more recessed areas, you do less buffing to create contrast with the lighter areas.

**It's been more than 20 years since you visited Baton Rouge. What are your impressions about changes in downtown?**

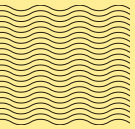
I spent a lot of time around the Centroplex [now the River Center] in 1998. It was pretty sterile, a fairly bleak area. There's been an absolute transformation of downtown Baton Rouge—the Shaw Center, the new library. I stayed on Airline Highway because I couldn't find a hotel downtown—they were all booked. It was wonderful working here. The people are so friendly and warm. Some people shouted out, "That's beautiful," while we worked.

**What's the purpose of public art like the Pollock statue?**

It's awareness of historical issues. It's a teaching tool. I wouldn't have known who Oliver Pollock was and his importance in the funding of the Revolutionary War without this sculpture. And then there is Frank Hayden. A man on a bike came by while we were working and said Frank Hayden taught him art in the ninth grade. And Hayden's daughters came to see the statue. And then there's the sheer beauty of it. It just gleams now. ■







COVER STORY

# HERO

Misti  
Bramley  
Had  
All  
Jenni  
Danny  
Eric



# OES

BROUSSARD  
BROUSSARD  
HUGHES  
MOREAU  
PETERS  
PLAISANCE  
ROMERO





# Lunch with ERIC ROMERO

*His public data portals will tell you where raindrops go, where sidewalks end*

BY AMY ALEXANDER | PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER

It's the kind of March day you'd like to bottle and pop open on a stifling July afternoon—seventy-odd degrees, piercing blue skies, just the right amount of snap in the air. Eric Romero and I have the best seat at Parrain's Seafood Restaurant, out on the broad, breezy porch, amid the flinty timbre of the city birds we sometimes take for granted.

On a less hectic day, Romero would cook his own fish from the waters near his grandfather's camp in Grand Isle. But for now, a little bit of shrimp barbeque and brisket will do. I've heard that fishermen like to keep their secrets and I ask him if that's true.

"Nah," he says. "I'll share what I know."

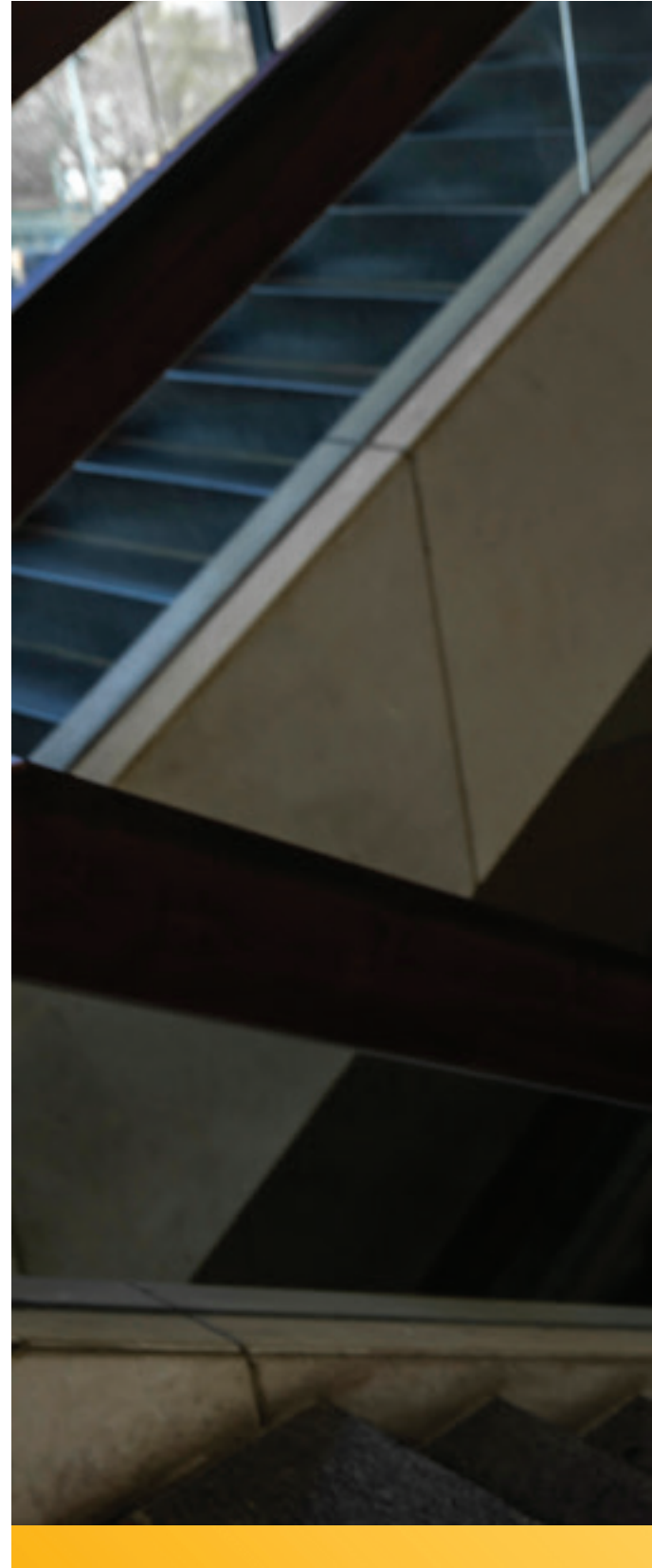
Along with fishing, Romero is passionate about information. As the director of information services for the Baton Rouge city-parish, he has spent the past few years figuring out the best ways to share the city's data with its citizens.

The city offers a collection of databases and search portals that allow anyone to look up, for instance, crime statistics, traffic patterns and future plans. You can learn where a raindrop that falls on your street is going to end up.

"I love looking at seeing how we can use data to build solutions or make decisions," he says. "It's truly the public's data, because we are using taxpayer money to collect that data."

Romero and his team have modeled places such as Raleigh, San Francisco and New York City in creating this virtual infrastructure. Baton Rouge has consistently earned a Top 10 ranking within the U.S. Open Data Census over the past few years.

Growing up on the West Bank of New Orleans, Romero, the son of a welder at the Avondale Shipyard, dreamed of the sea. Shrimp, sharks, seahorses, stingrays and turtles swam in his imagination. He decided he would become a marine biologist.







“

It's truly the public's data, because we are using taxpayer money to collect that data.”

—Eric Romero



But he was also a practical kid, and when a mentor told him there was more money in computers, and that they were becoming the backbone of every sort of science, including the study of water and the fish that live in it, he charted a new course at Nicholls State University.

A fan of Pac-Man and those old-time clunky machines of the 1980s, it felt natural to pursue programming. He joined the city-parish 27 years ago. In that time, his profession has morphed rapidly. Romero reaches for the latest technology. But it's important to him that everyday people can benefit from the work he does.

“He is a very earnest and honest and open leader,” says John Snow, a partner at management consulting firm Emergent Method who met Romero

while they were strategizing how to increase the flow of information so city leaders could map out their ideas and responses accurately.

It's a rare talent, adds Snow, for an IT maven to be able to step back and consider how technology impacts everyone—from kids to hipsters to retirees. Romero honors his elders. His grandfather was a Cajun who celebrated Christmas and the beginning of shrimp trawling season with the same amount of childlike glee.

My own grandfather was a fisherman too. He cast flies in the waters of the Wasatch and Uinta Mountains of Utah. He liked to ask a lot of questions. Maybe that's where I get it from.

Plugging search terms into the city's collection of information portals gives





me a rush. I like seeing what I can learn about the earth beneath my feet and the water that runs behind my house.

I visit Romero's portal to our parish. I look up all of the car crashes that happened on my block in the past year and through time. I scope out which

## Romero's Domains

East Baton Rouge has several public data sites.

### Main transparency page

» [brla.gov/transparency](http://brla.gov/transparency)  
Explains efforts and links to all of the city-parish's transparency initiatives

### Open Data BR

» [data.brla.gov](http://data.brla.gov)  
Main searchable data site—find crime, fire, permits, tax roll and much more

### EBRGIS Program

» [gis.brla.gov](http://gis.brla.gov)  
The city's maps and location-based tools

### Open Budget BR

» [budget.brla.gov](http://budget.brla.gov)  
City-Parish budget in easy to view charts

### Open Checkbook BR

» [checkbook.brla.gov](http://checkbook.brla.gov)  
All payments made by parish government

### Open Neighborhood BR

» [my.brla.gov](http://my.brla.gov)  
Mapping interface showing crime, fire, permits, traffic and 311 calls

streets in Baton Rouge have the most fender benders and make a mental note for my morning commute. I look to see where the sidewalks actually end.

There will always be hand-wringers who believe that things are only getting worse on their streets. Romero hopes that the facts his search portals provide will add balance and structure to those emotions. If that happens, focused advocacy and appropriate shifts in planning and policy can follow.

Much to my surprise, Romero is a fan of a certain popular app where neighbors can share everything from kvetches about post-St. Patrick's Day Parade bead refuse to lost rabbits and random security camera footage. When people talk about issues they have on their personal plot of city land, Romero says, that is priceless information that can build a better infrastructure.

Recently, the city took an inventory of its catch basins, places where rain travels after a storm. Preventive maintenance of these structures is a vital and constant task for the city, and facts about them help crews plan ahead.

That brings us back to water.

At his grandfather's fishing camp, there are marshes that prefer to keep their secrets. They are dark and filled with a rich sediment that keeps the animals that live there healthy and happy. In the fall, the bull redfish makes its migration out to sea, and Romero and his family have long looked forward to night fishing, dropping a line in and, with miraculous speed, seeing it bend with a bounty.

At my own grandfather's camp, you can see all the way to the bottom of the lakes where sparkling fish cast shimmering shadows.

In information technology and wetlands, there is a time and a place for both the opaque and the crystal-line. When it comes to the flow of data in a civic sphere, Romero believes, the clearer the better. Yet not all information, he explains, should be exposed.

There will always be private details that need to stay secure. This calls for a different mindset, an obsessive series of digital checks and balances that Romero maps in his mind.

He recently shared how to create a password that is hacker-proof. Avoid the obvious, like birthdays and ordered numerical sets. If people understand the value of securing their programmable toasters, he says, they will be more eager to contribute to security efforts on a civic level.

"He is a collaborator and he is a communicator," Snow says.

Being able to move back and forth from transparency to security requires an agile, fluid mind. It's stressful.

To decompress, Romero heads to Grand Isle with his family. Both kids are veteran anglers. Romero flips through photographs of them holding up fish that are almost as big as they are, grins even bigger.

The camp his grandfather built offers no more than an old TV with an antenna. No Wi-Fi. It's quiet as the moon rises over ripples and cypress. Hurricane Ida was merciless when it ripped through Grand Isle, but the Romero camp still stands.

Romero's grandfather taught him to take care of the things you build. There will always be something to fix, some piece of weathered wood that needs replacing or some section of roofing that requires a closer look. Ask the people you care about to lend a hand. Feed them well after.

Building a world-class digital infrastructure isn't much different.

Snow says Romero's gift is connecting people with the tools he and his team design. Romero pursues every opportunity to talk about what he is building—at libraries, in front of civic groups, and on social media.

"I want people to be engaged," he says. "It's about building a relationship." ■



# The Little BOOKSELLER WHO DID

**Cottonwood Books was a warm spot in readers' hearts**

BY MARY ANN STERNBERG | PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER

Cottonwood Books existed for over 40 years and several iterations in the shadow of the Perkins Road overpass. But, since 1986, that name emblazoned in white on a royal blue awning has been synonymous with a single person: proprietor (and often sole employee) Daniel Robert Plaisance, known to everyone as “Danny.”

While the surrounding area became trendy with hip shops and restaurants, the last independent bookstore in old Baton Rouge preserved the warm, cozy atmosphere of an old-fashioned neighborhood.

Cottonwood was a kind of oasis, but unlike other contemporary bookshops: It offered no café for sipping lattes, no slick displays or bright lights, only the musty, earthy, pleasant smell of quantities of vintage books—a book-lover’s favorite fragrance—offered in a small, clut-

tered, friendly space. Nor did the owner ever harbor aspirations of becoming more modern. He preferred to focus instead on an increasingly hard-to-find quality: excellent customer service.

Cottonwood Books was utterly the creation and reflection of its owner.

Danny Plaisance, an eternally genial man, slim and boyish looking with a 1950s barbershop haircut, could usually be found seated in the “office” right next to the front door. It was merely a small, open, corner space, defined by a messy desk, a crowded sales counter and a perimeter of crammed bookshelves that often looked as if one more added book might cause a landslide.

A sign on the wall overhead read “Cottonwood Books a business friend of Literacy Works.” Another read “No cash refunds.” Often, taking up precious floorspace at the entrance were cardboard boxes spilling over









with used books that he hadn't yet sorted through.

From his office perch, Danny greeted all comers with his trademark broad grin that lit up in his pale blue eyes, a warm welcome for both familiar customers and first-timers. If he wasn't sitting right there by the door, chances were that Danny was "in the back," looking for a book someone had requested. He seemed to be always there, rarely closing during the workday, and then just for an hour or so, and "back soon."

Only recently, when his Parkinson's Disease began to progress and make it increasingly difficult for Danny to continue the long, solo hours did Cottonwood Books change its operations. He was forced to open for fewer hours, then fewer days. Finally, his wife Nancy, retired from banking, came in to help with both daily logistics and strategizing the sale of her husband's unique enterprise.

Danny Plaisance's journey to becoming a mainstay of Baton Rouge's literary community was slightly circuitous. After graduating from Broadmoor High School, he earned a business degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now ULL) in Lafayette. During college, he had worked at Anders, a bookstore near the USL campus that sold used textbooks, class-assigned books, and USL paraphernalia.

"I loved working there," recalled Cottonwood's owner, reflecting that perhaps the experience had planted a seed, though it lay dormant for a while.

His first job was as an assistant buyer for H.J. Wilson, a jewelry company; next he worked as a salesman for C J Curtis, a paper company. He won an award for rookie of the year at Curtis, but he hated sales, hated cold calling.

When Cottonwood Books came up for sale, he decided "to follow the American dream ... be my own boss, have my own business," in an arena he already believed he knew and would enjoy.

Learning the book-selling business,

however, would not be completely intuitive; he had to learn to do by doing. One thing on his side, he confessed: He'd never been a "book person"—that stereotypical avid reader who hung out for hours in bookstores, or read late into the night.

"I'm really a slow reader."

But this meant that, during times of low customer traffic in the store, he wasn't tempted to sit back and read; instead, he shelved and re-shelved, learning his growing, changing inventory.

Most of the time, Danny was the shop's only employee.

"I found out pretty quickly that I could run the show solo except for some busy Saturdays and during the holiday season" when he hired helpers. But woe to a job applicant who swooned about the bookstore job, saying, "If I worked here, I'd sit and read and all day!" That definitely doomed the hire.

Danny grew Cottonwood's inventory from the 5,000 books it stocked when he purchased it to a collection of approximately 45,000 books. His mix also evolved to be primarily second-hand books, some special editions, and some rare, out-of-stock, and out-of-print books.

The secret to his inventory, the bookseller confided, was having the right used books, which was much more difficult than just having any used books.

But whether a customer came looking for a copy of *Modeling in Wax for Jewelry and Sculpture*, *The Physics of Wall Street*, *Dracula Unbound*, *Stokstad's Art History*, *Gilmore Girls* or *The Civil War*, Danny knew whether the book was in the store and where to find it amongst his crammed shelves. (*Confederacy of Dunces*, historically his best-seller, was almost always in stock.)

He also knew if he did not have the requested book, although he'd never created a reference database of his trove. He just knew it intuitively.

When he didn't have a book, he'd offer

to find it for a customer, whether a new publication or something more arcane. For the latter, the multi-volume *Books in Print* became his bible; more recently, the computer he had so reluctantly added to his office could aid searches with websites like Abebooks and Alibris. That computer had come to Cottonwood only when Ingram, his book supplier, went digital and threatened to drop him as a customer if he couldn't accept their new business model.

Of course, customers were encouraged to search for their own books, to explore among the shop's dimly lit back corners and hidden recesses, peer along the crowded brown plank shelves, and squint at the primitive, stenciled labels hinting at the shelves' genres: Louisiana; history, religion, military, humor, biographies, and others.

The books were stacked mostly vertically, and almost in alphabetical order, though some books lay horizontally across others so as to fit on the correct shelf. Regular customers knew not to expect the precision order of other bookstores but just to enjoy the serendipity of the browse: the delight of discovering a book you didn't anticipate wanting.

Danny's small inventory of best sellers, splendid in their bright jackets, was showcased up front, interspersed among the latest books by local and regional authors whom he loyally supported. Also up front: a mix of new and used children's books plus shelves of paperback classics.

Cottonwood's focus on second-hand and unusual books not only reflected its owner's affinity for them but provided a distinctive niche among area competitors.

When he started, these had included a couple of other local "indies" and big chain bookstores; later, the books-beheemoth, Amazon.com, became a competitor as well.

"Sure they were stiff competition," Danny said. "I know my customers could go to big box stores or order online, but




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**FOUNDATION FACT**


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At each celebration of the Foundation's Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, Danny Plaisance set up a table to sell the winning book. He warmly greeted people and introduced them to the winners, who signed books beside him. Thank you, Danny Plaisance and Cottonwood Books.

luckily, I have a very loyal clientele ... and the most eclectic and widest variety" of people.

These loyal folks ranged from serious book collectors to children looking for their first school assignment. "Middle-aged women were my number one book buyer group... And history buffs."

And, happily, folks from locally filmed movie productions needing books for props on their sets. The most recent purchase by a film company, in fact, included over a thousand books—shelves and shelves of leatherbound books with gilded imprints.

Stars from these films occasionally wandered into Cottonwood; the most famous of these was Tom Hanks. His thrilling visit was documented with a prominently displayed photo of a smiling Tom, baseball cap shading his face, standing right next to a grinning Danny against the backdrop of shelves of jumbled books.

"He came in with his bodyguard and bought four books," Danny remembered;

then word got out that Tom Hanks was there and the store became jammed with fans. The second most exciting time Danny recalled was when novelist and sportswriter John Ed Bradley had a book signing at the store, and "women lined up out the door."

No doubt in the business world Danny Plaisance and Cottonwood Books would have been considered backward because of his seeming aversion to new technologies.

Danny came late to accepting credit and debit cards and his credit system for valuing second-hand books was arcane. This old-fashioned type of credit enabled the donor to buy more second-hand books but he kept this "system" in a plastic file box stuffed with handwritten notes in no particular order that only he could decipher.

In the age of social media, Danny grudgingly agreed to having a website created, then dropped it, retaining only a very informal Facebook page.

Danny's business never relied on aggressive advertising or promotion. He had never, in fact, advertised or solicited for the used books that became his trademark. Perhaps it seemed too much like cold calling.

Nevertheless, word of mouth had filtered out and his business expanded. "I got called by people with old books they wanted to sell, or who were having estate sales."

Some people wanted to trade books, buy used books, or just donate books they had to part with but, being book lovers, couldn't throw away. "I really can't remember where a lot of the books came from," he said, glancing around at the overstuffed shelves and their holdings that included some collector editions, leatherbound series and autographed tomes.

Out of all the books, Danny had his favorites: a 1682 edition of *The Lives of the Primitive Fathers*, in Gothic script print; an antique Book of Job written on facing pages in Hebrew and English;

an autographed copy of Walker Percy's *Love in the Ruins*.

He also had an unusual acquisition: a six-volume set that, to his great surprise, included one hollowed-out book hiding a tidy collection of antique gold jewelry.

Until recently, Danny and Cottonwood Books were well known for their ongoing involvement in the community. The shop's doors and windows were papered with posters promoting local literary events, and he spotlighted the work of local and regional authors, prominently displaying stacks of their books.

Formerly, he'd even crowded an occasional book signing into his small space. Danny often worked with schools to stock their assigned readings and was an expected presence at local events where an author spoke, then autographed copies of his or her works that Danny had brought in to sell.

This might be a book club or the annual Ernest Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, Big Buddy or the Baton Rouge Gallery. Over the years, it seems, Danny and Cottonwood became a friend to everything literary in the greater Baton Rouge area.

If not for the Parkinson's, Danny Plaisance would probably have continued to stay surrounded by his wonderful collection of books and the people who loved them—and him—for decades.

But he accepts that retirement can offer some pleasures; he plans to spend time binding and restoring books, a craft he's "tinkered with" before but didn't have much time to do. And he can certainly see his family more often—three adult children and four grandchildren, who will be delighted to have "Pops" more available.

In fact, he might even have time to introduce the little ones to some lovely old editions of children's classics or tell stories about what took place at an old-fashioned oasis called Cottonwood Books, a place the Baton Rouge community would grow to miss. ■









# CIVIC LEADERS

## Four owners push to improve links to Perkins Road Overpass district

BY SARA BONGIORNI | PHOTO BY TIM MUELLER

A handful of scrappy business owners are leading the push to build a safe and beautiful way for pedestrians and bikers to navigate the dicey Perkins Road overpass. Their idea: Develop a paved multi-use trail

beneath the overpass to improve community connectivity and create a distinctive public space in a Baton Rouge neighborhood like no other. The 2023 start of the I-10 widening project is expected to create still more traffic in the busy bar-and-restaurant district.

The first goal of the proposed Perkins Road Underpass is giving cyclists and pedestrians a safe way to move along a narrow stretch of Perkins when they reach the 85-year-old railroad overpass. Walkers and bikers have two options now, both dangerous.

They can go up and over the tracks via the 35-inch-wide overpass sidewalks, a route that requires whistle-past-the-graveyard moxie as cars whir by dizzily close. There is no room here for error by drivers, cyclists or pedestrians.

The second option is following a dirt trail that runs beneath the overpass from Christian Street to Reymond Avenue. Unlit, uneven and often muddy, it passes abandoned equipment and trash-tangled brush. People who use the isolated trail must step across or haul their bikes over the railroad tracks.

“People are using the path anyway,” said Misti Broussard, who with husband Brumly Broussard opened the restaurant BLDG 5 under the overpass in 2019.

Al Moreau of Moreau Physical Therapy points out that the dangerous routes represent the daily commute for people who bike or walk to work along Perkins. “Getting this done is going to make our city safer,” Moreau said.

Broussard and Moreau are part of the informal group of four small-business owners that for years has worked to get the pathway built. The others are Jenni Peters of Varsity Sports and Chad Hughes of Ivar’s Sports Bar & Grill and Unleaded BBQ on Perkins, which is under construction.

The group has met often with elected officials and planners and organized

Leaders of a project to create an urban trail to link with Perkins Road Overpass Merchant District are, from left front row, Jenni Peters and Adrian Owen-Jones with, from left back row, Misti Broussard, Brumby Broussard, Al Moreau, Chad Hughes, Carl Stages and Julie Becnel.





## Our common bond is that we're impatient business owners."

—Jenni Peters, Varsity Sports owner.



walking visits to the site to explain their vision. They've sought advice from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the BREC Foundation and the Center for Planning Excellence about how to get the project done and funded.

Significantly, they've also spent about \$40,000 of their own money for site surveys and a conceptual master plan that shows details like landscaping, lighting and ADA-compliant entry points at Christian and Reymond.

"Our common bond is that we're impatient business owners," Peters said.

Plans for the \$2.2 million pathway—the group also paid for the cost estimate—tackle safety and connectivity with artistry and imagination that play on the neighborhood vibe, and the structure completed in 1937.



### FOUNDATION FACT

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation provides advice to the leaders of this project. We've also advocated for biking and walking as an alternative to driving. The Foundation led the project that created bikeshare, partnered to add the first EV chargers in downtown and started the parish's bike and pedestrian plan.

The design by CARBO Landscape Architecture shows a paved 8-to-10-foot-wide path from Reymond to Christian. It includes new shade trees along Perkins, a railroad crossing, low-maintenance plantings heavy on natives and a small plaza where people could gather for pop-up events.

The project would reconfigure the chaotic gravel parking lot along Christian and add storm-water management features to improve drainage. Pedestrians, cyclists and other users could access the path at either end of the overpass and either side of Perkins.

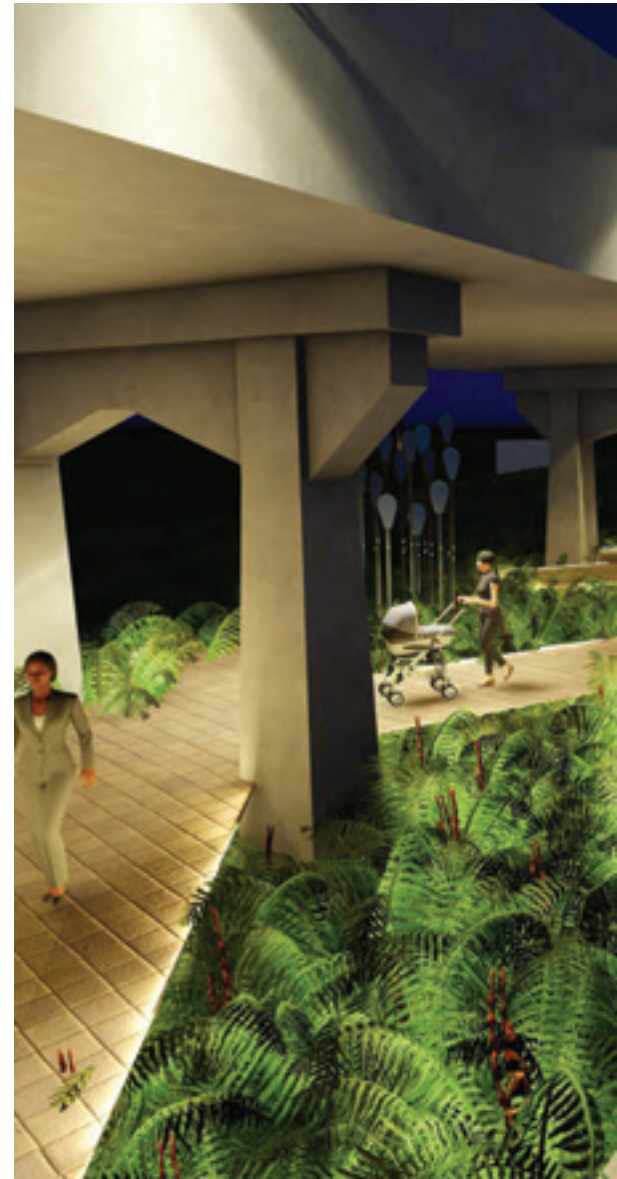
Distinctive lighting would enhance safety and add ambience along the 1,000-foot pathway. Neon way-finding signs, electric bollards and colored lighting to illuminate the path after dark are ideas in the mix.

Commissioned public art, maybe even on the underside of the overpass itself, is also part of the plan for what resembles a linear park.

In time, the pathway could connect to additional trails and park-like elements along and near Perkins that will be built in connection with the I-10 widening. A striking and useful trail under the overpass could set high expectations for the look and feel of those new public spaces and others across Baton Rouge.

"It could be a source of 'wow factor' for the city," Misti Broussard said.

U.S. Census data offer insight into how many people might use the trail. Some 42,000 residents live within a two-mile walk of the overpass, including 2,021 who



already walk or bike to work, according to a Baton Rouge Area Chamber analysis for the Foundation. The project also would enhance walkability for the nearly 10,000 college students who live within 2 miles of the overpass.

Broussard is confident more people will use the trail to get to work, stores and restaurants like hers, more than offsetting the small loss of parking spaces, down from 75 to 68 if the path is built.

"I see people bringing their kids to it as an activity," Broussard said. "I have customers tell me they'd use it to walk or



CARROL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

bike here to eat.”

Looking to the city-parish to pay for the project is logical, since it would own and maintain the trail and because multi-use trails are a key feature of its long-term infrastructure plan. The underpass trail would boost connectivity to new multi-use trails that will be built as part of the restoration of the lakes near City Park and LSU.

There is also some cause for optimism on the question of funding for the path. Fred Raiford, city-parish chief of public works, has committed to covering

the \$750,000 to \$800,000 for a railroad crossing for the path.

Raiford, who spoke at the March public meeting where its design was unveiled, also vowed to look for more money to build the path, possibly to include federal grants. He called the project “super great,” but also said he wants a process that shows buy-in from the surrounding area.

“The business owners taking the lead is amazing from my standpoint,” Raiford said.

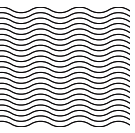
Any final decision on funding rests

with the Metro Council. Council members Carolyn Coleman and Jen Racca—who represent two of three council districts that converge in the overpass district—voiced support at the March meeting.

Other funding options are under consideration, including private donations and public and corporate sponsorships. Meanwhile, the trail’s champions will keep working.

“It’s been a long process,” BLDG 5’s Misti Broussard said. “We think this is something all our residents deserve.” ■





# Bridge Center *for* HOPE

*Crisis receiving center cared for more than  
2,000 in first year*

BY SARA BONGIORNI | PHOTOS BY TIM MUELLER

**T**he Bridge Center for Hope’s first day of operations included cause for optimism that law enforcement officers would view it as an alternative to jail or the emergency room as a place to bring people in crisis—a fundamental aim of the taxpayer-funded facility.

Officers dropped off the first five people admitted to the center on February 11, 2021, when Louisiana’s first round-the-clock crisis stabilization center opened on Florida Boulevard in Mid-City.

The day capped a years-long initiative to bolster access to crisis treatment in East Baton Rouge Parish and improve connections to community providers of substance-abuse rehabilitation, therapy, housing and other services.

Officer buy-in is an essential element in expanding access to care and on of the best practices developed by RI

International, the Arizona-based operator of the Bridge Center.

Turns out, the Day 1 optimism was well placed. Officers from agencies across the parish and emergency responders transported 41% of the 2,141 adults who were admitted to the center over its first 11 months of operation, center data show. The other 59% sought help on their own.

Law enforcement drop-offs typically account for 35% of admissions at other centers operated by RI International that offer both substance abuse and mental health services, according to R. Joy Brunson-Nsubuga, RI regional vice president.

Getting officers to bring people to a crisis center instead of jail or the hospital generally involves a culture shift. “But participation from law enforcement and EMS in Baton Rouge has been strong from the beginning,” Brunson-Nsubuga said.

The center will highlight its streamlined drop-off process as it expands awareness among law enforcement agencies in year two of operations. Officers were in and out of the center in 3 minutes and 52 seconds on average in 2021—less than half its initial goal of 10 minutes or less.

“We beat our expectations,” said Charlotte Claiborne, executive director of The Bridge Center.

Baton Rouge Police officers accounted for the most drop-offs, at 425, followed by sheriff’s deputies, who transported 235 people. But officers from Zachary and Central, LSU Campus Police and Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport also dropped off people in crisis.

Other first-year operations were more typical of what RI sees elsewhere. The average 30-day readmission rate was 14% compared to RI’s national average of 16%, Claiborne said. Primary diagnoses were nearly evenly split between



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“We’re getting better known. We want people to understand that we are not here for a particular demographic. We are here for everyone.”

—Charlotte Claiborne, Bridge Center for Hope







substance abuse at 51% and mental illness at 49%.

About 80% of people admitted to the center were diagnosed with both mental health and substance abuse issues, also in line with what RI sees in other states, Brunson-Nsubuga said.

A “no wrong door” admission policy means it does not turn away anyone in crisis, but East Baton Rouge residents comprised 91% of admissions in 2021, Claiborne noted. Parish tax funding covers only in-parish residents.

The cost of care for the 9% of non-resident admissions was covered by RI, which works to recoup such costs through Medicaid or other insurance providers. Out-of-parish admissions were mostly regional but included people from Ouachita, Calcasieu and Washington parishes.

“We saw people from across Louisiana,” Claiborne said.

Roughly 70% of people admitted to the center were discharged within 23 hours.

It is not yet possible to fully measure the center’s community impact, for several reasons.

Pandemic jail-reduction strategies accelerated declines in the prison population over the past two years, Claiborne pointed out. Mental health crises spiked amid the pandemic in Baton Rouge as elsewhere. This year will provide important baseline data for measuring impact in future years, she said.

Perhaps surprisingly, a regional surge in opioid overdoses did not track with 2021 admissions for opioid treatment. In July, for instance, there were 40 opioid-related admissions and 21 opioid-related deaths in the parish. In October, opioid-related admissions fell to 12 as overdose deaths climbed by 26 for the month, parish data show.

Nevertheless, the region’s opioid crisis is shaping care provided by the Bridge Center. Since April of 2022, it has offered what’s called MAT—Medication Assisted Treatment—to curb opioid cravings in those trying to quit the dangerous and highly addictive drugs.

“This is an evidence-based treatment that people are going to seek,” said Lysha Best, RI’s Louisiana state director.

The treatment is an important additional option for people transitioning back into the community after medical detox, when they are especially vulnerable to opioid overdose.

Reaching out to both the public and law enforcement agencies will be an important focus as the center works toward caring for as many as 5,000 people each year. The pandemic and damaging May flooding curtailed such efforts in 2021.

“We’re getting better known,” Claiborne said. “We want people to understand that we are not here for a particular demographic. We are here for everyone.” ■

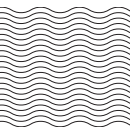


**FOUNDATION FACT**

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation and partners formed Bridge Center for Hope. The center is part of our civic projects to improve mental health care in the region. It’s overseen by an independent board that includes a Foundation representative.







# SPARK



“So many people interacted at different stations and shared ideas that led to what parts of the plan we need to take a deeper dive on. We were really pleased at the level of engagement.”

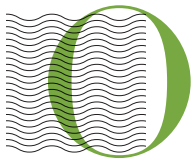
—Sara Judson, president and CEO of Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana



# Connecting the dots to RECOVERY

## *Southwest Louisiana pursues a 50-year blueprint for post-hurricane revival*

BY GARY PERILLOUX



In a March evening at the Lake Charles Civic Center, Catherine Riggins is hopeful. Her voice echoes among a roomful of charts, maps, easels, chairs and people. Eighteen months after the first of four storms dealt a multi-billion-dollar blow to her community, Riggins can glimpse the rebirth of Southwest Louisiana.

“It’s bigger and bolder than what I expected to see,” says the 65-year-old Arkansas Street resident, who’s viewing 10 potential projects that could reshape the region. “It’s good to see the future being laid out, and to see the vision broaden out in the 50-year plan.”

The \$2.5 million master plan, still under development, is funded by a gift from Yahoo founder and Calcasieu Parish native David Filo and his wife, Angela. They’re entrusting the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana to develop the plan, with Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh serving as lead consultant.

So far, the foundation and UDA have culled through 4,000 citizen comments about what would make a better, more resilient Southwest Louisiana. At

March public meetings in Calcasieu and Cameron parishes, designers unveiled coastal protection projects: over 45 miles of dunes and retaining walls protecting the Cameron coast, complemented by 35 miles of levees and flood-gates protecting Lake Charles. They also presented a 4-mile commercial waterfront development from downtown Lake Charles to Westlake.

Other projects would create “resilience districts” strengthening the bonds between McNeese State University and downtown Lake Charles; SOWELA Technical Community College and Chennault International Airport; and north and south Lake Charles via the Nellie Lucher Cultural District, anchored by Enterprise Boulevard.

A mixed-income housing redevelopment would take shape in the Prien Lake area while a resilient housing toolkit would spur residential and commercial growth in other areas. That, Riggins believes, is critical for correcting inequities in an underserved north Lake Charles.

“I want the north side to look like the south side, and the south side to look like the north side,” she says. “I don’t want to see the disparity between the two sides

of town. These projects should help us.”

### **What’s next**

Megan O’Hara, a UDA principal, says the master planning process is built upon citizen input, from interactive surveys online to public meetings to lamppost signs around the region that provide QR codes for people to text ideas.

“Right now, we’re asking people to dream with us,” she says. In the next planning phase, early summer workshops will refine funding sources and prioritize the projects. Recommendations for project leaders and partners will be made.

Later in the summer, the foundation will present the final master plan to the community, says Community Foundation President and CEO Sara Judson. “We’ve had very positive feedback. So many people interacted at different stations and shared ideas that led to what parts of the plan we need to take a deeper dive on. We were really pleased at the level of engagement.”

One project’s cost is well-established. It’s the mixed-income housing redevelopment near Prien Lake Mall tied to an expected \$40 million to \$50 million grant application to the



federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Implementation grant could yield \$200 million in new investment for the neighborhood within five years, planners estimate.

Virtually everyone agrees coastal risk reduction will take longer and cost more than any other project. Yet it may be the most important investment of all, in that it protects every other investment in Southwest Louisiana. Regional leaders will rely on coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority for design, construction and maintenance.

"We're making the argument that you actually need to look at the whole region," O'Hara says, "and look at the risk of not protecting both Cameron Parish and the investment along Lake Charles waterways."

Progress is underway on some projects. An example is the proposed 4-mile waterfront development stretching from downtown Lake Charles to Westlake, where investment in a new Horseshoe Casino is approaching \$200 million. In Lake Charles, a \$20 million children's museum and science center—Port Wonder—has broken ground along North Beach at I-10. Nearby, Crying Eagle is expanding from its McNeese-area microbrewery to develop a new

waterfront restaurant, while Lake Area Adventures will combine watercraft rentals, boat tours and pier fishing with a new Paul's Rib Shack location.

Hal McMillin, a former Calcasieu Parish Police Jury president, believes full development of the waterfront is essential. McMillin, 66, envisions an attraction comparable to the Kemah Boardwalk on Galveston Bay, Texas, coming to the Westlake waterfront.

"It would help all of Southwest Louisiana," he says. "Port Wonder is going to be tremendous. After all of the hurricanes and the ice storm and COVID, we're looking at creating a destination point for people to visit, live here and retire here."

### Bayou Greenbelt

Parallel to the 50-year master plan, the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program is designing six long-term recovery projects in Cameron, Calcasieu, Beauregard and Allen parishes. Because foundation leaders had applied for the program prior to the 2020 hurricanes, FEMA and the Department of Interior were able to expedite their grant. Planned projects target food insecurity, flood mitigation and parks, with a 23-mile recreational water loop—Bayou Greenbelt—serving as the centerpiece.

Sulphur veterinarian Philip Stelly views Bayou Greenbelt as a transformative project for the region's quality of life. The Great Chicago Fire in 1871 spawned redevelopment of that city's lakefront. A hurricane-spawned flood in 1921 led to the San Antonio Riverwalk. In Lake Charles, Bayou Greenbelt, the brainchild of resident Mike Nodier, and a new waterfront development could galvanize the region's future.

"A lot of people have moved away because things have hit hard and there's not as much to do here," says Stelly. "Young people are constantly looking to be outdoors and be active."

Three years ago, Stelly glimpsed the promise of a regional water loop. He and his cousin launched a canoe at Prien Lake Park and paddled across Indian Bay, beneath the Interstate 210 bridge, and onto the Calcasieu River. There, they paddled past casinos and port terminals, angled onto Contraband Bayou, and came ashore at a former Bennigan's restaurant lot, where friends picked them up. Acquiring that site, and others, would create access to a world of wonders, Stelly says.

"I think the greenbelt project would allow people to buy a kayak and enjoy the outdoors right near the city," he says. "I'm excited for that to be offered for McNeese students here, and young people and everyone in general. I think it would be a great tourist attraction, with the casinos and ways for people to be active and experience the wetlands."

Mayor Nic Hunter of Lake Charles agrees. Such projects, in addition to critical housing and infrastructure, could benefit from federal dollars recently committed to Southwest Louisiana. For the region, Louisiana's Office of Community Development is completing an action plan for \$600 million in federal disaster aid announced in October, including about \$300 million for homeowner and rental-housing assistance, \$200 million for infrastructure improvements, and \$78 million for storm mitigation measures. Only \$5.1 million is expected for small business assistance, but Hunter hopes another \$450 million in disaster aid announced in March will address business and economic development needs.

The flow of long-awaited federal recovery dollars should be a boon to the foundation's master-plan projects, he says.

"I look forward to the final product being released," Hunter says of the plan, "but what I've seen so far does capture this community very well. They have captured what makes this community unique." ■



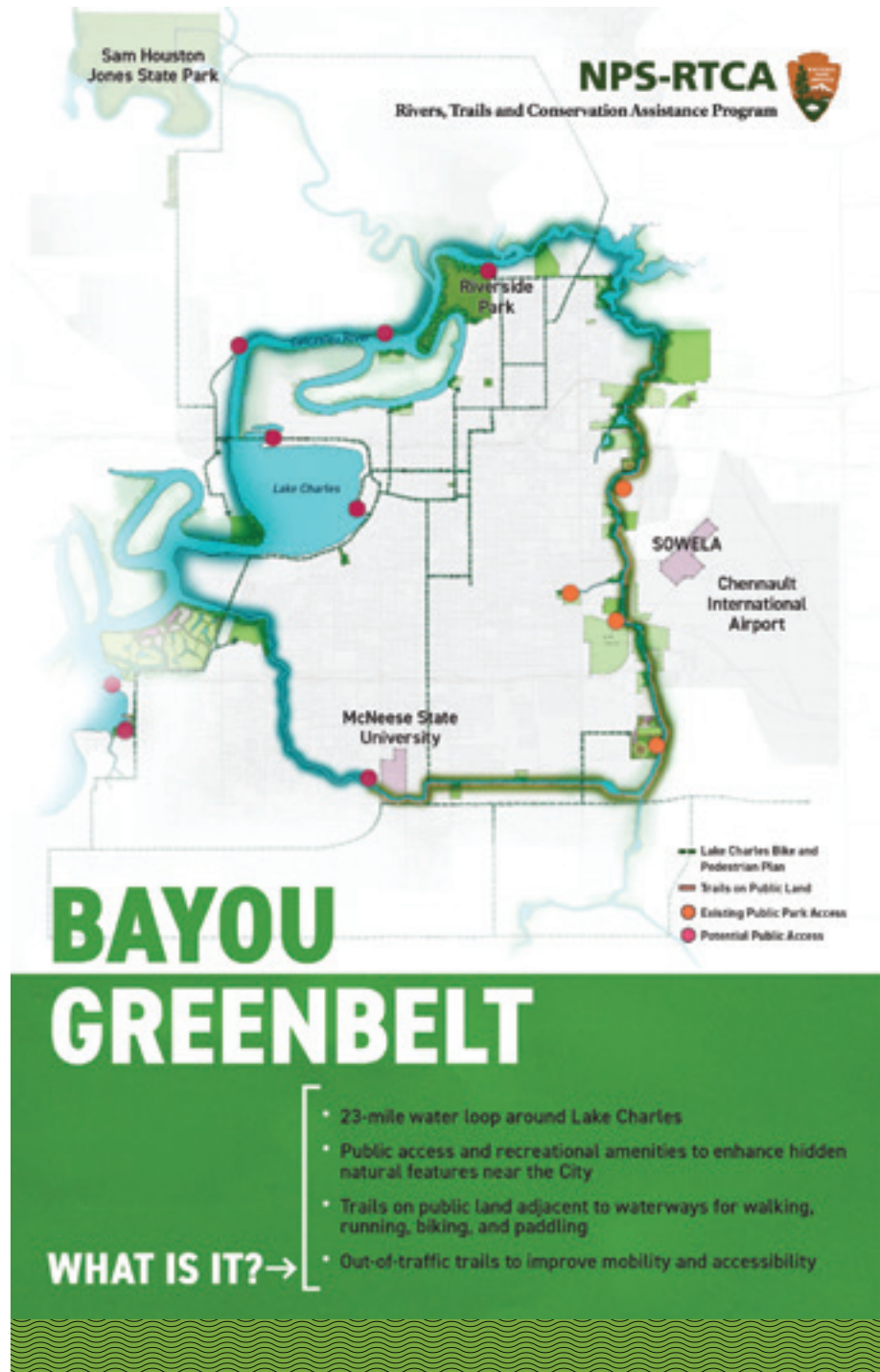
### FOUNDATION FACT

The Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana is a supporting nonprofit of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation that has its own board. BRAF helped the foundation in Lake Charles raise millions for relief and recovery after the 2020 hurricanes.

# Just Imagine

IN MARCH PUBLIC MEETINGS, the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana—joined by Urban Design Associates, Stantec and other consultants—unveiled 10 projects that could spark recovery from 2020 hurricanes and 2021 winter storm and floods. By summer 2022, public workshops will better define costs and partnerships required to unlock Southwest Louisiana’s potential through these projects:

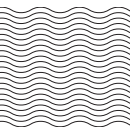
- **Coastal Risk Reduction** in Cameron and Calcasieu parishes via flood control structures.
- **Lake Charles Waterfront Development** via new retail, tourism, recreational assets.
- **Mixed-Income Housing Redevelopment** in the Prien Lake area.
- **Nellie Lucher District Renaissance** via an I-10 gateway along Enterprise Boulevard.
- **McNeese Resilience District** with calmed traffic corridors and downtown partnerships.
- **Chennault & SOWELA Resilience District** strengthening the international airport and technical community college via economic development and quality-of-life investments.
- **Stronger Downtowns** through directed investment not only in Lake Charles, but also in Cameron, Hackberry, Vinton, Starks, Sulphur, Westlake, DeQuincy and Iowa.
- **Community Resilience Hubs** serving as shelters during natural disasters and as social gathering/ event centers in other times.
- **Resilient Housing Toolkits**, like ones developed after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, to guide residents over regulatory and rebuilding hurdles.



- **Redevelopment Authority**, like Build Baton Rouge, to secure vacant, abandoned or tax-delinquent properties and redevelop them via partnerships.

For more about the regional projects envisioned in a 50-year master plan for resiliency and growth in Southwest Louisiana, visit [www.JustImagineSWLA.org](http://www.JustImagineSWLA.org).





# SPARK BRIEFS

## Eat tomatoes, live longer ... perhaps

A BOTANIST HAS EXPERIMENTED for more than 15 years to create a purple tomato that might lengthen your life. It could be available at your grocer soon, or in a pasta or pizza sauce. Cathie Martin was expecting federal approval of her tomato by the end of April.

She plucked three genes from snapdragon and cress and inserted them into tomato plants to produce a fruit abundant with an antioxidant that is commonly expressed in blueberries. Martin says mice fed her tomatoes have lived up to 30% longer. More at [BigPurpleTomato.com](http://BigPurpleTomato.com).

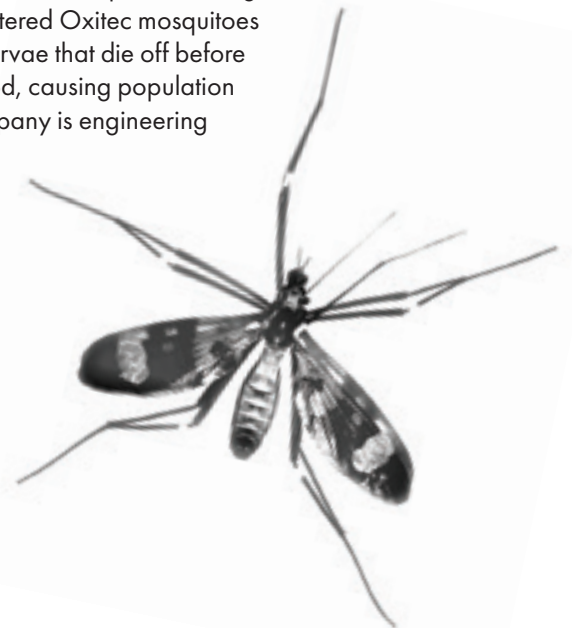


## GREEN FOR ALL PEOPLE

A FIRM IS INSTALLING heat pumps and solar panels in low- and middle-income communities. Led by entrepreneur Donnel Baird, BlocPower is electrifying homes and public buildings by offering low-interest loans for low-energy appliances that run on cheaper solar power. In a first phase in Ithaca, New York, BlocPower will decarbonize and electrify 1,600 buildings, including 1,000 homes.

## MOSQUITOES NO MORE

A COMPANY HAS RELEASED genetically altered mosquitoes to control populations of the reviled pests. After successful safety tests, Oxitec released 2 billion tailored mosquitoes in an expanded pilot in Florida and California. Female mosquitoes mating with genetically altered Oxitec mosquitoes produce female larvae that die off before reaching adulthood, causing population collapse. The company is engineering other insects with a goal of reducing crop damage without pesticides.





**THE SKINNY ON CALORIE RESTRICTION**

IN A BREAKTHROUGH study, Pennington Biomedical researchers have found why calorie restriction might let people live longer and healthier lives. Low-calorie diets were already known to extend the lifespan of mice. In their study of humans, Pennington researchers said calorie restriction improves metabolic and immune responses that determine how long a person lives and how many years of good health they enjoy.

“If researchers can find a way to harness PLA2G7, they could create a treatment to extend a person’s health span, the time an individual experiences good health,” said Pennington Biomedical Executive Director John Kirwan.



**CARBON TO VODKA**

LOUISIANA HEAVY INDUSTRIES want to bury carbon emissions. But an innovative company may have a better use for that greenhouse gas. Air Company is transforming CO2 into \$75-per-bottle premium vodka. The company turns carbon emissions into ethanol, which is the primary ingredient in alcoholic beverages.



**BIRD-FRIENDLY PARK**

A CHICAGO PARK has a birdwatching center that is designed to prevent bird collisions. The \$7.8 million Ford Calumet Environmental Center has low landscaping so birds can’t nest near it, windows that are shielded to keep birds from smacking into them and a visible bronze exterior. Big Marsh Park was reclaimed from an industrial wasteland.

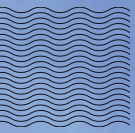
COURTESY TOM HARRIS



**SOUND OUT**

A NEW DEVICE FITS on a window to stop the noise of the outside world. A microphone on the back of Sound Eclipse captures noise, while speakers emit sound waves of identical amplitude to the original noise but of inverted phase. These waves combine and cancel each other out. The device is in the prototype phase and a finalist for the \$25,000 Lexus Design Award.





## Growing Up

THIS LANDMARK IS being transformed. It was a church before it was converted into an oriental rug store. The latest incarnation of the Mid City building is Youth City Lab, a dynamic shared space for learning, connection and creating. YCL is a collaboration of four nonprofits—Big Buddy, Front Yard Bikes, Humanities Amped and Line4Line. Baton Rouge Area Foundation is consulting on a \$2 million renovation to be completed over 24 months. Learn more at [YouthCityLab.org](http://YouthCityLab.org).

If you wish to learn more about this effort or want to donate, please contact the Foundation's Lois Smyth at (225) 387-6126 or [lsmyth@braf.org](mailto:lsmyth@braf.org).



# 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 Edmund Giering at (225) 387-6126 or [egiering@braf.org](mailto:egiering@braf.org) for more information.

*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*

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



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# RESTORE REFORM REIMAGINE

The Foundation is primed to advance key quality of life initiatives and envision our next chapter of impact.

We have built the momentum and support to restore nine historic pieces of public art this year. Based on the Foundation's \$1 million master plan, a network of partners is kicking off a \$50 million project this summer to save and beautify the University/City Park lakes. This fall, more than 11,000 students will attend exceptional schools that are supported by New Schools, a project of the Foundation.

To do even more, the Foundation is engaging stakeholders across the community to develop our next strategic priorities.

As we implement these initiatives and set our next course, we ask you to take this journey with us. Join or renew your membership today.

**[BRAf.org/membership](https://BRAf.org/membership)**

*Baton Rouge  
Area Foundation*