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The Community Lifestyle/Business Profile Journal of CenLA

Volume 28 • Issue 2
February 2025

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in this
ISSUE

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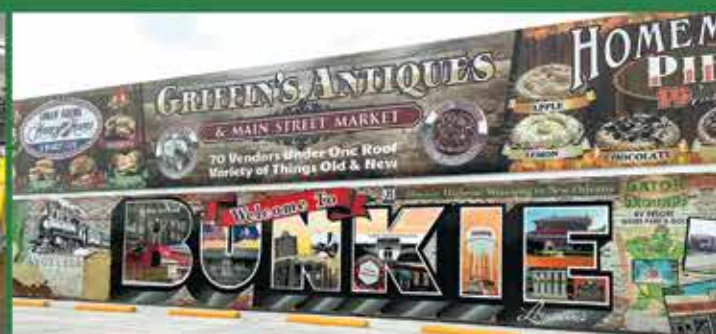
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2nd

Tuesday

GRANT @ NOON

Hopewell Baptist Church, 1100
Graham Street, Colfax, LA

3rd

Tuesday

AVOYELLES @ NOON

(ACYC) Marksville Fire Department,
512 N. Main street, Marksville, LA

4th

Tuesday

LASALLE @ NOON

New Evergreen Baptist Church,
1190 Church Street, Jena, LA

1st

Thursday

CONCORDIA @ NOON

Concordia Parish Library- Vidalia
Branch, 408 Texas St., Vidalia, LA

2nd

Thursday

Winn @ NOON

Louisiana Political Museum, 499
East Main Street, Winnfield, LA

3rd

Thursday

RAPIDES @ NOON

Westside Regional Library, 5416
Provine Place, Alexandria, LA

4th

Thursday

CATAHOULA @ NOON

LCAA office, 202 Sicily Street,
Harrisonburg, LA



VISIT WWW.CLAHSD.ORG OR PREVENTION DEPT. AT 318-487-5189 FOR MORE INFORMATION

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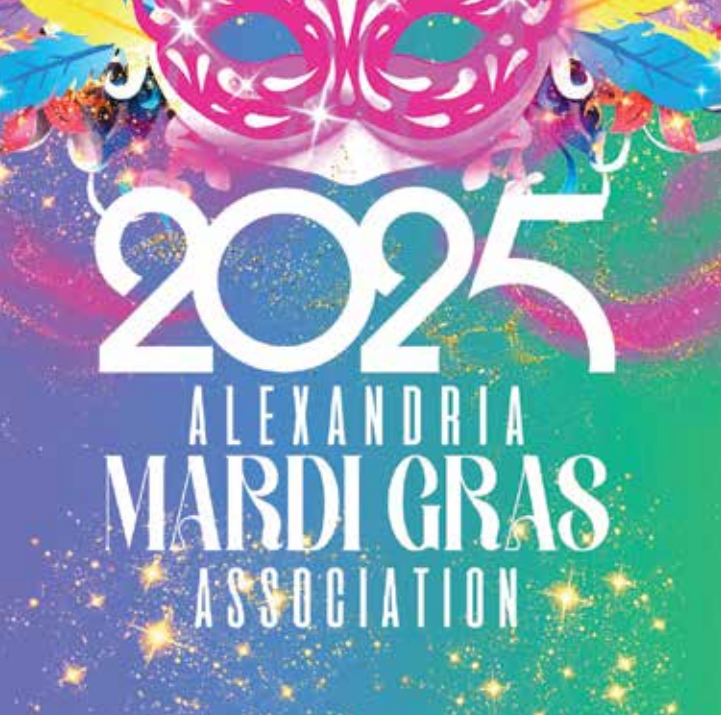
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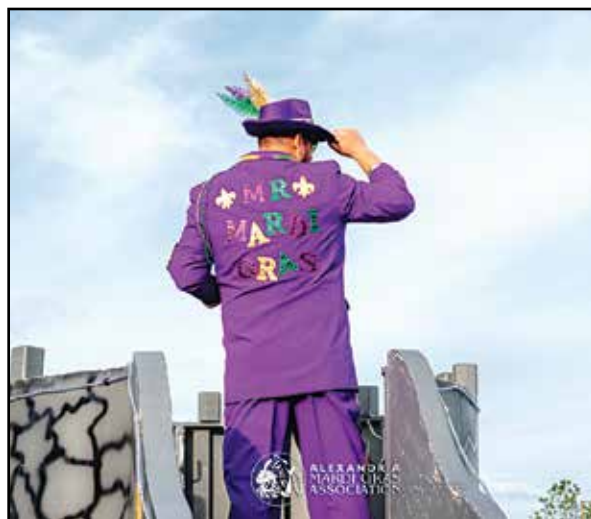
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MARDI GRAS IN THE REAL EASY

You don't have to travel south to "*laissez les bon temps rouler*" for Mardi Gras. For over three decades, the Alexandria Mardi Gras Association (AMGA) has brought the best of Mardi Gras from the Big Easy to the Real Easy! Since its inception, the goal of the AMGA has been to provide a cultural event, appealing to all cross sections of the community, state, and region. Each year, nearly 200,000 revelers from across the region converge on Cenla to enjoy the food, festivities, and fun, helping to stimulate the economy right here at home!



After a year off, Mr. Mardi Gras himself, Chris Chelette, is back at the helm as President of the AMGA. "It is an amazing feeling being back," he explained. "The few that knew I was gone have welcomed me back with open arms, but most really didn't know a thing. It warms my heart from both sides, to be appreciated and welcomed back, but to also be such a part of it that they never knew I was gone."

After Mother Nature was less than cooperative for Mardi Gras weekend in 2024, forcing the cancellation of several events, Chris and the entire AMGA are

looking forward to making up for lost time this year! "Mardi Gras 2025 I am most looking forward to is reconnecting with the Krewes and our Grand Marshal," he explained. "I really think Mardi Gras has flourished over the years because we do our best to connect with the community and connect with the people that are coming and watching. We've never really lost sight of that, so we've always kept the community and the front of our minds since day one and I think it's shown over the years."

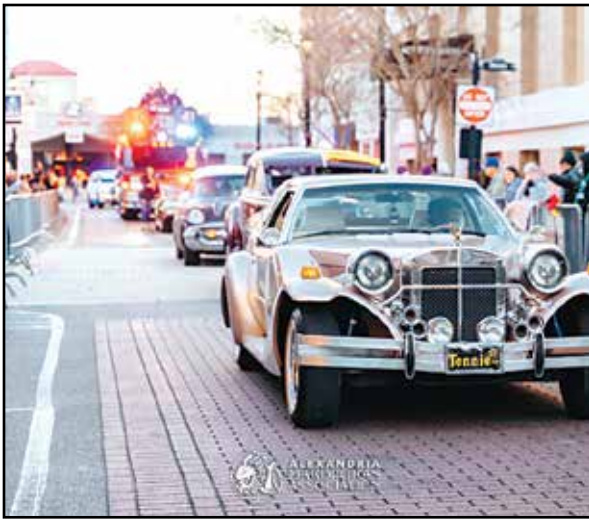


Capturing the spirit of each Mardi Gras season is the job of an artist commissioned each year to design the

official AMGA poster. This year's poster is the creation of River Oaks Square Arts Center Resident Artist Amber Voorhies. Known for her dynamic acrylic paintings and ceramics, Voorhies has designed a striking poster that captures the spirit of Mardi Gras with a theme centered on wings and feathers—symbolizing freedom, creativity, and the transformative power of art. Official AMGA posters for this year and years past are available for purchase at alexmardigras.net.

The first parade to roll for the 2025 Mardi Gras season will be the Pineville Night of Lights Parade on Friday, February 21st. The 2025 parade begins at 7:00pm at the flagpole on the Riverfront and travels north on Main Street through Downtown Pineville to the entrance of Louisiana Christian University. Following the parade, keep the fun rolling with the after party at the Trotter Center, located at 1600 Military Highway in Pineville. This is a night of fun you don't want to miss!





The Classic Cars and Cheerleaders Parade will kick off Alexandria's family-oriented Mardi Gras weekend on Friday, February 28th at 5:00pm. The Classic Cars and Cheerleaders follows the AMGA Downtown Parade route which begins on Murray Street towards the river before turning left on Fifth Street to Jackson before turning onto Third Street at the Hotel Bentley. The route concludes at Third Street and St. James Street. This unique parade features classic cars paired with cheerleaders from schools and cheer/dance teams from across Central Louisiana.

After the Classic Cars and Cheerleader Parade, stroll over to the Randolph Riverfront Center at 7:00pm for the 31st Annual Taste of Mardi Gras, presented by the Louisiana Restaurant Association. The "Mardi Gras Ball for All Y'all!" gives you the chance to experience the culinary prowess of over 30 LRA member restaurants, each offering a tantalizing "taste" from their menu. All proceeds raised at the event benefit local charities and culinary education in Cenla, including: LRA Programs (Education Foundation & Louisiana ProStart); Children's Miracle Network; Manna House Ministries; the AMGA Children's Mardi Gras Parade; and the Food Bank of Central Louisiana.



Come out and dance the night away, eat, drink and have fun, all for a good cause! The family-friendly event will bring restaurants from across the region under one roof. Dress code is dressy-casual and fun; Mardi Gras attire is highly encouraged! Bring out the beads, wigs, and purple, green, and gold!



The lively New Natives Brass Band will open the live music for the evening. Crowd favorites, The Chee-Weez, will once again headline the evening's live entertainment at 8:00pm. The Chee-Weez are a New Orleans-based five-piece tribute/show band that specialize in making sure you always have a great time and leave with a smile on your face. With an ever-expanding stage show including video walls, lights, lasers, and pyrotechnics, to the off-the-cuff antics, you never know what you'll see next at a Chee-Weez show!



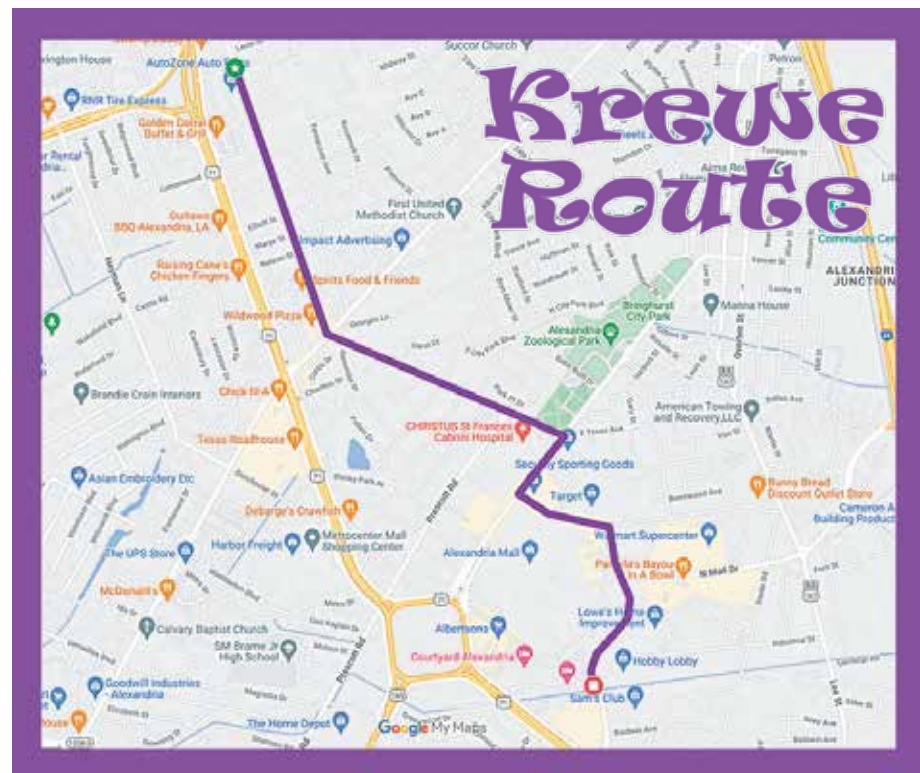
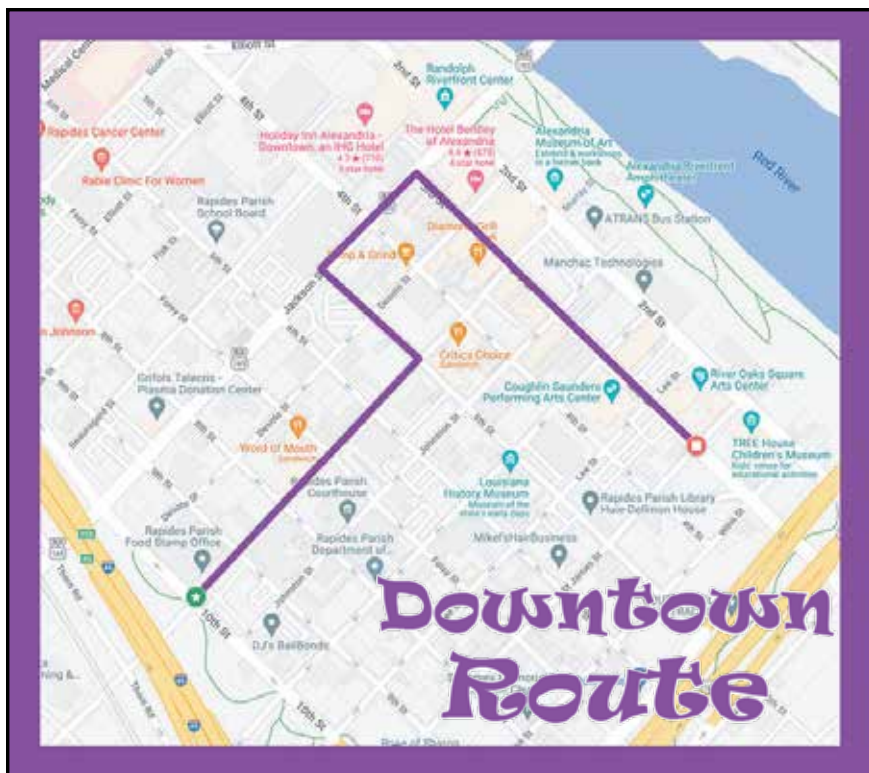
Taste of Mardi Gras is not just a celebration of Louisiana's culinary heritage but also a testament to our community's generosity. So, put on your Mardi Gras attire and be part of an unforgettable night of fun, all in the name of a good cause. We look forward to seeing you there! VIP ticketholders will enjoy reserved seating and early admission before the general public. Reserved VIP tables are \$750 for a table of eight; General Admission is \$50.00; Children 10 and under are \$25.00. Ticket prices will increase by \$10.00 on the day of the event. For more information, call (225) 240-7189, visit LRA.org, or scan the Taste of Mardi Gras QR code on Page 9.



The AMGA Children's Parade rolls on Saturday, March 1st at 10:00am following the downtown Alexandria route. Leading the way this year will be Grand Marshal, Miss Louisiana's Outstanding Teen 2024, Melissa Le. Melissa Le, a junior at Ruston High School, is a dedicated STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) advocate and an accomplished pianist. She is the founder of STEM to Bloom: Investing in STEM Education for All, a community service initiative focused on expanding access to STEM opportunities for students of all backgrounds. Melissa actively promotes her platform through public speaking, mentorship, and collaborations with organizations like the National Girls Collaborative Project, where she serves as Co-Chair of the Youth STEM Advisory Board and a Youth Board Member.

A two-time Louisiana State Piano Champion and Miss Louisiana's Teen talent winner, Melissa showcased her musical excellence by performing Hungarian Op. 39 at the national Miss America's Teen Competition, where she was named Top 11 and a talent winner. Melissa aspires to major in STEM and pursue a career in dermatology, inspired by her personal experiences overcoming skin challenges. With a heart for service, a passion for learning, and a drive excellence, Melissa continues to inspire others through her leadership, talent, and advocacy.





The party doesn't stop following the Children's Parade! Head over to the Alexandria Zoo to keep the good times rolling for the annual Mardi Gras Party, starting at 1:00pm. The Zoo is rolling out the purple, green, and gold for a family-friendly Mardi Gras Party. Indulge in complimentary king cake from Atwood's and get your groove on with live Zydeco and pop music by The LaCour Trio. Show off your Mardi Gras decorating skills by decking out your kid's stroller or wagon (but let's leave the throws for the parades, please). Regular zoo admission prices will be in effect. For more information, visit thealexandriazoo.com!

You, too, can get in on the action by joining a Krewe! While each Krewe has its own membership rules and bylaws, there is likely already a good fit for you. You can find a full list of active Mardi Gras Krewes at the AMGA website, alexmardigras.net. Or, if you don't find the right fit, you can gather like-minded friends and start your own brand new Krewe! Contact the AMGA for details on how to get started.



Each year, AMGA selects a Grand Marshal to lead the grand spectacle that is the Krewe parade. "We've always tried to find a local Alexandria person or Louisiana native to honor as our Grand Marshal and to really bring the roots back home," explained Chelette. "We've never lost sight of it being a family-focused Mardi Gras that you can bring anyone to." This year, reigning over the AMGA Krewes Parade will be 2025 Grand Marshal, Alexandria native and LSU Gymnast, Annie Beard. "We are excited to have Annie Beard who is from right here in Alexandria, and has done such great things for herself in the gymnastics world," said Chelette. "Talking with her and her family and seeing everyone's enthusiasm for her to be the grand marshal, how can you not be excited for that?"



A highly accomplished athlete and scholar, Annie holds titles such as J.O. National Champion, Junior Elite, and NCAA National Champion. Recognized for excellence both on and off the mat, Annie has been honored as an Academic All-American and LSU Student Athlete of the Month. Currently pursuing a degree at Louisiana State University, she is set to graduate in the summer of 2025. Her dedication to academic achievement and athletic excellence exemplifies her drive, discipline, and commitment to success. Annie is the daughter of Ronnie and Jennifer Beard.

Thousands of revelers will line the streets of Alexandria on March 2nd, arms outstretched, chanting the familiar Mardi Gras refrain, "Throw me something, Mister!" The Krewes Parade will follow the AMGA Mid-City Route, beginning on Texas Avenue, crossing Jackson Street then onto Masonic Drive before turning on Memorial Drive to North Drive, concluding at Sam's Club. While the route is long enough to provide plenty of space for everyone, major intersections fill up fast!

Make plans to be a part of all the fun. Whether you're young or young at heart, there is something for everyone this year at Mardi Gras in the Real Easy!



Mardi Gras weekend in the Real Easy culminates on Sunday, March 2nd at 2:00pm when the AMGA Krewes Parade rolls through Mid-City Alexandria. Since its inception in 1995, at the heart of the AMGA have been its Krewes, each one with a unique history and theme. Some Krewes—like Boogaloo, Twelfth Night, and Madea, to name just a few—have been around for decades, while others, like the Mystic Krewe of Apollo—will be rolling in their first AMGA Mardi Gras parade, after last year's parade was, unfortunately, rained out. Each organization brings its own flair, flavor, and custom throws each year.

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2025

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For over three decades, the Taste of Mardi Gras has been the heartbeat of celebration in Cenla, and this year, we're turning the dial up to 31! Join us on February 28th at the Randolph Riverfront Center for an evening that promises to ignite your senses and spirit.

The Louisiana Restaurant Association Cenla proudly presents Taste of Mardi Gras—the revered "Mardi Gras Ball for All Y'all!" Prepare your most vibrant purple, green, and gold attire and get ready to immerse yourself in a jubilant atmosphere that only Mardi Gras can evoke.

This year isn't just about festivities; it's a tribute to the culinary arts and the aspiring talents of high school students. With every ticket sold, you're contributing to the LRA Education Foundation, supporting ProStart programs that fuel the dreams of future chefs and hospitality leaders. As Scott Laliberte, Chapter President, puts it, "It's more than revelry; it's investing in our future. Laissez les bons temps rouler!"

What's a celebration without sensational flavors? Experience the culinary prowess of over 30 LRA member restaurants, each offering a tantalizing "taste" from the diverse Cenla region. From savory bites to delectable treats, your taste buds are in for a royal treat!

The evening wouldn't be complete without the electric energy of the Chee Weez! Get ready to dance the night away to their infectious beats, ensuring the party reaches new heights of excitement.

Your journey to this unforgettable celebration begins now. Secure your tickets and mark your calendar. Visit LRA.org to grab your spot at the Taste of Mardi Gras. Look for the iconic logo and prepare for an evening filled with culinary adventures, vibrant festivities, and the warmth of community coming together.

As the countdown begins to this landmark event, join us in commemorating 31 years of flavor, generosity, and the joy of Mardi Gras. Come one, come all—let's make this anniversary a night to remember!

PURCHASE TICKETS HERE:
OR VISIT WWW.LRA.ORG



Note: Valid ID is required for alcohol purchase/possession/consumption. No outside food, beverages or ice chests allowed.

Just So Proud To Be Here

By Dr. Jerry Sanson



DR. JERRY SANSON

When you stop to think about the tragedies that our ancestors had to survive, it is almost unbelievable that we are here and alive today. Consider, for example, the great reduction in population that occurred about 900,000 years ago when the breeding population of hominins alive at the time evidently fell to about 1,300, at least one recent genetic study of modern humans concluded. Climate cooling also occurred at about the same time, and it might have been a cause of the decline. Drought and other climate conditions might have been causes as well.

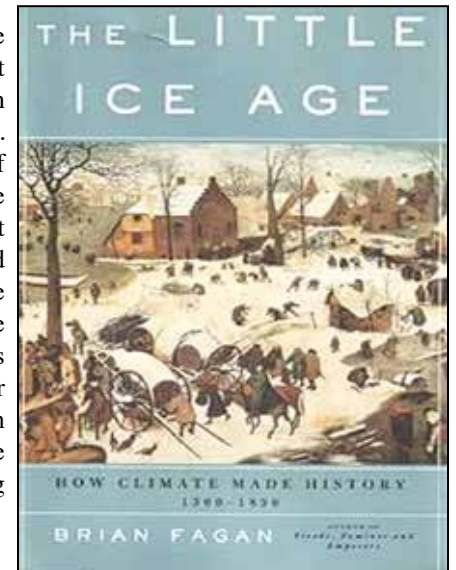
Wars, massive volcanic eruptions that reduced light and heat from the sun, floods, excessive rainfall, droughts, famines, and other causes have affected human population numbers repeatedly through the millennia, but the focus this month is the Great Famine of the 14th century.

The Great Famine affected the Northern European population from England in the west and Scandinavia in the northwest, to Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe. People in those countries had experienced the Medieval Warm Period from approximately the 10th to 13th centuries, a time when the weather was relatively mild; grazing and farming could be carried on at higher elevations than during earlier centuries. Relatively warmer weather and more land available for agriculture led to somewhat more plentiful food supplies, and as is not uncommon in such conditions, human population increased rapidly. Some parts of Europe did not reach their 13th

century population numbers again until the 19th century.

Increasing population caused increasing pressure on individuals to produce enough food. Relatively inefficient medieval farming methods had produced yield ratios of about 7:1 for wheat in the late 13th century (seven grains harvested for each one planted), but as a precursor to the famine, the yield began declining about 1280.

Real problems began in 1310 when climate change caused colder winters and cool, wet summers that hindered crop production and reduced the amount of arable land. Northern Europeans experienced some of the worst weather that occurred anytime during the Medieval Period for about the next twenty years. Historians and others who study this subject explain the bad weather as resulting from possible volcanic activity compounded by Earth's changing climate that brought new weather patterns to the region. The Medieval Warm Period was followed by the Little Ice Age beginning in the 14th century and lasting until the 19th century.



Congratulations! Kylie Miller

BOM Bank would like to congratulate Kylie Miller on her promotion to Head Teller at our Many branch! Kylie has been with BOM since 2022, where she has previously served as both a teller and a loan processor. Kylie attended CLTCC, where she obtained an associate's degree in business administration. She has been married to her husband, Kyle, for four years, and they have three pit bulls. When she isn't working, Kylie enjoys baking, cooking, and spending time with her pets, friends, and family. Kylie stated, "I enjoy the family atmosphere at BOM; birthdays and work anniversaries have always been special, and my coworkers are also there for me during the hard times." Welcome, Kylie!



BOM

Spring is often a rainy season, and spring rains began across Europe as usual in 1315. Rather than tapering off, though, spring rains became summer floods and the temperature remained cool. Saturated soil could not be prepared properly for planting. The grain stalks that managed to sprout under bad conditions could not ripen the future harvest. People gathered unripe grain and brought it indoors in a futile effort to dry it for consumption. Grass could not be cured for hay because of the incessant rain, reducing or eliminating fodder for feeding livestock during the winter.

Food prices inevitably began to rise, doubling in England between spring and midsummer. Salt, used to preserve meat, became increasingly scarce and expensive because brine could not be dried in the rainy weather. While members of royalty and the gentry and the church had some reserves of grain, poor people did not, and they began to suffer first. Even bread prices rose to levels beyond their means, so they began to harvest wild plants from the countryside in an effort to survive. Conditions became so bad that survivors barely had strength to bury family members who died from hunger. Horse and dog meat became common table fare, and some desperate people reportedly resorted to cannibalism.

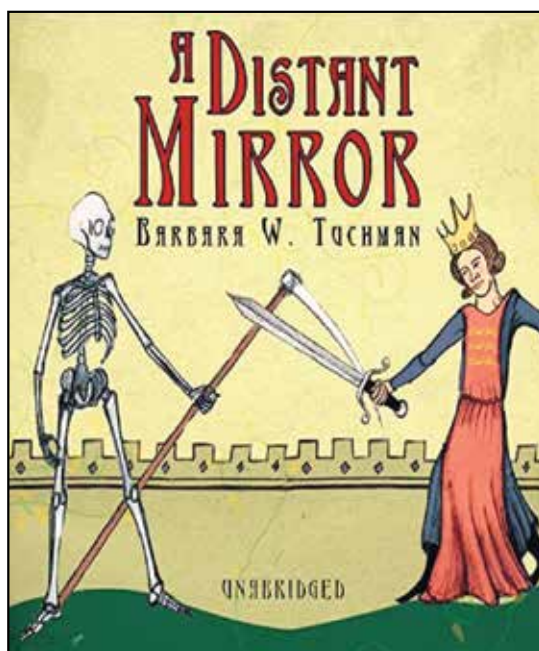
One bad harvest caused problems, but people hoped for a better yield in 1316. Unfortunately, those hopes came to nothing as the rain continued to fall during the spring. All classes of society were affected by this time, but the peasants (about 95 percent of Europe's population) continued to be most deeply harmed. Draft animals were slaughtered for meat, making future farming more difficult and less efficient. Consumption of seed further hampered future crops, but desperate times called for desperate measures. Reports indicate that some parents abandoned their children because they could no longer provide for them and left them to fend

for themselves. The Great Famine is supposedly the deep origin of the fairytale story of Hansel and Gretel. Other accounts indicate that some older people endured voluntary starvation so younger people could live to work the fields if and when they got the chance.

That chance began to occur during the summer of 1317. Rain throughout the spring discouraged people, but the summer brought near normal and somewhat drier weather patterns. Even this relief was too late for many people. Human bodies, weakened by prolonged hunger, are susceptible to illnesses. Pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis, and other maladies continued to claim famine victims. Seed supplies were dangerously low because of consumption, and the lack of draft animals hindered farmers. Food production and supply did not return to the levels they had reached before the famine until 1325 and population began to increase again.


Historians estimate that between ten and twenty-five percent of people in many areas of Europe died during the Great Famine. The Plague, the "Black Death" killed an even larger percentage of the European population beginning just thirty years later, starting in 1347. If you have Northern European ancestry, consider yourself lucky that your forebears found ways or had the sheer luck to survive these times when destiny seemed determined to wipe them out.

I recommend two books if you want to learn more about the 14th century: "A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century" by Barbara Tuchman and "The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850" by Brian Fagan.



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Leave Them Be: A Case for Letting Leaves Stay

By Molly Lyles



This time of year, it's common to see bags of leaves lining the streets, ready for pickup. While fallen leaves may seem like a hassle in your yard, I want to encourage you to reconsider throwing them out in plastic bags. Leaves are a valuable resource for our landscapes and soil. They are a natural source of organic matter that can improve soil health and provide essential nutrients as they decompose. Think of organic matter as compost—it helps preserve moisture, supports beneficial organisms, suppresses weeds, and more.

Instead of sending your leaves to the landfill, there are some alternative ways to use them in your landscape. Add

them to compost bins. Composting is an excellent way to recycle leaves. There are different composting systems available, all of which can utilize leaves as a carbon source. Consider setting up a composting system where you can let the leaves break down over time, eventually turning them into valuable material for your garden.

Use them as mulch. Leaves naturally make great mulch. Why not use them in your garden beds instead of buying mulch? I simply use a leaf blower and/or a rake to move the leaves from my driveway and lawn into my landscape beds. Over time, they break down and contribute organic matter back into the soil.

Mow leaves into the lawn. When leaves fall on your lawn, they can cover the grass which is the most common reason people rake them up and put them in trash bags to throw away. To help them break down faster and benefit



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the soil, consider mowing the leaves. Set the mower deck to the highest setting and mow over the leaves a few times to shred them into smaller pieces. This allows them to stay in the lawn and decompose without smothering the grass.

Add leaves to garden beds or raised beds. In the fall and winter, consider using leaves as mulch in your vegetable gardens. You can either leave them to break down on top of the soil or incorporate them into the soil come spring when it's time to plant new crops.

By letting your leaves stay and putting them to good use, you can support a healthier landscape and reduce waste, all while benefiting your soil and garden.

For more information, visit LSUAgCenter.com





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The Art of Grafting Fruit Trees: What, When, and Why?

By Michael Polozola II, PhD



If you have purchased a fruit tree from a nursery, there's a high likelihood that it was grafted. Grafting offers several benefits, including improved disease resistance, faster fruit production, and the ability to combine desirable traits from different plants. So, what exactly is grafting? Grafting is the process of taking the top part of the plant you want (scion) and attaching it to a root system capable of supporting it (rootstock). This technique is particularly useful for obtaining specific fruit and plant characteristics that are difficult to achieve through other propagation methods.

There are a few fruit trees that can be grown easily from cuttings, like figs, that are very seldom grafted, except for niche reasons. Most domesticated fruits that come to mind, like apples, pears, peaches, pecans, plums, and persimmons, are grafted when used for commercial production or the nursery trade. Grafting is a labor-intensive process that requires some skill to master, which is one reason fruit trees often cost more than landscape trees and shrubs that can be propagated from seed or cuttings. To understand what is involved, let's dive into the process of grafting.

Most grafting is typically done in late winter and early spring. Before you can get started, you need to have healthy scion wood and rootstock for grafting. Growing a healthy rootstock should start at least a year in advance, but for some slower-growing species like pecan, it can often take two to three years to grow a rootstock large enough to graft. Acquiring healthy scion wood also requires proper planning a few years in advance.

As mentioned earlier, the scion is the plant you want to propagate. For persimmon, this would be a named variety like Fuyu, which performs well in most residential settings in Louisiana. To obtain Fuyu scion wood for grafting, you need some Fuyu trees to start with. The best scion wood for grafting has plenty of buds (at least two, but preferably four) and is ideally one year old, although healthy two-year-old wood can also be used. To obtain wood large enough for grafting, you need a well-established yet youthful plant to harvest from. Nurseries specializing in grafting heavily prune trees annually to encourage the growth of larger, juvenile wood ideal for grafting.

Once you have the scion wood and

rootstock, how do you splice them together? In brief, the goal is to align the cambium layers, the thin green lines just beneath the surface, so they will heal together. Once healed, they will act as one unit, with the scion becoming the top portion of the plant and the rootstock serving as the root system. You need to monitor your rootstock throughout the life of the tree. It may occasionally send up shoots from the roots or lower trunk that can displace the grafted top. The method of aligning the cambium layers varies depending on the grafting technique used. Here, we will focus on cleft grafting.

To begin, you need a healthy rootstock. In these examples, I am grafting a persimmon in the field to produce more scion wood for future grafting. The first significant step is to cut off the majority of the above-ground portion of the rootstock. Cleft grafting is typically done close to the ground, sometimes even near the soil line. When starting out, I recommend grafting a bit higher, to give yourself some room for error. If you make a mistake, you can always cut lower and restart if you began higher initially.

The next step, known as the cleft cut, is where this grafting method gets its name. I am use a specialized cleft grafting tool with a hammer to make smooth and easy cuts in larger plant material. For smaller plant material or occasional grafts, a grafting knife can be used instead. After making the cleft cut, whittle the scion wood to fit in the gap and align the cambium layers. I typically use a razor knife for this process. The goal is to expose the cambium layer on the scion wood and align it with the cambium layer in the cleft cut. The scion wood needs to be slightly triangular or pie-shaped at the bottom to fit into the cleft cut.

If you plan to graft two scions onto your rootstock, as I did for the persimmon tree, this step is critical. Choose two pieces of scion wood that are close to the same size



to start. During the whittling process, you can also carve them to be similar in size. This ensures they both fit together in the cleft cut. For larger grafts, you may need a tool to pry the cleft open to insert the scions, but they should fit together smoothly in the end. The pressure from the cleft aids in the healing process. For smaller grafts, you can create this pressure by wrapping the graft tightly.

The final step is to wrap the graft to prevent it from drying out and dying before it can heal. Graft healing is more effective in humid and dark conditions. For the persimmon graft, I covered all cut areas with white grafting tape. I then covered the grafting tape with a parafilm wrap to trap humidity and promote healing. Some grafters also wrap the scion wood with parafilm, but I prefer not to for many fruit species.

Common challenges in grafting include poor alignment of cambium layers, desiccation of grafts, and making clean cuts. Ensuring precise cuts and maintaining humidity can help overcome these issues. Additionally, using sharp tools and proper techniques can significantly improve the success rate of your grafts. For instance,



keeping your tools sharp ensures clean cuts, which are crucial for the graft to heal properly.

Aftercare is also important. Regularly check for any shoots from the rootstock and remove them promptly to prevent them from diverting resources from the grafted scion, ensuring the grafted scion remains dominant.

While cleft grafting is a common method, there are several other grafting techniques, such as whip and tongue grafting, bark grafting, and bud grafting. Each method has its own advantages and is suited to different types of plants and

situations. Exploring these techniques can provide more options for successful grafting.

Grafting is a rewarding technique that can enhance your fruit tree cultivation. With practice and patience, you can master this skill and enjoy the benefits of grafted trees in your garden. If you would like to learn more about grafting, please feel free to reach out to me and check out some of the other resources I have created on the topic on the LSU AgCenter's website, LSUAgCenter.com.

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f @CenlaFocus – FEBRUARY 2025 PAGE 15

Central Louisiana Orchid Society Presents a “Carnival of Orchids”



The Central Louisiana Orchid Society will be hosting their Spring Orchid Show and sale on Friday, February 28th and Saturday, March 1st at Kees Park in Pineville. The theme of the show this year is “Carnival of Orchids” as the event falls near Mardi Gras. The show is for orchid growers, orchid enthusiasts, and for anyone wanting to see a wide variety of orchids in bloom, as well as those who are interested in learning more about the culture of orchids and how orchids are judged for competition. The general public will be able to view exhibits and purchase orchids on Friday, February 28th from 2:00pm to 5:00pm and Saturday, March 1st from 8:00am to 3:30pm. The show is free and open to the public during these times. There will also be vendors selling orchids and orchid supplies.

The Central Louisiana Orchid Society has also been a participant in a conservation project to restore a native Louisiana orchid. A society project to restore the Kentucky lady slipper orchid (*Cypripedium kentuckiense*), one of the rarest and most spectacular orchids native to Louisiana, began with the curiosity of a high school student from Shreveport. It has evolved into a cooperative effort between the Kisatchie National Forest, Southwest Regional Orchid Growers Association, Southern Research Station, and the Central Louisiana Orchid Society; and yes, the high school student turned high school science teacher—Kevin Allen—is still intimately involved in the project. The Kentucky lady slipper orchid is a tall, stately perennial plant with the largest flowers of any known lady slipper. Grants allowed the society to purchase plantlets grown from the collected seed pod. A research study

is now underway to develop propagation protocols and compare effects of seedling age, fungal inoculation, and depth and season of planting on establishment success. Three planting trials are providing information that will help develop guidelines for restoring this beautiful orchid.

While there may be the misconception that orchids are hard to grow, the culture



of orchids is really basic once you become familiar with their requirements. We have members who grow inside their homes under lights and on windowsills, as well as in a greenhouse. With orchids becoming more and more readily available at our local grocery and home building supplies stores, take a



chance on this exotic flower. To learn more about the culture of orchids, the public is invited to attend the local growers’ monthly meeting held the 3rd Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in the St. James Episcopal Church Youth Activities Building on Albert Street in Alexandria. Here, you will meet local growers and their plants and learn about their culture. Door prizes and raffle plants are one perk of the meeting.

The Central Louisiana Orchid Society would like to invite Cenla to see our Orchid Show and sale on February 28th and March 1st and get ready to have your socks knocked off by the array of exotic blooms on display!



Please Join the Central Louisiana Orchid Society for the 2025 Orchid Show "A Carnival of Orchids"

Friday, February 28th 2:00pm-5:00pm
Saturday, March 1st 8:00am-4:00pm

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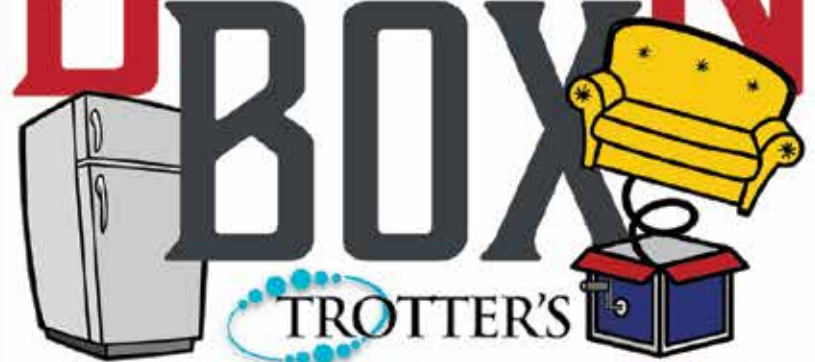
- Amazing Displays and Galleries of Orchids
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- Kids are Welcome! Orchid Treasure Hunt and Ribbons Awarded!

To learn more and learn how to grow these beautiful flowers, join the Orchid Society for a meeting. The Central Louisiana Orchid Society meets on the 3rd Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in the Youth Building at St. James Episcopal Church in Alexandria.

www.CentralLouisianaOrchidSociety.org



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Central Louisiana Master Gardener Association Plant Symposium

As spring approaches, gardeners and outdoor enthusiasts can look forward to an exciting opportunity to enhance their gardening skills and knowledge. The Central Louisiana Master Gardeners are proudly sponsoring a Plant Symposium on Saturday, March 8th at the Pineville Main Street Community Center, located at 708 Main Street in Pineville. The theme of this year's Plant Symposium is "Adding Color in Your Landscape". This event promises to be an engaging experience focused on the theme of incorporating vibrant colors into landscapes, making it an ideal gathering for anyone looking to rejuvenate their garden or landscape design.

The Plant Symposium will run from 9:00am to 2:00pm, giving attendees ample time to absorb the information shared by expert speakers and engage with local vendors. A ticket to this enriching experience costs \$35.00 per person, a sure investment for the wealth of knowledge and inspiration that participants will gain. Included is a light lunch for all participants.

One of the highlights of the Plant Symposium will be the lineup of three guest speakers, each bringing a unique perspective and expertise in gardening and landscape design. Attendees can expect not only to gain insights from these seasoned professionals but also to have the opportunity to ask questions and receive personalized advice.

In addition to the educational speeches, the symposium will feature local vendors who will showcase a variety of gardening products. This is an excellent opportunity for participants to purchase plants, soil amendments, garden tools, and other essentials to help them implement what they learn during the event.



Networking is a crucial aspect of gardening, and the symposium will provide a relaxed setting for garden enthusiasts to connect with one another. Sharing experiences,



challenges, and successes can lead to fruitful relationships and even collaborations in gardening projects.

As an added benefit, the Plant Symposium will host a raffle for a beautifully crafted cypress potter's bench, an ideal addition for any gardener looking to enhance their workspace. Participants can purchase raffle tickets at the entrance, and the lucky winner will be announced later in the day.

Moreover, there will be a silent auction featuring a range of gardening-related items. From rare plants to gardening tools, attendees will have the chance to bid on unique items while supporting a great cause. The proceeds from both the raffle and silent auction will contribute to the ongoing efforts of the Central Louisiana Master Gardeners, a volunteer organization dedicated to the promotion of gardening education.

To make the most out of your experience at the Plant Symposium, consider the following tips:

1. Bring a notebook. Take notes during the presentations for future reference.
2. Dress comfortably. Wear comfortable clothes and shoes, as you will be moving around the venue.
3. Come with questions. Prepare any specific gardening questions you may have to get the most valuable insights from the expert speakers.
4. Engage with vendors. Take the time to explore vendor booths and ask questions about their products.

The Master Gardener Plant Symposium promises to be an enriching experience for all garden enthusiasts. With expert speakers providing valuable knowledge, local vendors showcasing their products, and opportunities for networking and bidding in the auction, attendees are sure to leave inspired and equipped to add vibrant color to their landscapes. Don't miss this chance to enhance your gardening journey. Purchase your ticket today by calling (318) 359-5672, (318) 240-8231, or scanning the QR code on this page and join your fellow gardeners at the Pineville Community Center on Saturday, March 8th!



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The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) began selling hard collector's license cards last year. These optional collectible cards allow you to carry all of your active annual licenses on one long-lasting card that fits right in your wallet. These collector cards will feature new artwork each year from our very own outdoor enthusiasts.

LDWF is looking for amateur or professional artists or photographers who love the Louisiana outdoors to submit iconic Louisiana outdoor artwork and photographs to be featured on this year's hard license cards! We are looking for user-submitted, original artwork or photographs falling into the following categories Wildlife/Hunting, Fish/Fishing, and Scenic/Other to be featured. Photographs or artwork may be submitted in digital format.

To participate, simply follow the link below, enter your contact information, and upload your image(s) by Saturday, February 15th.

<https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/ldwf-durable-hard-license-artwork-contest>

Rules:

- Images must be taken in Louisiana;
- Please do not submit images with anyone's face;
- Image size cannot exceed 20MB;
- Images should be horizontal.

Winners will be notified by email, will have their artwork featured on the hard license cards, and will be featured on our website and social media channels throughout the year. The hard license cards will go on sale this year and will be available for an additional \$5.00 fee. The proceeds from the card sales help fund LDWF's mission to manage, conserve, and promote wise utilization of Louisiana's renewable fish



and wildlife resources and their supporting habitats.

LDWF will announce the winners and the date that these hard cards may be purchased on June 1st. LDWF will continue to accept paper licenses and digital licenses. To learn more about license and tagging requirements, visit <https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/>.

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Swing Into Oak Wing for a Great Cause

By Brady Noland



Oak Wing Golf Club is thrilled to announce that we have volunteered to host a special outing benefiting the Food Bank of Central Louisiana! This fantastic event will be organized and run entirely by the club, allowing us to share in the proceeds while ensuring that our resources remain focused on providing meals to those in need.

The event will kick off of Thursday, February 27th at 11:00am with a shotgun start. Your \$250 team registration includes lunch served after play and two complimentary beers per player. Additional beers can be purchased on the course for just \$2.00 each. Mulligan Packages will be sold separately for \$50.00 each with 100% of proceeds directly benefiting the food bank.

The mission of the Food Bank of Central Louisiana is to alleviate hunger in Central Louisiana. Through collaboration, we work to eliminate waste and channel valuable and needed food to our neighbors in need. More than 42,500 households receive assistance each year in our community because of the generous support of donors like you. For every \$1.00 donated, the Food Bank of Central Louisiana can provide five meals to our neighbors in need. The Food Bank also helps strengthen our youth through its Backpack Program, works to end hunger among seniors, and dispatches the Mobile Food Pantry to bring food to communities that lack access to food pantries or distribution sites.

We look forward to a wonderful day of golf and community support for a worthwhile cause. Your participation is invaluable; together we can make a real difference in the lives of many. Thank you for your continued support!

For more information on the Golf Tournament, scan the QR code on this page. For more information on the Food Bank of Central Louisiana, visit fbcenla.org.





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Do You Want to Be a Better Athlete?

By Nicolle Rivera, DC



Today's athletes are constantly seeking the most effective methods to optimize performance, minimize the risk of injury, and gain every possible competitive edge. Chiropractic care is the secret of all the professional athletes. Why choose Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center? We have excellent expertise in building up athletes' performance. Therefore, for every athlete, chiropractic care should be part of their routine.

Chiropractic care is not only associated with treating pain and injuries but with health and performance optimization.

Athletes who undergo routine chiropractic adjustments take a shorter time to recover

after training and events because chiropractic care optimizes the nervous system's working, thus enabling the body to heal better. Further, it has been scientifically proven that the alignment of the spine makes biomechanics efficient, and coordination, balance, and strength factors are crucial for elite athletes.

On the other hand, sports injuries are often due to overload, postural dysfunction, or musculoskeletal imbalance. Chiropractic care helps remove these causes to minimize the occurrence of strains, sprains, and overuse syndromes. Research conducted shows that chiropractic is a preventative measure that ensures that your body is always prepared for any physical task that is required in your sport.

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Endurance and flexibility are important for any athlete, and chiropractic adjustments play a role in enhancing both. Chiropractic treatment helps in optimizing athlete performance for the longest durations by enhancing joint mobilization and muscles.

Whether you run, swim, or lift weights, it is crucial to have the right range of motion, as it's going to affect the result.

Further, athletes who pay attention to the health of their spines earn themselves more years of their sports careers. Chiropractic care reduces the physical strain and cumulative stress on athletes' bodies, helping them stay in peak condition for longer. Lower recovery time and enhanced performance time result in more training time and less time out due to injury.

At Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center, we care about athletes and their success. Do not risk an injury or a sprain to find out the advantages of chiropractic treatment. Schedule your evaluation today and take the first step toward achieving your athletic goals.

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Love (and Viruses) Are In The Air!

By David Evans, PharmD, BCPS



With the winter months still in full swing and Valentine's Day fast approaching, you want to make sure you're healthy and protected from possible airborne illnesses. One of these airborne illnesses is the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). RSV is known to cause substantial lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD), hospitalizations, and even death in very young children and older adults. Adults with certain medical conditions, including chronic

obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease, cerebrovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, and chronic kidney disease, are at increased risk for RSV-associated hospitalization.



In 2023, the FDA approved two new vaccines for prevention of RSV-associated lower respiratory tract disease (LRTD) in adults aged at or over 60 years. Vaccination with a single dose of either vaccine demonstrated moderate to high efficacy in preventing symptomatic RSV-associated LRTD over two consecutive RSV seasons among adults aged at or over 60 years. Both vaccines were generally well-tolerated with an acceptable safety profile. RSV vaccination in older adults should be targeted to those who are at highest risk for severe RSV disease and therefore most likely to benefit from vaccination. For RSV vaccination, the decision to vaccinate a patient should be based on a discussion between the health care provider and the patient, which might be guided by the patient's risk for disease and their characteristics, values, and preferences; the provider's clinical discretion; and the characteristics of the vaccine.

The recommendation for shared clinical decision-making is intended to allow flexibility for providers and patients to consider individual risk for RSV disease, while considering patient preferences. Co-administration of RSV vaccines with other adult vaccines during the same visit is acceptable. As with all vaccines, RSV vaccination should be delayed for persons experiencing moderate or severe acute illness, with or without fever (as a precaution). Talk with your doctor to see if you are at risk of complications secondary to RSV and if the vaccine is appropriate for you.



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Let's Get Real About Childhood Vaccines

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) "Let's Get Real" campaign aims to cut through the noise of misinformation and give parents the balanced information they need about childhood vaccines. The campaign provides verifiable facts so parents can get the information they want to make informed vaccine decisions, and it shares stories from doctors and peers on why most of us rely on vaccines to protect our children. "Let's Get Real" also offers tools for health care professionals with pediatric patients.

Vaccines help protect children from diseases, like polio and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), which used to kill or disable many people. Hib is spread through droplets in the air, through coughs or sneezes, and can cause serious infections in different parts of the body, like the brains and lungs. Hib disease used to be more common in the U.S., but cases have dropped by more than 99% since 1987. Vaccines also help to prevent or lessen the severity of diseases such as whooping cough, which is especially deadly for newborns, and human papillomavirus which millions of Americans, including teens, get every year and can lead to cancer.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than nine out of 10 parents ensure their children are up-to-date on routine vaccinations when they enter kindergarten. Yet, the percentage of U.S. kindergartners with an exemption from at least one vaccine increased in the 2023-2024 school year to 3.3%, the highest percentage ever reported. In the 2019-2020 school year, only three states reported vaccination rates below 90%. That sharply increased to 14 states in the 2023-2024 school year.

If parents stop vaccinating their children, preventable diseases typically not seen in the U.S. can come back. Measles, for instance, is extremely infectious, and a potentially very serious illness. Before the measles vaccination program began in 1963, an estimated 3 to 4 million people got measles in the United States each year—about 48,000 of them were hospitalized and between 400 and 500 died. Those numbers dropped dramatically after widespread measles vaccination and prevention efforts. Despite the success of the measles vaccine, measles cases are increasing again because of declining vaccination rates. In 2024 alone, there have been 283 cases of measles in the U.S. reported to the CDC.

The "Let's Get Real" website offers a robust library of shareable content, such as infographics and videos, for parents and other vaccine champions to use to spread facts about vaccines and show other parents that they believe vaccines are important. Visit letsgetreal.hhs.gov to find credible, engaging, and easy-to-understand, information about vaccine safety, the science behind vaccines, and the recommended childhood immunization schedule.

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Vision Is More Than 20/20

By Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.



DR. PHILLIP L. CARNEY, JR.

Most of us think of vision as simply being able to read an eye chart at a certain distance and whether we need glasses to see the chart or not. There is, however, much more to vision. Depth perception, eye teaming, binocularity, and focusing systems of the eyes all play an important part in not just how well we see, but how efficiently we see. Depth perception involves using the eyes together, binocularity, to judge distances and relative space. Since the eyes are apart from each other, they each see things from a slightly different angle. This small separation puts our world in 3D, and allows us to judge distance and object separation. This is very important in playing sports and activities where judging distance is important.

Eye teaming involves moving the eyes together as a team. The eye muscles should move the eyes together without one eye drifting out of sync. When the eyes work together, it prevents double vision or eye suppression. Focusing of the eyes is important to keep objects in focus at any distance. Vision is a complex process that involves much more than simply reading 20/20. A comprehensive eye examination tests and measures all aspects of the visual system.



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Launching in conjunction with the 75th Anniversary, the CHRISTUS Cabrini Legacy Society offers exclusive access to hospital events and volunteer opportunities as well as an invitation to the Legacy Luncheon in December, where members will have the opportunity to vote on how cumulative membership funds are utilized to elevate local healthcare each year. For pricing and more information, please visit CHRISTUScabrinifoundation.org/legacysociety.



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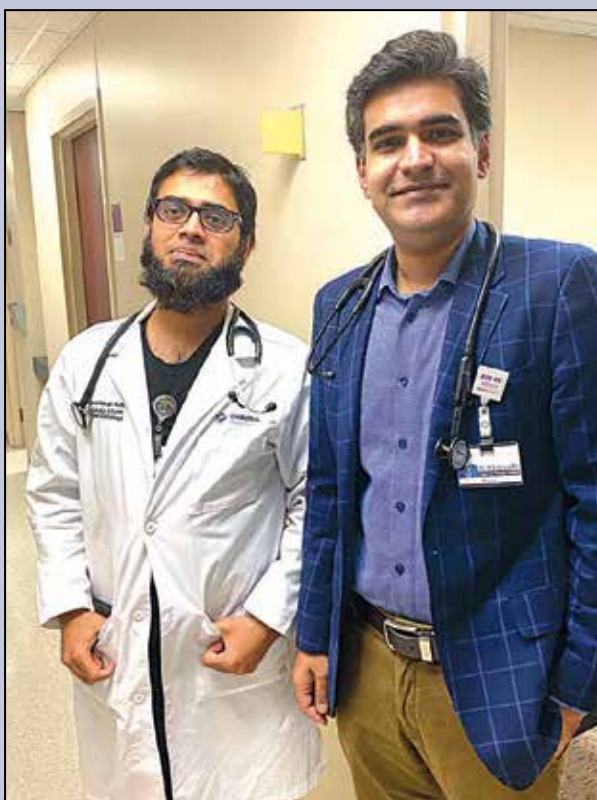
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 **CHRISTUS CABRINI**
Foundation

The CHRISTUS Heart & Vascular Institute

Last summer, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Health System expanded access to cardiology services in Central Louisiana with the creation of the CHRISTUS Heart & Vascular Institute. Freedman Memorial Cardiology and Alexandria Cardiology Clinic joined CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini in a move that allows for more advanced comprehensive heart care services in Central Louisiana.

“CHRISTUS Heart & Vascular Institute will enhance our clinical cardiovascular services and heart disease management in central Louisiana,” said Monte Wilson, president and CEO of CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital. “We remain committed to providing essential health care services to our community, aligning with our mission to extend the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.”



The Heart & Vascular Institute provides a highly specialized team of cardiologists who treat heart disease and offer preventive steps to improve a patient’s heart health, in addition to care for conditions like cholesterol disorders, hypertension, cardiac angina, and arrhythmias.

An on-going area of care under the CHRISTUS Heart & Vascular Institute is the structural heart program. A structural heart program addresses conditions that affect the heart’s valves, walls, or chambers. A team of specialists develops individualized treatment plans, often utilizing minimally invasive

procedures, which lead to better outcomes, shorter hospital stays, and faster recoveries compared to open heart surgery. Structural heart disease can be congenital (present at birth) or develop with age. Types of structural heart disease include heart valve disease, cardiomyopathy, and congenital heart disease, which can lead to other health problems over time, if left untreated.

According to Shannon Saldana, structural heart program coordinator and cardiovascular service line supervisor at CHRISTUS St. Francis Cabrini, the Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) is one of the key procedures utilized to treat patients in the structural heart program. TAVR is ideal for those patients who are not candidates for traditional heart valve replacement procedures or prefer not to go through a big surgery like the traditional surgical valve replacement. “The TAVR procedure is less invasive and offers a shorter recovery time,” said Saldana. “It usually takes around one hour, and patients are typically allowed to return home the next day. I had a recent patient who stated he felt better immediately after his



procedure. He had better coloring and said he could breathe easier as soon as he woke up. For the majority of our patients, TAVR is life-changing.” Following the procedure, patients are evaluated at one month and then one year with the cardiac team. “The long-term outcomes from the procedure

have proven to be positive at our facility,” said Saldana.

Patients are also referred to cardiac rehab, which is a 36-session protocol, three days a week that includes monitored exercise therapy and diet and prescription education. “Cardiac rehabilitation increases patients’ well-being, increases quality of life, and enhances social interactions in a monitored environment,” Saldana added.

A new program that launches in 2025 through the Heart & Vascular Institute is the limb salvage program. Through this program, a multidisciplinary team of medical professionals will work together to treat diseased limbs and prevent amputation. The goal is to preserve the limb’s mobility and functionality, while also restoring blood supply, tissues, and muscles. Limb salvage programs can treat conditions such as diabetic foot ulcers and peripheral artery disease. “Diabetes is such a prominent condition in our greater community,” said Mitchell Gutierrez, cardiovascular service line executive. “The loss of a limb puts a strain on not just the individual, but their families. Having the care available through this new program will allow patients to continue living full lives.”

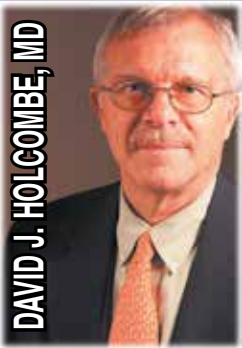


Generous funds raised by CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation will help support the equipment and programs utilized through the new Institute. “This transformative initiative will bring advanced care, hope, and healing to our community. This vision can only become a reality with the ongoing generosity and support of individuals in our community,” said Ashley Walker, executive director of philanthropy for CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation.

In honor of CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Health System’s 75th anniversary, the CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation is raising \$75,000 in 75 days for 75 years of service to the Cenla community. We are asking those impacted by the Sisters of Charity and CHRISTUS St. Frances to consider giving \$1.00 a day for 75 days to support the lifesaving care at our hospital. To contribute to our ministry and make an impact today that will ripple for the next 75 years, visit our website at christuscabrinifoundation.org.

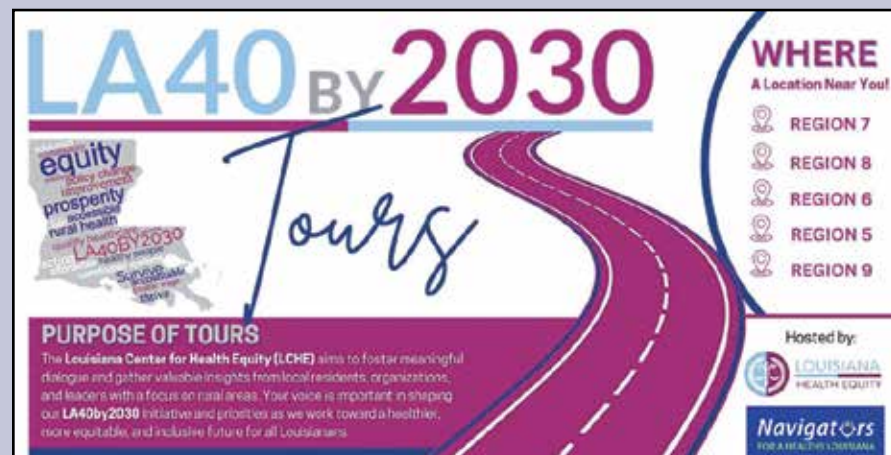
La40by2030 Tour Coming to Vidalia and Alexandria

By David J. Holcombe, MD



The Louisiana Center for Health Equity (LCHE), under the direction of Mrs. Alma Stewart Allen, is partnering with the Navigators for a Health Louisiana Program and the Louisiana Campaign for Tobacco Free Living to organize a series of regional meetings throughout Louisiana. La40by2030 is an initiative whose goal is to improve Louisiana's health outcomes from 50th to 40th by 2030. Such a goal represents a bold attempt to focus on improvement in Louisiana's dismal health outcomes, which have remained at the bottom of state outcomes for the last 35 years. Region 6 (Central Louisiana) is the next stop in the La40by2030 tour.

In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the La40by2030 Tour wants to engage community members and leaders in a conversation to assess community assets and needs, and to advocate for programs and policies to achieve better and more equitable health outcomes. Louisiana has long been plagued with a myriad of issues including high infant mortality, high maternal mortality, high cancer death rates, elevated cardiovascular disease-related issues, high STDs, significant obesity rates and resulting diabetes. All have significant racial disparities, mostly related to social determinants of health, notably poverty and low education outcomes.




LCHE and the La40by2030 planning committee want to have candid conversations about moving forward by listening to and understanding the needs of community residents, and then promoting effective action on these needs. Input is solicited not only from community members, but also from governmental and non-governmental organizations, local and state officials, service and healthcare providers, community advocates, and champions and visionaries for a better Louisiana for all.

The LCHE is already working on consolidating data from multiple sources to have a better understanding of the problems and where they are concentrated. Their goal is data sharing for all organizations and individuals to promote more effective and targeted actions.

Following the tour, a report will be developed that will be shared not only with the public at large, but also with researchers, health and business professionals, and policymakers. Data drives action and it is hoped that it will contribute to improving the overall health and well-being of all Louisianans by eliminating healthcare disparities related to structural, institutional, and social disadvantage.

Two meetings will be held in Region 6 on Tuesday, February 25th — one in Vidalia and one in Alexandria. The Vidalia meeting will take place at the Vidalia Convention Center, located at 112 Front Street in Vidalia, from 9:30am to 11:30am. The second meeting will take place at the Martin Luther King Branch of the Rapides Parish Library, located at 1115 Broadway Avenue in Alexandria, from 2:30pm to 4:30pm.

Everyone is invited to attend one or both of these important meetings to take the pulse of the community and get valuable feedback to achieve the ambitious goal of improving Louisiana health outcomes from 50th to 40th by the year 2030. Come share your information and your vision for a better Louisiana. For further information any questions, contact Alma C. Stewart Allen, LCHE President, at alma@lahelathequity.org or text/call (225) 772-7029.



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Louisiana Blue Offers Telehealth Services to Get Care Without Leaving Home

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana (Louisiana Blue) reminds members that they can use telehealth services to get care without leaving the comfort of home. Telehealth can be a good option to get treatment for non-emergency medical needs like cough, colds, pink eye, mild stomach viruses, bladder infections, rashes or fever when your regular healthcare provider's office is closed or you are unable

to get there. Telehealth providers can write or refill prescriptions to treat many conditions remotely, too.

Louisiana Blue members can have 24/7 online doctor visits or make behavioral health appointments with BlueCare, the insurer's telehealth platform. BlueCare works on any device with internet and a camera, like a smartphone, laptop, tablet or computer. BlueCare is available in all 50 states. Create your BlueCare account at www.BlueCareLA.com or with the BlueCare (one word) mobile app for Apple and Android devices.



In addition to BlueCare, members can ask their regular healthcare providers if they offer telehealth services.



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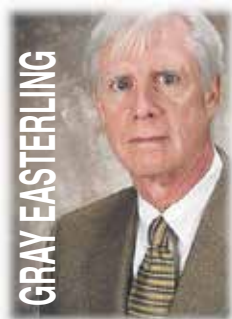
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Medical Information and Hackers

By Gray Easterling



What the heck does a hacker want my health information for? Who cares when and if I had measles when I was a kid or had Covid back in 2020? According to a December Wall Street Journal article, someone or some group of no-gooders break into providers' networks in search of a ransom to unlock the computer systems. But they also could be looking for patient data. These healthcare records contain personal information like addresses and credit card numbers. They also hold insurance policy numbers, medical conditions, prescription data, to name a few items.

This information helps crooks scam insurance companies, Medicare, and Medicaid. With this data, they can commit insurance fraud, identity, and other related wrongdoing in the future.

The theft of health records can create a long-term impact on victims because the information in those documents is harder to detect and more challenging to correct when misused. With personal identifiable information and healthcare records, it may be possible to file for insurance benefits and reimbursements from private insurers or government health agencies and have checks sent to a new address. Some of the other problems include increases in your insurance premiums based on claims made and paid that you never knew about. You may be denied coverage based on medical conditions you don't have. To add insult to injury, it is very difficult to correct the wrong information because of the way providers and insurers digitally "talk" to each other.



To prevent fraud, patients should take some of the same precautions with medical information that they would with any other sensitive online data, like using multifactor authentication to access medical records, and never clicking on suspicious links. Closely monitoring your medical bills is also important, looking for charges for services not received, or being told that benefit limits have been reached. Another part of the solution involves changes being made to the way patient records are stored. Apparently, many healthcare organizations use third-party partners, so records are not stored just at the hospital, but possibly with dozens of other service providers, resulting in hospitals having less control over their partners' security measures. So, you should not be surprised that more than 85% of healthcare thefts

occur with third parties and non-hospital providers. The hospitals and insurers are aware of the problems and are spending money and time to find a "better way" to protect patient records and hiring more IT people while working to implement other data loss prevention strategies. In the meantime, be vigilant, curious, and consistent in your review of healthcare expenses.

For that matter, let that advice carry over to your relationship with God. Be vigilant in your piety, action, and study, curious about God's work in your life and consistent in your worship. From Isaiah 45: "There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is no one besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other. By myself, I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." Go in peace to love and serve the Lord! On a lighter note, please remember February 14th. Not only is it the start of LSU baseball, it is also Valentine's Day. I will let you decide which is more important.

The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and are not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual. Please discuss your specific situation with your financial advisor. Financial Solutions Group is located at 128 Versailles Blvd, Alexandria, LA 71303. We can be reached at (318) 448-3201. Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor, Member FINRA/SIPC.

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We believe that our office building provides a fantastic work environment. As "cool" as the structure might be, it only supports the friendly and helpful team that you have become familiar with over the last four decades. We believe that providing financial advice is important, but no more important than helping guide our clients in life changing decisions. If you have questions regarding your future financial independence, life insurance or long term care options, please come by for a visit. There's no obligation, no pressure, and no charge.

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Offer Employee Benefits Without Offering Health Insurance

By Wesley Watkins



Health insurance is expensive; that is a fact. Another fact is that companies, no matter what the size, need good employees to be successful. Good employees gravitate to companies that offer something—extra perks—in addition to competitive pay. It is proven that good employees want to work in a company where they feel appreciated and valued for their work. Offering benefits such as health insurance is a highly recruited and highly contested benefit that can eat into 30+% of revenue for a business. Companies who employ less than 50 full time equivalents don't have to offer health insurance. So, for those companies, we think differently to

help meet the goals of recruiting and retention. Offering employee benefits such as dental, vision, life, disability, cancer, accident, and other insurance products can be a wonderful way to provide benefit your highly recruited employees need. We have clients who pay 100% of dental insurance (\$35.00 per employee, per month) or vision insurance (\$8.00 per employee, per month), or one of the lowest costing benefit, life insurance (\$4.00 per employee, per month), either in place of paying for health insurance or even in addition to offering health insurance. We actually make recommendations for employers to pay for these lower costing benefits while employees seek health insurance on an individual level. We have seen, on many occasions, where an employee can buy health insurance much cheaper than the

employer buying it for them.

Health insurance through a group or employer policy will average \$900 per employee, per month. The employer must pay half of this cost and typically, employers pay 75% of this premium, with some employers even paying 100%. Our approach is to build the best value for the employees at the lowest cost. There are ways, in addition to the previously mentioned, to deliver “perks” to your employees. But what if you did want/need to pay something for the employees’ health insurance without getting into group insurance? What if you didn’t have enough employees to form a group because most had other options such as military or spousal coverage? How can you provide health insurance benefits to employees without offering health insurance?

There is a way to offer tax-free funds to employees where they can use the money to pay for individual health insurance premiums and health care needs. This mechanism is called an Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement (ICHRA). The intent and environment needs to be correct and is specific for each company; however, there is a way to help employees pay for health coverage tax-free without offering a group health plan.

Quality benefits brokers are great advisors and can help you in many ways. If you need a quality benefits broker, or if you need to meet with an expert in health insurance and employee benefits, feel free to call me at (318) 445-9464.

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Introducing Brazzel Wealth Management

By Toby Brazzel



I have been in the financial services business since 1996 and have seen a lot of water go under the bridge. Most of that time I spent with a captive company and, as of November 15th of last year, I launched my own Financial Advisory Firm called Brazzel Wealth Management with my wife Kelli and my oldest son Ricky.

I was born here in Alexandria at Cabrini hospital and grew up on Cane River near Melrose, on a cattle ranch. I attended Northwestern State University and graduated in 1991 with a degree in Business Finance and Aviation Science. I wanted to be an airline pilot, but fate had other plans for my life. In November

1996, I entered the fascinating world of financial services and began my career. In the meantime, just like most other people around me, I started a family, though our family took a route that is not normal. I ended up adopting five children. My oldest son, Ricky, was a foster child that we adopted. Kait was adopted from Vietnam, Nicholas was adopted from Guatemala, Kensli was adopted from China, and my youngest, Kami, was a private adoption here in Louisiana. My wife, Kelli, has three kids of her own named Collin, Dylan, and Austin. When we married almost six years ago, we then became a “party of 10, if you please!” We live here in Alexandria and our kids have attended school here. You will see us often in Kroger and at ASH, LSUA, and Johnny Downs.



If you are looking to do business with a locally owned business financial advisory practice, we would love to help you meet and exceed your financial goals in order to have a quality of life you have worked so hard to achieve. We are located at 1705 Simmons Street in Alexandria and you can reach me anytime at (318) 426-0168. Kelli, Ricky and I look forward to hearing from you soon.



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Widow's Benefits

By Annie Lemoine Newton



ANNIE NEWTON

A person who unfortunately becomes the widow or widower of a person who was insured (paid in enough to Social Security) could be eligible to draw a benefit off of their deceased spouse's record. If the living spouse is 60 or over and you were married to the deceased for ten years or more, you may draw a survivor's benefit. Even if you remarry after age 60, you can still draw the survivor's benefit.

The living spouse who is over 50 and disabled may draw off of their deceased spouse's record once they are found disabled by Social Security Administration. However, if you remarry before age 60, you cannot receive disability benefits off of your deceased spouse's record.

If you have questions or need help filing for Social Security Disability on your own record or a deceased spouse, please contact our office. The law firm of former Social Security Judge Peter J. Lemoine has offices in Cottonport, Alexandria, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette. Call (318) 876-3174 to set up a consultation or visit our website at www.lemoinelawfirm.com.



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Author Dr. James A. White, III

By Michael Wynne

I have interviewed almost 150 authors over the last two decades. I have truly enjoyed every interview and learning about every book that these authors have written. I have read many great books by these Cenla authors as we have an overflowing bounty of great authors here. But once in a great while I meet an author who has written not only superb books, but is also simply a monumental person of importance themselves. The beloved author that I will speak of today is a local doctor, connoisseur, bon vivant, mentor, expert (on so many things), and a storyteller as well is none other than Dr. James A. White, III. He might be “the most interesting man in all of Cenla.” This column cannot do him justice as you have to read his books to better know him, or perhaps, spend an afternoon with him listening to him spin yarns on his life.

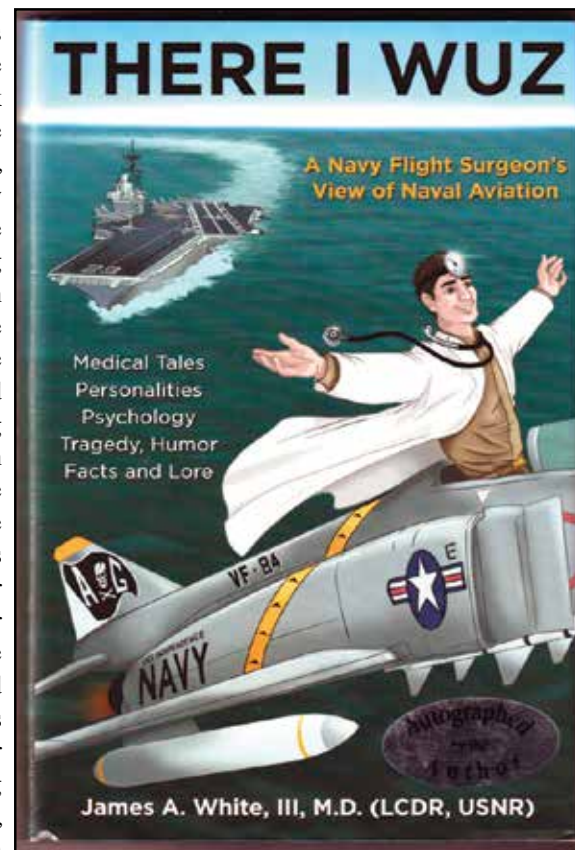
James is a third generation medical doctor in Alexandria. I had personally admired his late mother, May Thornton



White (1912-1990), 4 1/2 decades ago for having written one of the most important Rapides parish histories ever written, “Early Medicine in Rapides Parish, Louisiana.”

A 1957 Bolton graduate with medical degrees from Tulane, James volunteered to join the Navy during the height of the Vietnam War after he graduated medical school. His thoroughly engaging and comprehensive autobiography, “There I Wuz; A Navy Flight Surgeon’s View of Naval Aviation,” now ranks (in my opinion) among the best written military biographies of the 20th and 21st centuries. There are many very good local medical autobiographies, like those written by Dr. Jonathan D. Hunter and Dr. Charles S. Prosser, but James’ book is the most thorough, informative, and entertaining book of its kind that I have ever read. I can’t begin to discuss his military medical career in this column; that is what the book is for. But I warn you, do not start to read the book unless you schedule for yourself enough time; although the book appears long (while reading it, it reads fast), the trouble is that you won’t want to put it down once you start.

James is so much more. His life in the commercial wine business (it is true!) is a book unto itself. This humble Otolaryngologist (Ear, Nose, Throat and Allergy Specialist) physician, whose office is an unassuming former house at 2920 Jackson Street, at one time ran one of the state’s largest wine businesses. He has traveled the wine world, gaining extensive experience, even serving as a judge in the Los Angeles County Wine Fair Competition. James was, at one time, a major importer/exporter with four retail stores, a wholesale distributor business, and an import company. This helped lead him to author one of his many fascinating books, this one entitled, “Improv Chefs Club; From Launch To Limbo.”



In everything that James sets his sights on, he excels. A proud and longtime member of the Kiwanis Club, James has served as a past governor of a 3-state Kiwanis district. In the medical field, James was also a noted past president of the Louisiana State Medical Society.

With a still incredibly busy medical practice at his youthful age in his 8th decade, James continues to help local people, a devotion that he has had for his entire life. And James still continues to write, with one of his granddaughters designing the covers for his books.

James’ two daughters and three grandchildren must be very proud of him for having a person of his caliber continuing to serve our community. James’ books are available at Amazon and from his office.

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Inadequacies of Vocational Evidence Presented at Social Security Hearings”,
“An Unsolved Mess: Analyzing the Social Security Administration’s
Methodology for Identifying Occupations and Job Numbers”.

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The Gesualdo Six Brings Darkness Into Light

By Roy Rosenthal



The Saint James Episcopal Church Concert Series is pleased to present the Louisiana debut of the award-winning vocal consort, The Gesualdo Six (G6) on Tuesday, February 18th at 7:00pm. These six very talented London-based vocalists will sing a program of compositions from across centuries evoking the darkness of night passing into the light of day. Formed in 2014, the group derived its name by singing a concert of works of Carlo Gesualdo, a very

colorful Renaissance Italian composer. An Italian nobleman, Gesualdo's musical output is notable for his shocking use of chromaticism in his madrigals and sacred works. In his personal life, Gesualdo is also known for having caught his wife and her lover in a very compromising state, subsequently killing both of them.

The group's artistic director and bass, Owain Park, is a graduate of Cambridge University. In addition to his duties with The Gesualdo Six, Park is Principal Guest Conductor of the famed BBC Singers, and he is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. Park is also a composer, and the group will perform one of his compositions in the concert. Rounding out the group are countertenors Guy James and Alasdair Austin, tenors Joseph Wicks and Josh Cooter, and baritone Michael Craddock.

The Gesualdo Six records for the prestigious British record label, Hyperion Records.

To date, there are nine recordings produced by Hyperion and G6 will have the compact disks available for purchase and autographs at the reception in the St. James parish hall immediately following the concert.

Being the recipient of a generous grant from The McCormick-Smith Fund, Inc., the Concert Series presents The Gesualdo Six with complimentary admission and is open to the public. St. James Episcopal Church is located at 1620 Murray Street at Bolton Avenue in Alexandria. For more information or questions, please call the Church office at (318) 445-9845.



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Red River Chorale Presents “Novum Sonos”

By Leigh Schneider

The Red River Chorale continues its 18th concert season on Thursday, March 13th, with their winter concert entitled, “Novum Sonos,” at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Alexandria at 7:30pm. This concert, aptly named, will feature choral pieces all written in the 21st century and will embody the “new sounds” of the new century and millennia.

A beautiful, and diverse array of music make up this concert. From the haunting “Hope Waits” by Karen Marroli, written very recently during the COVID-19 pandemic to inspire society to continue to choose hope despite dark and dire times, to the new vision of “Ubi Caritas” by Michael John Trotta that inspires one to greater charity and kindness towards others. The listener is sure to be inspired by these uplifting themes! The choir then takes the audience on a lighter, slightly more nonsensical turn with “Johnny Said, No!” by Vijay Singh and “Zinga!” by Steven Samtz. The former will



be performed by the treble, female voices bringing love-sick, flirtatious girls to life, all infatuated with one boy, while the latter has only nonsense words, but challenges the choir to use dynamics, tempo, and phrasing to personify people discussing, gossiping, sharing secrets, and arguing! The RRC is also excited to welcome Preston Hernandez to be featured in James Whitbourn’s “Son of God Mass,” which is written for choir, organ, and saxophone. Mr. Hernandez is a saxophone major at LSU and upper-level winner of the 2023 RSO Concerto Competition.

Please join us as we continue to celebrate the Red River Chorale’s 18th season through this wonderful display of music. Concert tickets are \$20.00 for adults and \$5.00 for students. For more information and to purchase tickets, go to www.redriverchorale.com, or purchase tickets at the door.



Welcome!

Randy Deaton

BOM Bank would like to welcome Randy Deaton to our BOM team! Randy graduated in 1993 from Louisiana State University with a Bachelor of Science in Quantitative Business Analysis-Computer Science. Randy retired as a Special Agent with Federal Bureau of Investigation in July 2024 with over 25 years of service. Randy’s duty assignments included the FBI’s New York Office, New Orleans Field office, and FBI Headquarters in Washington D.C. Randy enjoys the outdoors, woodworking, traveling, and spending time with his wife and three children.

Welcome, Randy!



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Entertainment Focus

Art

Ongoing-March 2: Cane River Creole National Historical Park Student Art Exhibition, Texas & Pacific Railway Depot (1927 Remembrance Way, Natchitoches). The exhibit features several different mediums of varying compositions completed by 866 student artists representing 19 schools from across the United States depicting historical moments, activists, and movements that have shaped civil rights. Call: 318-352-0383 ext. 316.

February 8 & March 8: Second Saturday at the Museum, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria). Enjoy the Alexandria Museum of Art without admission charge on the second Saturday of the month. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

February 11: Creative Round Table, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 5:30pm-7:30pm. Are you an artist or creative in Central Louisiana? Are you looking for a place to come and talk to other creatives? Join us for the Creative Round Table! Being an artist can be isolating, but we can lift each other up! Do you want to learn about grants and artist calls? Talk about process? Maybe you want to learn how other artists market their art or ship their art? Well, come on! Let's talk about it! No need to register. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

February 14: Valentine's Sculpture Painting With Ronald Ray Veal, Johnson Branch Library (1610 Veterans Drive, Lecompte), 3:00pm-4:00pm. Come make a Valentine's Sculpture

Painting with our Artist of the Month, Ronald Ray Veal. Ronald is an artist of many different formats including hand drawing, painting, computer graphics, and clay sculpting. Seating is limited. Registration is required. See our RPL digital calendar by scanning the QR code in our ad to register. Cost: Free. Call: 318-776-5153. www.rpl.org

February 15: Mary Vinson Exhibition Opening Reception, Kent Plantation House (3601 Bayou Rapides Road, Alexandria), 1:00pm. Kent House Plantation will be hosting a major exhibit of "Clementine Hunter"- style paintings by the noted local African-American painter, Mary Vinson, during Black History month. Mrs. Vinson will briefly speak then on her work with selected pieces available for sale. Light refreshments will be served. The exhibit will remain open for display through February 28th. Cost: Free. Call: 318-487-5998. kenthouse.org

February 19: African Mask Painting With Ronald Ray Veal, Johnson Branch Library (1610 Veterans Drive, Lecompte), 3:00pm-4:00pm. Come make an African Mask painting with our Artist of the Month, Ronald Ray Veal. Ronald is an artist of many different formats including hand drawing, painting, computer graphics, and clay sculpting. Seating is limited. Registration is required. See our RPL digital calendar by scanning the QR code in our ad to register. Cost: Free. Call: 318-776-5153. www.rpl.org

Music

February 14: Kenny Lattimore, Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom

(711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 8:00pm. Known for his smooth, soulful voice and hits like "For You," "Love Will Find a Way" and "Never Too Busy," romance will certainly be in the air when Grammy-nominated R&B singer/songwriter Kenny Lattimore hits the Mări Showroom stage on Valentine's Day. Cost: \$50.00+. paragoncasinoresort.com

February 18: The Gesualdo Six "Darkness Into Light", St. James Episcopal Church (1620 Murray Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. These six very talented London-based vocalists will sing a program of compositions from across centuries evoking the darkness of night passing into the light of day. Sponsored by the McCormick-Smith Fund, Inc. Cost: Free. 318-445-9845.

March 1: Wayne Touns, Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 8:00pm. Don't miss an electrifying performance as "The Cajun Springsteen," Grammy Award-winning artist Wayne Touns performs live on the Mări Showroom stage! Cost: \$20.00+. paragoncasinoresort.com

March 13: Novum Sonos, Emmanuel Baptist Church (430 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 7:30pm. The Red River Chorale continues its 18th concert season on Thursday, March 13th, with their winter concert entitled, "Novum Sonos," featuring choral pieces all written in the 21st century and will embody the "new sounds" of the new century and millennia. Cost: \$20.00 adults; \$5.00 students. redriverchorale.com

Theatre

Ongoing-February 9: Jeeves Takes a Bow, Hearn Stage at Kress Theatre (1102 Third Street, Alexandria). City Park Players presents a lovable oaf, Bertie Wooster, who inflicts his charming ineptitude on America when he adventures across the pond armed only with his handsome fortune, talent for trouble, and his remarkable manservant, Jeeves. Can the illustrious Jeeves be up to the task? Directed by Jill Dupont. Showtimes are Thursday through Saturday at 7:30pm and Sundays at 2:30pm. Cost: \$15.00 Adults; \$12.00 Seniors; \$7.00 Students; \$5.00 Thursdays. cpptheatre.com

February 10, 17, 24 & March 3: Military Monday at the Movies, Grand Theatre Alexandria (2039 North Mall Drive, Alexandria). All military personnel and first responders can enjoy the ultimate movie experience at Santikos Entertainment for just \$5.00. Along with \$5.00 movie tickets, they'll also have access to a \$5.00 large drink and a \$5.00 large popcorn, making their cinema experience even more enjoyable and unforgettable. Valid ID required. Cost: \$5.00.

February 10: The Aluminum Show, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. Get ready to be dazzled by The Aluminum Show, a groundbreaking performance combining cutting edge technology, electrifying dance, and mind-blowing visual effects and puppetry, creating an experience like no other. Watch as aluminum tubes and foil come to life, transforming the stage into a futuristic world of adventure. This is not just a family show but an adventure, enchanting audiences globally for over a decade. Enter FAMILY2X2 in the coupon section before checkout for 15% off! Cost: \$10.00-\$25.00. Call: 318-484-4474. louisiana-arts.org

February 13-16: PHS Theatre Presents Beetlejuice, Jr., Pineville High School (1511 Line Street, Pineville). It's our show now, kid. The ghost-with-the-most comes to the stage in Beetlejuice Jr., the frightfully funny musical based on the beloved motion picture turned Broadway phenomenon. Lydia Deetz is a strange and unusual teenager, still grieving the loss of her mother and obsessed with the whole "being dead thing." Lucky for Lydia, she and her father move to a new house haunted by a recently deceased couple and Beetlejuice, a delightful demon with a real zest for life. When Lydia calls on Beetlejuice to scare away anyone with a pulse, this double-crossing specter shows his true stripes, unleashing a (Nether)world of pandemonium. Performances begin Thursday through Saturday at 7:00pm; Saturday and Sunday matinees begin at 2:00pm. Cost: \$12.00-\$17.25.

February 14: "This World Is Not My Own" Screening, Kress Theatre (1102 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. Join the Arts Council for an Independent



Scan for a full
listing of events at



Entertainment Focus

Film this Valentine's Day! Chewing-gum sculptures, a wealthy gallerist, a firebrand wrestler, a notorious murder case and the segregated south – it's all part of Nellie Mae Rowe's boundless universe. "This World is Not My Own" re-imagines this self-taught artist's world and her life spanning the 20th century, with Uzo Aduba as the animated version of Nellie Mae Rowe. Meet the filmmaker for a Q&A after the screening. Cost: \$10.00 Adults; Students Free. Call: 318-484-4474. louisiana-arts.org

February 15: Spectral Sisters Productions Summer Submission Second Reading, Rapides Foundation Building Second Floor Classroom (1101 4th Street, Alexandria), 10:00am-12:00pm. Come have a reading of your proposed submission for the Summer SSP 10-Minute Play Festival. Receive valuable feedback from other playwrights, actors and directors. Bring as many copies as needed for each character (and one for yourself). Please make sure they follow play format. Remember: Ten minutes in length (about 1,800 words), no more than five characters, adhering to the theme "What Had Happened Was..." Light refreshments provided. One submission per author. Free. spectralsisters.com

February 24: A Taste of Ireland, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:30pm. Laugh, cry and jig into the night with a production that is Celtic, for this generation with A Taste of Ireland—The Irish Music and Dance Sensation. Performed by former World Irish dance champions, and featuring dancers from Lord of the Dance and Riverdance, 'A Taste of Ireland' transports the audience through the story of Ireland's tumultuous history delivered with a pint of Irish wit. Cost: \$43.00-\$65.00. louisiana-arts.org

March 1: Broadway Daze & Knights Cabaret, Hotel Bentley Claiborne Room (200 Desoto Street, Alexandria), 5:30pm. Enjoy a delicious Louisiana themed dinner by the Bentley Room and exciting Broadway Entertainment by "Louisiana Broadway Magic" under the direction of Laine Berry Miller. The show features the talents of Andrew Abbott, Anjelica Barbry, Ava Walker, Camryn LaCaze, Hahva Stroderd, Haley Dauzat, Lyla Knoll, Samantha Lyles, Savanna Johnson, & Laine! Seating is

limited; please pre-register by February 25th. Sponsored by Walker Automotive. Cost: \$60.00. Call: 318-451-3915. lbmproductions.net

March 7: Collage Dance Collective, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:30pm. Join the Arts Council of Central Louisiana as we present Collage Dance Collective! Collage Dance, recently named a "Southern Cultural Treasure" by South Arts and the Ford Foundation and listed among the 50 largest ballet companies in the nation, is one of the largest Black-led performing arts organizations in the South and one of just a few professional ballet companies in the world with a roster of BIPOC dancers. The professional company presents annual seasons in Memphis, plus national and international touring, performing a diverse range of classical and contemporary choreography. Cost: \$30.00 Adults; \$25.00 Arts Council Members/Seniors 65+/Military; \$10.00 Students (under 18). Call: 318-484-4474. louisiana-arts.org

Events

Ongoing-February: New Hope Al-Anon Group, Horseshoe Drive Methodist Church (1600 Horseshoe Drive, Alexandria), 7:00pm. The New Hope Al-Anon Group meets each Tuesday and Thursday evening. Al-Anon is a mutual support group for anyone having experienced a problem with someone else's drinking or addiction. You are free to ask questions or to talk about your situation or just listen. Every meeting is different. Each meeting has the autonomy to be run as its members choose, within guidelines designed to promote Al-Anon unity. Cost: Free.

February 8: Candied Yams and Cornbread, Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch Library (1115 Broadway Avenue, Alexandria), 12:00pm-1:00pm. Join master storytellers, Rosa Metoyer and Sylvia Davis for one of the favorite annual programs at RPL as we share stories in honor of Black History Month! Be ready and prepared to join our storytelling contest featuring young storytellers telling stories you prepare yourself! Cost: Free. Call: 318-445-3912. www.rpl.org

February 8, 15, 22: Enslaved Peoples Plantation Tours, Kent Plantation House (3601 Bayou Rapides Road, Alexandria). Noted Historian Michael Wynne conducts tours concentrating on the enslaved people who built, lived, and worked at Kent House rather than about the white families who lived there. Tours on the 8th and 22nd begin at 1:00pm; the tour on the 15th begins at 6:00pm. Additional tours are available for groups on certain dates. Call: 318-487-5998. kenthouse.org

February 8 & March 8: AMoA Knitting Circle, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 1:00pm-4:00pm. Anyone can come and knit in the galleries. Open to all ages. Just getting started? AMoA has limited materials to get you started. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

February 10: Professional Women's Network of Cenla (PWN), Brocato's (5515 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria), 12:00pm-1:00pm. Join PWN for networking and a delicious lunch on the second Monday of each month. No

reservations required. Lunch is available for purchase prior to the meeting. Cost: Free. Call: 318-880-3033.

February 11, 18, 25 & March 4: Alexandria Farmer's Market, First United Methodist Church (2727 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 3:00pm-6:00pm. The Alexandria Farmers Market is a weekly gathering that connects the community of Alexandria with the farmers, ranchers, and agricultural artisans of Central Louisiana. This connection strives to improve the physical, social, and economic well-being of the region by providing access to fresh, healthy, local food for residents, fostering community relationships, and serving as a business incubator for growers and producers. Cost: Free. Call: 318-441-3407.

February 12: Cenla Women's Prayer Connection Coffee, Calvary Baptist Church (5011 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 10:00am. Joanna Taylor will serve as hostess for February. No reservations required; bring a friend. Cost: Free. Call: 318-664-1192.

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Entertainment Focus

February 12: Child Safety Seat Check, Rapides Regional Medical Center Main Entrance (211 4th Street, Alexandria), 2:00pm-5:00pm. A trained child passenger safety educator will take a look at your car seats, make sure they are not under recall, make sure the seat is installed properly and show you how to install the car seat. The car seat check process takes between 15-25 minutes, depending on how many car seats are in the vehicle. The seat checks normally are held the second Wednesday of each month. Cost: Free.

February 13-14, 17-18, 26-27: Save Cenla ASIST Training, 7:00am-4:30pm. Suicide and mental health issues are a growing concern, especially in these trying times. Suicide is preventable. Anyone can make a difference. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is an evidence-based, two-day workshop in suicide prevention skills helps participants learn and practice a life-saving intervention model that is widely used by professionals and the general public. February 13-14: LC

Granberry Conference Center (1140 College Drive, Pineville); February 17-18: LSU AgCenter (8592 LA Highway 1, Mansura); February 26-27: First Baptist Church (2725 East Oak Street, Jena). Open to ages 16+. Mental health professionals can receive 12 CEUs after taking this workshop for \$60.00 through livingworks.net (a \$300 value). Cost: Free. Call: 337-519-1888. SaveCenla.com/ASIST.

February 13: Cavanaugh Lecture featuring Brooke Cassady, Rapides Parish Main Library (411 Washington Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm. Brooke Cassady, an Assistant Professor of Studio Art in Ceramics and 3D Design At Louisiana Tech, will kick off the Cavanaugh Lecture series for this spring discussing how a gap year and an unexpected encounter with clay facilitated an opportunity for self-awareness. Cassady uses ceramics, fiber, found objects, and metal to suggest the fragility of life and impermanence and to highlight the resilience and beauty of the natural world and human spirit. Cost:

Free. Call: 318-445-2411.

February 21: Pineville Night of Lights Mardi Gras Parade, Main Street Pineville, 7:00pm. Pineville's nighttime Mardi Gras Parade rolls down Main Street from the Red River to the entrance of Louisiana College. Cost: Free.

February 22: African American Culture & Heritage Center Honors, Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch Library (1115 Broadway Avenue, Alexandria), 11:00am-1:00pm. Coming into fruition a year ago, the African American Culture & Heritage Center was created to honor the past so that we could inspire the future. The theme for the 2nd Annual Induction into the African American Culture & Heritage Center is "Each Other's Harvest: Fostering Community and Applauding Achievement". Join us as we celebrate the handiwork and contributions of individuals whose harvest continues to bear fruit for the community in which they were born, raised and have served so diligently. If you missed last year's event, you definitely don't want to miss this year! A time of culture excellence and immense pride flows from wall to wall as we celebrate and honor the fruits of labor with the latest unveiling Cost: Free. Call: 318-445-3912. www.rpl.org

February 22: Live Gator Feeding Show, Paragon Casino Resort Hotel Atrium (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 4:00pm. Join the crowd in the hotel lobby on the last Saturday of each month for a live alligator feeding show. Bring the children for photos with a baby gator after the show. You will also hear traditional songs and stories of south Louisiana's flora and fauna performed by Tunica-Biloxi tribal members Donna Pierite and family. Cost: Free.

February 25: La40by2030 Tour. La40by2030 is an initiative whose goal is to improve Louisiana's health outcomes from 50th to 40th by 2030. The tour will engage community members and leaders in a conversation to assess community assets and needs, and to advocate for programs and policies to achieve better and more equitable health outcomes. The Tour will stop at Vidalia Convention Center, located at 112 Front Street in Vidalia, from 9:30am to 11:30am; and the Martin Luther King Branch of the

Rapides Parish Library, located at 1115 Broadway Avenue in Alexandria, from 2:30pm to 4:30pm. Call: 225-772-7029.

February 28-March 1: A Carnival of Orchids, Kees Park (2450 Highway 28 East, Pinville). The Central Louisiana Orchid Society presents a Carnival of Orchids for orchid growers, orchid enthusiasts, and for anyone wanting to see a wide variety of orchids in bloom, as well as those who are interested in learning more about the culture of orchids and how orchids are judged for competition. The show will be open from 2:00pm to 5:00pm on Friday and from 8:00am to 3:30pm on Saturday. Cost: Free. centrallouisianaorchidsociety.org

February 28: Classic Cars & College Cheerleaders Parade, Downtown Alexandria, 5:00pm. The Classic Cars & College Cheerleaders Parade will kick off Alexandria's family-oriented Mardi Gras weekend. The Classic Cars & College Cheerleaders follows the same route as the Children's Parade in downtown Alexandria. It features classic cars paired with college cheerleaders from colleges, universities, and high schools in Louisiana. Route: Downtown Alexandria – Murray – Fifth Street – Jackson – Third Street to St. James Street. Cost: Free. alexmardigras.net

February 28: Taste of Mardi Gras 2025, Randolph Riverfront Center (707 2nd Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm-11:30pm. The Louisiana Restaurant Association Cenla proudly presents the "Mardi Gras Ball for All Y'all!" Experience the culinary prowess of over 30 LRA member restaurants, each offering a tantalizing "taste" from their menu. The evening will also feature live music by the Chee Weez! Cost: \$50.00 General Admission; \$25.00 Children (10 & under). LRA.org

March 1: Experimental Aircraft Association 1st Saturday Breakfast, Buhlow Lake Airport (200 Lake Buhlow Road, Pineville), 7:30am-10:00am. Come enjoy a hearty breakfast of eggs, sausage, pancakes, grits, potatoes, milk, orange juice, and more! Anyone interested in aviation and general cordial chatter with lakeside ambience is welcome and invited to come to enjoy breakfast with us! \$10.00 Donation.



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March 1: Central Louisiana Dutch Oven Cookers First Saturday Gathering, Indian Creek Recreation Area (100 Camp Ground Road, Woodworth), 9:00am-12:30pm. A delicious day with Dutch oven cooking enthusiasts. There is no charge for food, however, donations are accepted. Regular park admission applies. Call: 318-625-1762.

March 1: Krazy Larry's Annual Auto Show & Swap Meet, Ragley Recreation Center (6719 Highway 12, Ragley), 8:00am-2:00pm. The event is hosted to raise funds for "Maverick", a precious three-year-old who has been diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder; he faces developmental delays and other challenges. Maverick needs specialized treatments which are not covered by insurance. The proceeds will help Maverick's family pay for the necessary treatments. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place trophies will be awarded in 6 categories. Cost: By Donation. Call Larry DeFries: 337-884-6586.

March 1: AMGA Children's Mardi Gras Parade, Downtown Alexandria, 10:00am. Calling all children and children at heart, join AMGA and Children's Parade Grand Marshal Melissa Le, Miss Louisiana's Outstanding Teen 2024, as they parade through Downtown Alexandria: Murray – Fifth Street – Jackson – Third Street to St. James Street. Free. Jenna Bonner: 318-542-9084. alexmardigras.net

March 1: Alexandria Zoo's Mardi Gras Party, Alexandria Zoo (3016 Masonic Dr, Alexandria), 1:00pm-3:00pm. The animals are askin' for you at Alexandria Zoo! Laissez les bons temps rouler! We're rolling out the

purple, green, and gold for a family-friendly Mardi Gras Party. Indulge in complimentary king cake courtesy of Atwood's Bakery and get your groove on with live Zydeco and pop music by The LaCour Trio. Show off your Mardi Gras decorating skills by decking out your kid's stroller or wagon (no throws). Cost: Regular admission. Call: 318-441-6810. thealexandriazoo.com

March 1: Krewe of Dionysos Mardi Gras Parade, Natchitoches, 6:00pm. Join the Krewe of Dionysos as they parade through Natchitoches starting on South Drive to Keyser, crossing Cane River Lake to University Parkway, 2nd Street, Texas Street and ending on Front Street. Cost: Free. kreweofdionysos.com

March 2: AMGA Krewes Parade, Mid-City Alexandria, 2:00pm. Grand Marshal and Alexandria native LSY Gymnast Annie Beard will lead the Krewes of the Alexandria Mardi Gras Association and local marching bands through the streets of Alexandria, starting on Texas Avenue - Masonic - Memorial Drive - North Boulevard and ending at Sam's Club. Cost: Free. alexmardigras.net

March 8: Central Louisiana Master Gardener Association Plant Symposium, Pineville Main Street Community Center (708 Main Street, Pineville), 9:00am-2:00pm. The theme of this year's Plant Symposium is "Adding Color in Your Landscape". This event promises to be an engaging experience focused on the theme of incorporating vibrant colors into landscapes, making it an ideal gathering for anyone looking to rejuvenate their garden or landscape design. Light lunch is included. Cost: \$35.00. 318-359-5672 or 318-240-8231.

Sports

Ongoing-February 28: Burn It Off Boot Camp, Beyond Fitness at the Courtyard (5615H Jackson St, Alexandria), 4:00pm-4:45pm. Push yourself and see results! Kick off the New Year with a new mindset to crush your goals! It's time to feel and look your best! Classes will meet Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Pre-register by phone. Cost: \$135. Call: 318-880-8759.

February 11, 18, 25 & March 4: Yoga in the Gallery, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 5:45pm. Chill out every Tuesday with yoga classes taught by Learn with Laci. Registration is not required. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

February 22: Fly Fishing 101, LDWF Booker-Fowler Hatchery (10 Joan Stokes Road, Forest Hill), 8:30am-12:30pm. The Kisatchie Fly Fishers will once again


present their "Fly Fishing 101" clinic covering topics like: equipment, casting, knots and leaders. Refreshments and handouts are provided. Pre-registration required. Cost: Free. Call Mike Carlin: 337-531-2275. kisatchiefly.org

February 27: Oak Wing Golf Club Benefit Tournament, Oak Wing Golf Club (2345 Vandenburg Drive, Alexandria), 11:00am. Oak Wing is thrilled to host a special outing benefiting the Cenla Food Bank! This fantastic event will be organized and run entirely by the club, allowing us to share in the proceeds while ensuring that our resources remain focused on providing meals to those in need. Registration includes lunch served after play and two complimentary beers per player. Additional beers can be purchased on the course for just \$2.00 each. Cost: \$250 per Team; \$50.00 Mulligans. oakwinggolf.com

**All events subject to change.*



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(PAID FOR BY THOMAS DAVID FOR CLERK)

Mardi Gras Beignets and Party Cake

By Wilbert Carmouche

As we are in the throes of Mardi Gras Season, I have put a twist to two favorites that are easily made and great to take to any MG Party you are invited to celebrate! Both recipes are from the “La Cuisine des Avoyelles” cookbook, a collection of Avoyelles Parish Recipes by La Commission des Avoyelles!

Mardi Gras Beignets

2 Cups Flour
1 Cup Milk
1 Egg
1 Tablespoon Sugar
1 Teaspoon Baking Powder
Pinch of Salt

Sift dry ingredients into bowl. Add milk and egg and mix well. Drop by spoonful into deep fat heated to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Fry until golden. Drain on paper towel. Serve with syrup and butter.

While beignets are hot, dust with colored powdered sugar in the traditional Mardi Gras colors, purple, green, and gold (see steps below)!

Mardi Gras Powdered Sugar

3 Cups Powdered Sugar, Divided
Purple Food Coloring
Green Food Coloring
Yellow Food Coloring

Sift 1 cup powdered sugar onto a large sheet of parchment or wax paper. Add 30 drops of your selected food coloring to the powdered sugar. Pick up some powdered sugar and rub both hands together in order to rub the color into the powdered sugar. Continue to rub until you no longer see streaks or blobs of coloring on the powdered sugar and the sugar is nicely colored. If needed, add more drops of coloring until you reach the



desired shade. Sift the colored powdered sugar onto a piece of parchment paper and allow it to dry. Repeat with each color. Once your colored sugars have dried, pour each color into a separate airtight container.

Mardi Gras Party Cake

2/3 Cup Butterscotch Morsels
2 1/4 Cup Sifted Flour
1 Teaspoon Soda
1 Cup Sugar
1/2 Cup Butter
2 Eggs
1/4 Cup Water
1 Teaspoon Salt
1/2 Teaspoon Baking Powder
1/4 Cup Firmly Packed Brown Sugar
1 Cup Buttermilk

Melt morsels in hot water; cool. Cram butter, add sugar gradually, and continue

creaming until light and fluffy. Blend in eggs; beat well after each. Add melted and cooled morsels; mix well. Add dry ingredients, sifted together, alternately

with buttermilk. Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit in three greased and floured cake pans, 8 or 9 inches, for about 20 to 25 minutes. Test for doneness with toothpick. Cool 10 minutes in pans on rack before removing from pans. When layers are completely cooled, spread butterscotch filling between layers and top.

Add drops of food coloring—purple, green, and yellow—to individual layers and sprinkle colored sugar on top layer after assembly! And if you have a favorite twist, please share with me at wcarmouche@krocket.net. Happy Mardi Gras Season mais amis!

Avoyelles Parish cookbooks are available for sale in the gift shop located at 8592 Highway 1, Suite 3 in Mansura. These recipes were selected from “La Cuisine des Avoyelles” cookbook, a collection of Avoyelles Parish Recipes by La Commission des Avoyelles! Cost is \$15.00 per book, plus \$5.00 for postage and handling, if mailed. Call (800) 833-4195 for details, or email us at tourism@krocket.net.



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Nourish Your Heart: Smart Snacking for Better Health

By Jennifer Duhon, MS, RDN, LDN



JENNIFER DUHON, MS, RDN, LDN

February is National Snack Month, a time to celebrate the joy of snacking! Eating healthy snacks can be an important part of a balanced diet. Benefits of healthy snacks include added energy, appetite control, mood, boosted nutrition, and even weight management. Whether you're a fan of sweet treats or savory bites, this month is all about enjoying your favorite snacks while also making heart-healthy choices. Let's dive into some delicious and nutritious snack ideas and learn how to keep our hearts happy and healthy.

Maintaining a heart-healthy diet is one of the most effective ways to reduce your risk of heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States. Here are some key points to consider when planning your diet.

Fruits and vegetables are packed with essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support heart health. They help reduce inflammation and lower blood pressure. Aim to fill half your plate with a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables at each meal. Leafy

greens like spinach and kale are particularly beneficial due to their high nitrate content, which helps relax blood vessels

Whole grains such as oats, brown rice, and whole-wheat bread are excellent sources of fiber, which can help lower cholesterol levels and improve heart health. Choose whole grains over refined grains to get the most nutritional benefit

Not all fats are bad! Unsaturated fats, found in foods like avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil, can help reduce bad cholesterol levels and lower your risk of heart disease.

Avoid trans fats and limit saturated fats, which are found in processed foods and red meat

Opt for lean protein sources such as fish, poultry, beans, and legumes. Fish, especially fatty fish like salmon and mackerel, are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are known to support heart health. Plant-based proteins like beans and lentils are also great choices

High intake of added sugars and sodium can increase your risk of heart disease. Read nutrition labels to choose foods with lower amounts of added sugars and sodium. Aim for less than 10% of your daily calories from added sugars and less than 2,300mg of sodium per day



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Remember that drinking plenty of water is essential for overall health, including heart health. Staying hydrated helps maintain proper blood volume, circulation and even satiety.

Here are some heart-healthy snack ideas:

1. Nuts and Seeds: Almonds, walnuts, and chia seeds are packed with healthy fats, protein, and fiber. They make for a satisfying snack that can help keep your heart in top shape while adding essential vitamins to your diet. Just remember to enjoy them in moderation, as they are calorie-dense. About 1/4 cup is considered a serving.
2. Fresh Fruits and Veggies: Nature's candy! Apples, berries, carrots, and bell peppers are not only delicious but also rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Pair them with a bit of hummus or Greek yogurt for an extra protein boost.
3. Whole-Grain Goodies: Whole-grain crackers, popcorn, and oatmeal are excellent sources of fiber, which can help lower cholesterol levels. Look for options with minimal added sugars and sodium. Pairing these carbohydrates with protein will also give better blood sugar support.
4. Yogurt and Berries: A bowl of Greek yogurt topped with fresh berries is a perfect combination of protein, probiotics, and antioxidants. It's a creamy and satisfying snack that supports heart health.
5. Dark Chocolate: Yes, you read that right! Dark chocolate (70% cocoa or higher) is rich in flavonoids, which can help improve heart health. Enjoy a small piece to satisfy your sweet tooth without the guilt.

National Snack Month is the perfect opportunity to explore new, heart-healthy snacks. By making mindful choices, you can enjoy your favorite treats while keeping your heart in great shape. So, grab a handful of almonds, a bowl of berries, or a piece of dark chocolate, and celebrate the joy of snacking this February!

Reminder that our "Lunch and Learns" are back! Join us monthly at the Rapides Parish Extension office. The next session is on Thursday, February 20th at noon. Registration is required, so call (318) 767-3968 for more information.

Happy snacking!

Raspberry Orange Yogurt Bark

By Jennifer Duhon

- 1 (32-Ounce) Container Vanilla Greek Yogurt
- 1 Cup Fresh Raspberries, Washed, Slightly Crushed
- Zest of One Small Orange
- 1/2 Cup Chopped Pistachios
- 1/4 Cup Mini Chocolate Chips or
- 1/4 Cup Shaved Chocolate

Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Spoon the yogurt onto the prepared baking sheet and spread into a rectangle about 1/4 inch thick. Scatter remaining ingredients on top. Freeze 2 to 3 hours or until completely frozen. Before serving, break or cut the bark into pieces.

Recipe courtesy of the Dairy Discovery Zone.





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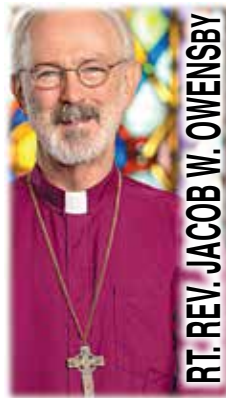
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Love in a Messy World

By Rt. Rev. Jacob W. Owensby, PhD, DD



RT. REV. JACOB W. OWENSBY

During our first year of marriage, Joy and I studied at the Ruhr University in Germany. We were part of a large, diverse foreign-student population. Men and women from Iran, Iraq, Argentina, Ethiopia, and Japan majored in engineering, computer programming, literature, and philosophy. By far, the largest group came from China.

The office responsible for exchange students arranged regular, heavily subsidized bus trips to other parts of Germany and to other countries of the European Union. The university's aim was to encourage international understanding of and relationships with Europe. Secondly, these trips fostered community among the foreign students.

On one of our excursions, Joy and I sat across from a young Chinese woman whom we had come to know. She asked, "How can you Christians love everyone? I love my family. I will take care of my children as they grow up and my parents as they grow old. But there are billions of people. What do you mean you love them all?" Our friend wasn't challenging us or calling our faith into question. She was genuinely curious about how we would live out a faith that makes such a bold claim: We will love everyone. No exceptions. No prerequisites.

We don't mince words about it. We sing it boldly: "They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love." Love is not one thing among many that Christians might or might not do, like cross themselves or genuflect or eat fish on Friday. To follow Jesus is to love like Jesus. So, Jesus spent his earthly ministry teaching people what love is. Or, more precisely, Jesus showed us who love is. God is love (1 John 4:8b). And Jesus is love in the flesh. What Jesus does in the flesh shows us what love is. Love is no mere affection. It is the creative, transforming power of God.

John's Gospel culminates in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. But in the earlier chapters of the Gospel, we read pointed lessons about the nature of love. These lessons gradually prepare us to experience the full impact of the cross and the empty tomb. Listen to the Gospel's familiar opening phrase: "In the beginning was the Word." The Greek words translated "in the beginning" mean at the root of things. At the bottom of things. At the very core of things.

Everything that is, was, or will be owes its existence to God's love. And it's not that God made a bunch of stuff and then stepped back to admire the handiwork. Everything depends upon God at every single instant. Each honeysuckle vine, white pelican, chubby baby, and grumpy old bulldog would tumble into the abyss of nothingness if God ceased even for a nanosecond pouring love into it. It would be like unplugging an electric appliance. The mere existence of all the animals and plants, of all the oceans and stars,

planets and rock formations, is a sign that God's love is actively present. Creating. Sustaining. Making something happen.

For the rest of eleven chapters, John recounts seven signs of God's love. The very first of those happens at Cana of Galilee. Along with his mom and his traveling companions, Jesus turns up at a wedding where the wine runs out. At the urging of his mother, Jesus turns several huge jugs of water into wine—and I mean the really good stuff (John 2:1-11). The sign is a showing, a revelation, of God as love. God's presence transfigures things. In some ways, we've grown so accustomed to God's transforming power that we take it for granted or think of it as merely natural. Caterpillars turn to butterflies. A child grows in a woman's womb. Bare winter branches yield spring blossoms. Other holy changes might more ably grab our attention. Parents forgive their child's murderer. Heroin addicts get sober. None of this is solely human achievement, luck of the draw, or brute natural law. This is God's love working itself out.

When Christians say that we will love everyone, we're admitting to an infinite desire, even though we are finite beings. We yearn to have God's love work itself out through us and to be signs of a loving God in a messy world. God can make water into wine through us. God's love can make strangers into friends, fear into compassion, resentment into reconciliation. When the hungry are fed, the homeless are sheltered, and the sick receive treatment, God's love reveals itself.

In this life, you and I will not love perfectly. But our imperfections do not prevent God's love from showing through. After all, a crummy stable and a cruel cross served as signs of God's love. So, too, can our own fumbling attempts to love what God loves as God loves it. To follow Jesus is to be an imperfect sign of God's perfect love. They will know we are Christians by our messy love.

Bishop Jake is the 4th Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Western Louisiana, the 26th chancellor of the University of the South, husband, father, noted speaker, teacher, and author. His newest book is entitled, "A Full-Hearted Life: Following Jesus in a Secular Age" and is available now from your favorite bookseller. Find Bishop Jake online at jakeowensby.com.



A Cenla Testimony from Church on the Levee

By Rev. Andrew Magee



“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins” 1 Peter 4:8.

When we started a church on the streets of Alexandria, a man named Joshua was clearly the most troubled man of the bunch. He was never close to where the Bible was being preached and either stood at a distance or he left during the service. When serving lunch one day, we had boiled eggs as a side item. Joshua apparently liked boiled eggs and asked my wife if we had more. AnnaMarie told him that we did not; however, if he would come back she would have some just for him. The next week, my wife brought him four boiled eggs and told him that she did this just for him and no one else. That was five years ago. Every Sunday from that time until his passing, we would find Joshua waiting for us at the same place. AnnaMarie handed him four eggs, and he followed us afterwards to join us at church.

Before his passing, Joshua stood closer than ever to the service, and he listened to hear about God’s love for mankind and the hope that can be found through Him.

One Sunday, he turned to my wife and repetitively said, “Look...Jesus down there healing people!” Oh how a simple act of kindness can go a long way! The Bible tells us that love covers a multitude of sins, but love requires action. Let’s all be willing to let God’s love shine through us always remembering that, in order for someone to know about it, someone has to share it.

Andrew Magee is the lead pastor of Church on the Levee in Alexandria.



You're One Tough Cookie

By Debbie Guy, LCSW



DEBBIE GUY, MSW, LCSW

On my office wall hung a sign that read, "You never know how strong you are until strong is the only choice you have." In other words: "You're one tough cookie." A catchy way to say "resilient," which is defined as: 1. The ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity. 2. The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness. It's seen in that friend who can take a gut punch and keep moving forward. It's an anthem on our news feed filled with catastrophic disasters as we watch mesmerized by the amazing, heroic efforts to restore normalcy. Our culture is filled with quotes reminding us, encouraging us, pushing us forward because the "sun'll come out tomorrow."

Unfortunately, it's easy to inadvertently confuse the ability of an object with the capacity to quickly recover. Springing back into shape is effortless for a slinky, but we're not slinkies. So, let's discuss our capacity, competence, and strength. In other words, those tough human attributes such as persistence, tenacity, resolve, will-power, or just good ole determination. That's right, right?!? Well, on the surface, they look good, desirable, and admirable, but just between us, they may not be healthy in the long run.



Why? After a crisis, those descriptors jumpstart us moving and getting things done. A temporary fix. They're a mask. We "fake it 'til we make it" to soothe our co-workers', friends', and family's concerns. Snapping back to "normal" is just our adrenaline kicking in which overrides our exhaustion, frustrations, and disappointments. They stifle change and growth. We find ourselves ignoring our mental, physical, and emotional care. We fail to develop new coping strategies, fearing other's expectations and not wanting to disappoint. Result? Burnout! A seemingly simple but unexpected glitch is the "straw that broke the camel's back."

We lose it. Our bewildered family and friends are taken by surprise. They thought we were "okay."

So, how does real resiliency look? Well, let's drop the slinky and think Stretch Armstrong. As we are pulled from here to there, we emerge wiser, stronger, and tougher. How? Baby steps. First, we're honest. We drop the, "Oh, I'm ok" facade which frees us to accept help as well as find a confidant to call when "in the middle of the night, our head goes places it shouldn't go." Then, by sheer tenacity, we accomplish those daily tasks establishing a sense of stability and control. Slowly, we embrace our different world, encounter different people, and acquire different skills, such as finding the breaker panel, paying bills, or traveling solo. This gradually builds our hope, self-confidence, and independence. We continue to trust God while fussing at Him. Lastly, our, "Why?" evolves into an empathetic, "Who else?" So we reach out, offering words such as, "I've been there. It's ok to have good and bad days. There is no quick fix. Living is a moment by moment, day by day endeavor. I'm here for you."

So blessings on us "tough cookies" as we bravely face this ever-changing "sun'll come out tomorrow" world. Together, we'll make it!



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Loving Better

By Christy Pennison, LPC-S



CHRISTY PENNISON, LPC-S

I've learned that every season brings its own emotional challenges, and the season of "love" is no different. Whether you're in a relationship or enjoying your own company, it helps to understand your needs and those of the people you care about.

In my work as a mental health professional, I often see people trying to live up to society's ideal of romance—especially when every billboard and social media post seems to scream "Love is in the air!" Instead of chasing an image of flawless love, I've found that the best relationships—whether with a partner, a friend, or even with yourself—start with simple self-awareness

and care.

Let me share a story that resonated with me. A few years ago, I met someone—let's call her Clara—who had just ended a long-term relationship right before Valentine's Day. Clara felt overwhelmed by all the focus on couples during the season of love. Rather than letting the pressure get to her, she decided to spend time exploring her own feelings. She took a quiet day to journal in her favorite park, went to a yoga class, and reconnected with friends who truly understood her. In doing so, Clara discovered that, when she took care of her own needs first, she was better able to understand and care for others.

Loving better starts by listening to yourself. Ask simple questions like, "What makes me feel supported?" or "When do I feel most at peace?" This kind of self-awareness isn't selfish—it helps you show up as your best self in every relationship. When you know what you need, you can clearly share that with others, making it easier for them to support you.

At the same time, it's important to learn about the needs of those around you. Try asking your loved ones, "What makes you feel valued?" or "How can I help when times get tough?" These honest conversations create a safe space where everyone feels heard and cared for. It's all about finding a balance between giving and receiving support.

Remember, love doesn't have to fit a single mold. Whether you're single or in a relationship, every bond is unique. Embrace small acts of self-care—like a few minutes of meditation, a peaceful walk, or even a quiet moment spent in nature. These little practices help you stay calm and centered, making it easier to connect with others.

In the end, love is a journey that grows as you do. By understanding your own needs and taking the time to understand those of others, you create a space where real love can flourish. Whether you're building a new relationship or strengthening an existing one, caring for yourself and the people you love is one of the kindest things you can do.

So in this season of "love", take a moment for self-discovery and honest conversation. Enjoy the opportunity to connect, learn, and grow—because the best kind of love is one that respects who you are and who others are.



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Each Other's Harvest: Fostering Community and Applauding Achievement

By Michael Wynne

The Rapides Parish Library, under the direction of Celise Reech-Harper and internationally-recognized artist and mentor Morris Taft Thomas, are proud and excited to announce the second induction of honorees to Central Louisiana's first center and repository devoted exclusively to African Americans and the African American community in Central Louisiana. The African American Culture and Heritage Center (AACHC) will continue to tell the story of the cultural, economic, and artistic contributions that African Americans from Central Louisiana have made here as well as on the world's stage. "This vibrant institution will be a cohesive way for anyone to find information on the Black leaders and the Black community as well as a method of promoting and displaying that knowledge for all, especially our younger generation," noted Mr. Thomas. In addition, the AACHC, housed at the Martin Luther King branch of the Rapides Parish Library located at 1115 Broadway Street in Alexandria next to Peabody High School, will provide a space to capture and celebrate those stories as well as specialized programming for the benefit of the community at large.

The year's event theme is "Each Other's Harvest: Fostering Community and Applauding Achievement." One of the many highlights of this thriving institution will be this year's selection of honorees from Central Louisiana. Mr. Thomas noted, "As members of the AACHC, we deem it a distinct honor, on behalf of our local, parish, state, and national communities, to recognize and pay tribute to our second group of champions who have made major contributions to our society beyond normal expectations."

The honorees this year include:

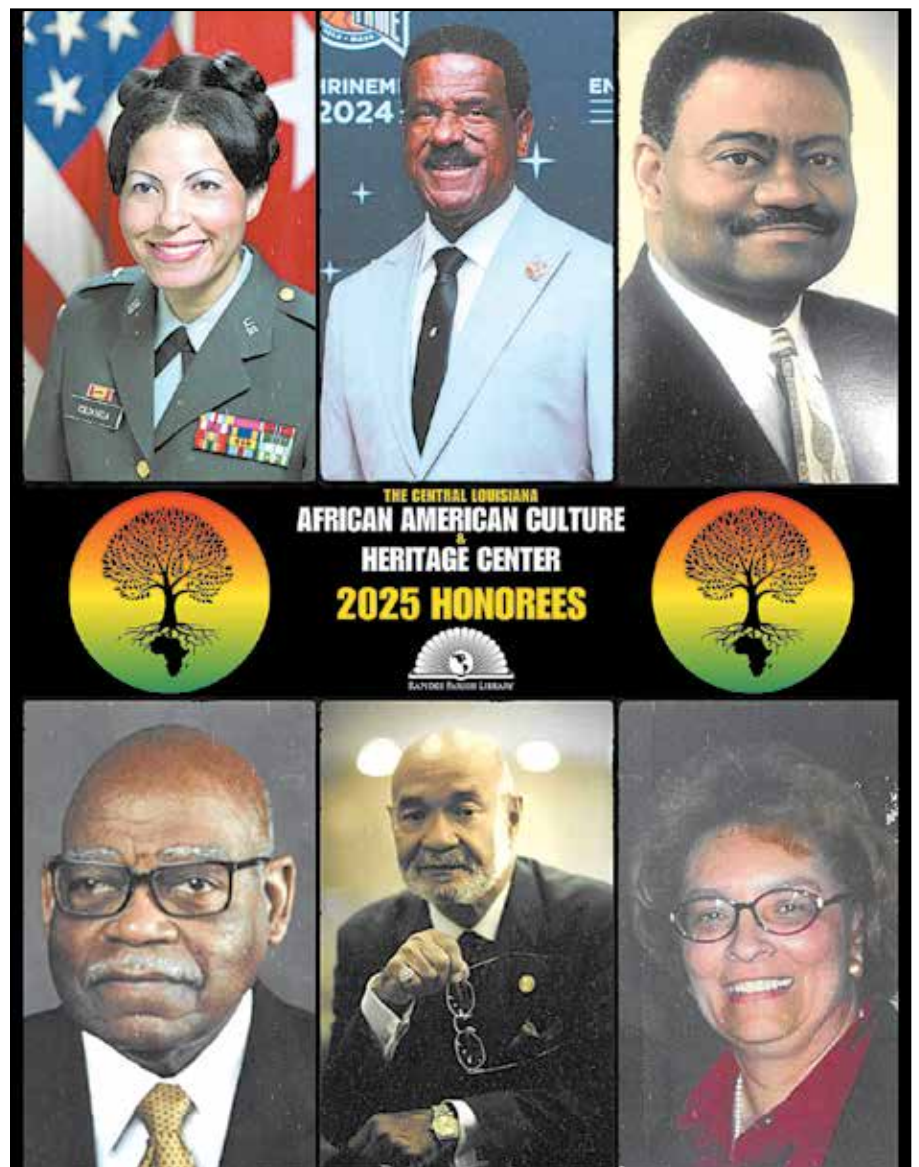
- Honorable Haywood B. Joiner, Jr.—PhD: Dr. Joiner is a distinguished leader in our state's higher education, healthcare administration and community service.
- Honorable Charles R. Joiner, MD—Brother of Dr. Haywood Joiner, Jr., is a veteran of the United States Navy and current pastor of His Way Sanctuary Church in Boyce.
- Honorable Lee Dotson, Jr. —Mr. Dotson is a dedicated and community leader with a distinguished career spanning over five decades.
- Honorable Charles Smith, Coach—Coach Smith is a legendary figure in the world of basketball coaching. With a teaching career spanning over 53 years, Coach Smith lead Peabody Magnet High School in a record setting 1,208 wins.
- Brigadier General Sheridan Cadoria (Ret.) —General Cadoria is a trailblazer in the U. S. Army, becoming the first African American woman to achieve the rank of Brigadier General.
- Honorable Dorothy Baker Reyes, Judge—In 2005, Judge Reyes was appointed to the Los Angeles Superior Court by then Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. She served until 2022.

"What a blessing, what a gift, and what an honor in times like these to be able to assemble such a group of honorees in such an important institution; this is our history at the highest level," noted Mr. Thomas, who will help lead this year's

ceremony. Mr. Thomas added, "As parents, grandparents, or guardians, encourage your children and grandchildren to visit your local library where treasures of knowledge are free. Read about the history of local legendary dreamers, whose contributions to society have paved the way for our youth to follow."

The Rapides Parish Library invites the community to attend the 2nd Annual Event of the Central Louisiana African American Culture and Heritage Center on Saturday, February 22nd at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library Branch. The event will begin at 11:00am and include an induction

ceremony as well as some exciting new additions to the center. Please R.S.V.P. to (318) 445-3912 by Saturday, February 8th.



Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler in Avoyelles

By Wilbert Carmouche

Are you ready for culinary experiences, Mardi Gras, Valentines' Day, and much more? Make Avoyelles Parish your destination to Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler!

Join Brittany and her crew at the Adam Ponthieu Museum on February 8th at 2:00pm for a Wreath Making Workshop. The museum is located at 8554 LA 451 in Moreauville, across from Sarto Historic Iron Bridge. Fee is \$10.00 (cash only). To reserve your spot, call (318) 500-4036 or email bigbendmuseum1927@gmail.com.

Paragon Casino Resort brings Kenny Lattimore to the Mari Stage on Valentine's Night at 8:00pm. Doors will open at 7:00pm for early seating. Lattimore is an American R&B singer known for his smooth, soulful voice and romantic ballads. He rose to prominence in the mid-1990s with the release of his self-titled album.

Pair the show with dinner at Legend's Steakhouse for a date night with your favorite Valentine! The Valentine's Day special for two includes an appetizer, salad, choice of two entrees, a dessert, and live entertainment by a violinist for \$130 plus tax and gratuity per couple. Dine-in only. Reservations are required by calling (318) 240-6380.

Don't miss out on what's sure to be an unforgettable Valentine's Day! Visit www.paragoncasinoresort.com for tickets and dinner reservations. Keep the party going after the show at Club MeZazz for a \$10.00 cover, must be 21+ (ID required).

Louisiana Office of Tourism has declared 2025 as "The Year of Food" and what a culinary treat you are in for at St. Genevieve's "Taste of the Country" on Saturday, February 15th at 5:00pm. The event begins immediately after the 4:00pm Mass.

"Throw Me Something, Debutante" is what you will hear at the Krewe of Cyllenius Parade in downtown Marksville on Sunday, February 16th at 1:00pm. The parade organized by the Rotary Club of Avoyelles will feature a float with 29 debutantes who were presented at the Krewe Ball on February 1st. Bring your bags, umbrellas, and anything thing to hold your many throws!

Jacob Ducote invites all to Open Mic Night at Bailey's on The Square, Thursday, February 20th, beginning at 7:00pm (doors open at 6:30pm). Open Mic provides an opportunity for singers and songwriters to perform in an intimate environment in the historic Bailey's on the Square, site of Judge Cushman's Office. Judge



Cushman presided over the hearing that he freed Solomon Northup from his enslavement in Central Louisiana. Open Mic is geared towards musicians who play and sing their favorite songs or original music, not to be mistaken for karaoke. Come see more than 10 artists each night, or on any third Thursday of each month. Open to all ages, No cover, always a vibe!

Also on the Courthouse Square on February 20th, prior to the Open Mic Night, there is a tribute to Black History Month at the Gallery on the Square, home to the Arts Council of Avoyelles. "African Americans & Labor" is the titled exhibit, and you are invited to view during a reception hosted by the Arts Council from 5:00pm to 7:00pm.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Fifth Ward's Altar Society is having a Garage Sale in their parish hall on Saturday, February 22nd, from 8:00am to 3:00pm. Find treasures that will make your Spring décor complete. Our Lady of Lourdes Hall is located at 1315 Egg bend Road in Fifth Ward (a Marksville address), right off Hwy 1. For details, call (318) 305-5672.

Paragon Casino Resort hosts its legendary Gator Feeding Show Saturday, February 22nd at 4:00pm. Hotel guests, casino visitors, and the public can enjoy a free, educational, and entertaining 30-minute live feeding with the alligators in the "Gator Bayou" located inside the hotel's atrium. Photo opportunities with a baby alligator and a "holding" snake will take place after each show and are open to the public.

The final food culinary experience is at Lafargue Elementary School on Sunday, February 23rd from noon to 2:00pm at their Mardi Gras Themed event. For tickets and/or details, call (318) 253-9591.

The fun begins Gator Grounds Mardi Gras the weekend of February 28th through March 1st for registered guests. The annual MG Parade is set to roll on March 1st at 3:00pm along with a chicken run. Call (318) 295-4030 or visit www.gatorgrounds.org to make your reservations today! Gator Grounds RV Water Park Resort is located at 200 Golf Course Road in Bunkie. Located on property is a 9-hole golf course for your golfing pleasure.

For additional information, contact Mary, Murial, Penny, Carolyn, or Wilbert to plan your travels at www.travelavoyelles.com, (800) 833-4195, or tourism@krocket.net.



By Robert Smith

As tourism is at heart beat of the Bunkie Buz , our Buz Brand (TM) has now had a change of heart! And just in the nick of time for Valentine’s Day! Our heart, as can be seen, is so big that it now surrounds our Bunkie Buz logo, encompassing both our design and desire. We now have so much Buz Love for Bunkie, that we proudly wear our heart where everyone can see it—no, not on our sleeve—we wear the button on lapel, le chapeau, and, yes, even our breath! It’s a sugar-free amenity “mint” to be! Even our long-tailed, certifiably cute, and portable Bunkie Monkey (TM) painlessly and non-invasively boasts our new heart! “Our” new heart remains synonymous with the friendship and kinship of the family Buz. And for the family Buz, the beat goes on!

With the tread of tourism rapidly developing in Bunkie, we are currently hosting tour systematizers, junket journeymen, excursion organizers, and tour coordinators intent on making the Bunkie Buz District their rest stop and shop. This means cultivating the seedlings of sojourn to sprout and bloom from the previous seasons of planting in order to enjoy the fruit of our labors. Such foreign agents and tourististas of change have been recently amidst and amongst us, happily arranging future jaunts and junkets to the Bunkie Buz District from all points abreast and abroad. Whether by small band or bus load, they are coming!

The B.U.Z. (Bunkie and U Zone) is swamped with relevant revelations, rumors, and raucous remonstrations of peril! Alert: according to the I.D.I.O.T.S. (Internal Departmental Immunology Office of Totalmedicorpus Services), the viral level of the B.U.Z. is now officially contagious! So many fuzzy buz-y bodies have caught



the Buz, gone bananas, and are now exhibiting the associated simian symptoms of euphoric chuckles, giggles, smiles, telling tails, patting paws, and tapping toes!

Be advised that extreme cases may manifest tattle-tale signs (especially I-49 signs) of swinging and swaying, wild waving of paw, along with, but not limited to, verbal outbursts of bodacious buzzing, and use of “z” instead of “s”! No known cure is available; however, all simian symptoms and associative synonyms can be managed and maintained with repeated and regular gatherings with fellow Buzters, Buzites, and Buzettes at all Buz friendly locations within the friendly environs of the Bunkie Buz District!

Our Bunkie Buz Live at Five Radio Show on 92.5 KDPI (FM) is now aBuz with great listeners, replete with great sponsors, and chock-full of news and views of all things Bunkie whiel featuring local music. Tune in to hear the Buz!

Special Kudos and “Thank You” to the Bunkie Rotary Club for the erection and completion of the new Bunkie Rotary Club Pavilion! Great people!

As the new season for travel and tours begins, join our Bunkie Buz family to savor all the great people and businesses that Bunkie has to offer. Visit and spend a bit of time. You might find out that you can catch the Buz, too! We must confess that we lack sufficient superlatives to fully express gratitude to our five jewels—Cenla Focus Magazine, the Avoyelles Tourism Commission, our Bunkie Buz family, 92.5 KVPI FM radio, and to all of you, our extended family of friends near and far. Come catch the Bunkie Buz!

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Open Mic Night
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February 20, 2025
FB: Bailey's on the Square
Our Lady of Lourdes Garage Sale
Oil Church Hall – Fifth Ward
February 22, 2025 (8:00am to 3:00pm)
318.359.5672

Alligator Feeding Show
Paragon Hotel Atrium
February 22, 2025 @ 4:00pm
www.paragoncasinoresort.com

Taste of Lafargue
Lafargue Elementary School
February 23, 2025 (Noon 2:00pm)
318.253.9591

Mardi Gras Madness
Gator Grounds RV Waterpark Resort
For registered guests
March 1 – Chicken Run & Parade
www.gatorgrounds.org

Wreath Making Workshop
Adam Ponthieu Museum
February 8, 2025 @ 2:00pm
318.500.4036

Kenny Lattimore Concert
Paragon Casino Resort
February 14, 2025 @ 8:00pm
www.paragoncasinoresort.com

Taste of the Country
St. Genevieve CC – Brouillette
February 15, 2025 @ 5:00pm
FB: Janice Brevelle

Krewe of Cyllenius Parade
Downtown Marksville
February 16, 2025 @ 1:00pm
FB: Rotary Club of Avoyelles

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Rapides Early Childhood Education Registration - Now Open! Children | Birth to 5

The Rapides Parish School District online early childhood application is now open for all children from birth to age five.

- Pre-K | Must be 4 years old by September 30, 2025
- Head Start | Ages 3 - 4 by September 30, 2025
- Early Head Start | Infant - Age 2 by September 30, 2025
- Type III Early Learning Centers | Infant - Age 4

2024 Rapides Early Childhood Network Highlights

- The Highest Performance Profile on record. According to the 2023-2024 Network Performance Profile, Rapides scored 5.93. Thirty-three early childhood providers received "Excellent" scores.
- Since 2019, Rapides Parish has increased publicly funded early childhood seats by 8.48% while simultaneously increasing Performance Profile scores by 13.6%.
- Rapides Parish earned a Kindergarten DIBELS score of 39, significantly outperforming the state average of 29.

Required Documents

- Child's Birth Certificate
- Child's Social Security Card
- Up-to-Date Shot Record (only requirement needed to register at early learning center)
- Proof of Residence
- Proof of income-
2 Most Recent Pay Stubs SNAP/Food Stamp Benefits

Application Process

- Register online at rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com or RPSB.us
- Pre-K and Kindergarten must choose zoned school

To Register: Apply online at rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com

Rapides Parish School Board Celebrates the Month of the Young Child

The Rapides Parish School Board and Superintendent Jeff Powell invite Rapides Parish residents to participate in the Month of the Young Child. During the month of February, we will focus on early childhood education enrollment, scholarships, and parent engagement. Enrollment for Public School Pre-K, Early Head Start, Head Start, and Type III early learning centers is now open. Families with children from birth to age five are encouraged to register online at www.rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com or www.rpsb.us.

The Rapides Parish School District's Early Childhood Performance Profile score increased to 5.94 in 2024, ranking fifth in the state and nearing the "Excellent" category. Thirty-three sites received "Excellent" ratings, including 19 early learning centers, four Head Start programs, and nine school-based sites. Pre-K programs in Rapides Parish exceeded state averages by 10% in literacy and numeracy benchmarks, underscoring the district's commitment to kindergarten readiness.

Superintendent Powell stated, "This community has proven that when we work together, we can achieve extraordinary outcomes for our youngest learners. We're closing gaps and raising standards, ensuring every child is kindergarten-ready." Cindy Rushing, Director of Early Childhood, added, "The data tells a story of progress, but it also challenges us to do more. Our mission is for every child to thrive, and we're not stopping until we achieve that goal."



The Rapides Early Childhood Network is offering scholarships for children from birth to age three to attend one of 35 Type III early learning centers. Eligibility requires guardians to work at least 20 hours per week, be enrolled full-time in an educational/training program, or actively seeking employment, in addition to meeting income requirements. These scholarships were made possible through \$4.7 million in community support, leveraging Louisiana's Early Childhood Education Fund, which will expand access to early care for 300 additional children.

Throughout February, Rapides Parish will host events to promote awareness and engage families, including:



- Online registration to secure an early childhood seat: rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com or rpsb.us.
- Participating in Dolly Parton Imagination Library parent engagement activities.
- Highlighting Highest Performance Scores Programs: Pre-K, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Type III early learning centers.
- Distributing and celebrating "Excellent" Performance Score banners throughout the Rapides Early Childhood Network.
- Participating in the Early Ed Day Event hosted by the United Way of Central Louisiana, on Thursday, February 27th at 10:00am at the Cenla Christian Child Care Center in Woodworth, on Highway 165.

For more information about Rapides Early Childhood Network programs, please visit www.rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com.



EDUCATION FOCUS

LSUA School of Nursing Launches New Evening Option for Associate Degree



The LSUA School of Nursing is proud to announce the launch of its first evening option cohort for the Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN) program, offering a flexible pathway for individuals balancing work, caregiving, and other

life commitments. This innovative program began in January with seven students attending classes on Monday and Tuesday evenings, with clinical training on Saturdays. Building on the success of this cohort, LSUA plans to offer two evening classes by Fall 2025 and all four clinical courses by Fall 2026.

The program was developed in response to market research and demographic data collected by the School of Nursing, which revealed significant demand for flexible learning options in Central Louisiana. According to Jeff Langston, Dean of the College of Health & Human Services, 70% of current nursing students are married, and 48% have children or serve as caregivers. “This data showed us there is a real need for a nursing program that accommodates those who cannot attend classes during traditional hours,” Langston said. “We’re addressing this demand to make nursing school more accessible to working moms and dads in our area.”



Sarita James, Ph.D., RN, CNE, and Director of the LSUA School of Nursing, emphasized the program’s focus on inclusivity and accessibility. “The evening option allows individuals with daytime commitments to pursue their dreams of becoming registered nurses without compromising their responsibilities,” James said. “This initiative reflects LSUA’s commitment to providing high-quality education tailored to the needs of our community and the healthcare industry.”

For Raven Bryant, a current LSUA employee and newly enrolled pre-nursing student, the program is a life-changing opportunity. “As a mom and full-time worker, this evening option is perfect for me,” Bryant said. “I always wondered how I could work and go to nursing school, and this is my confirmation to get to the finish line.”

As LSUA continues to address the region’s healthcare workforce shortages, the evening option exemplifies the university’s mission to deliver meaningful, high-quality degrees that meet the evolving needs of Central Louisiana.

For more information on the LSUA School of Nursing, visit explore.lsua.edu/nursing

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LET’S GET TO WORK!



Filmmakers Freeman and Lee Share a Cenla Connection

By Michael Wynne



Magic is real! I'm not speaking of the sword and sorcery kind, but the magic and mystery of creating one's own unique world vision through one's imagination, daring, and effort. We all have that in us, the urge to create great things with our own abilities, but, for a variety of personal reasons, we usually don't ever tap into these individual innate talents to better our world and bring us personal satisfaction. We all know well some techniques for creating these magical worlds can be through the creation of art and writing books. But what about cinema? Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting two filmmakers, one of whom is from our own neck of the woods. Both are beginning their careers to gradually change our world, a world for the better. They are Robert Gonzalez Freedman and Dustin Lee. I recently sat down with the pair at Tamp and Grind in Downtown Alexandria.

Robert, a proud native of Alexandria, is a graduate of Bolton High who took off after graduating to attend New York University's Tish School of the Arts. "My dad and granddad are both doctors (Freedman Clinic) so I was probably initially expected to become a doctor," Robert shared with me. "But my parents were big into art and while I was watching movies, I began to see pictures differently from others—how they were constructed in the editing process. My parents were very supported of my interests so I ventured into filmmaking."

Dustin came through the writing route. Born and raised in Los Angeles, he also entered Tish's School, but in their screenwriting program. "Together," Dustin noted, "we came to share an interest in films and we developed our own visual language in film making together."

Robert and Dustin met as freshman roommates at the school and quickly bonded. They found New York City to be an "energetic and interesting place to be." They said, "New York film is much more focused on independent and stylized filming while Los Angeles filming is more focused on commercial and mainstream filming." Their mutual goal is to have "creative and financial freedom, to have our own audience." Robert noted that some independent filmmakers who show their films traveling in circuits find their fans travel with them; they hope one day to have such a devoted fan base.

Initially, the duo have spent the last decade running KBR, a full-service video agency. Together, they've produced, directed, shot, and edited content for brands like Disney, Google, Pepsi/Lays, DSW, and French Connection. Their videos have garnered over 25 million views on YouTube, with their latest music video amassing 6.6 million views in just a few weeks. Their work has been featured in Vogue, British Vogue, The Huffington Post, In Style, and more.

Robert and Dustin's debut short film, "Kiddo," has been screened at numerous film festivals across the U.S., Canada, and Japan. It was



a semi-finalist at the Oscar-qualifying Rhode Island International Film Festival and was awarded Best U.S. Drama Short at the Alternative Film Festival in Toronto.

Dustin and Rob "craft stories that capture American life with an honest, lived-in style. They create characters who strive to meet the demands of the world while aspiring to find their authentic place in it. Their films depict the bittersweet journey of leaving the old behind and embracing the new," according to their publicity release.

Their latest film, "Kiddo," is about a young boy's curiosity about love which becomes complicated when the boy's mom leaves him alone with his favorite babysitter for the weekend.

Robert and Dustin's recent visit was most enjoyable. Dustin felt like he was treated like a member of the Freedman family. Since working together, both have used visits to Alexandria as a "marker" of sorts as to how they have changed and have attempted to change the world for the better through the magic of storytelling in filmmaking.

February is for Art Lovers at River Oaks

As River Oaks Square Arts Center welcomes February, it proudly announces a compelling lineup of exhibitions, highlighting a blend of artistic talent and community engagement to kick off the year. This season's exhibitions feature a diverse range of artistic styles, from intricate wood fabrications and vibrant oil paintings to expressive works created through community outreach programs.

In the Bolton Davis Gallery, Michael Yankowski presents "Dreams & Fabrications," a deeply personal and thought-provoking exhibition that showcases his mastery in wood fabrication and carving. Yankowski's work uniquely combines media, melding clay, cast and fabricated metal, and found objects into striking constructions that explore themes of life, death, and eternity. His Catholic upbringing heavily influences his work, infusing it with spiritual reflection and existential inquiry.

Yankowski's career has been marked by a dedication to both art and education, with decades spent as a professor at Northwestern State University. His pieces have been exhibited in numerous regional and national competitions, and his design work, including festival posters and silkscreen prints, has been widely recognized. "Dreams & Fabrications" brings together his artistic experiences from around the world, including his time as a medical illustrator in Doha, Qatar, and his travels documenting the landscapes of China and Tibet. Visitors will find themselves drawn into the intricate details and layered narratives of his sculptures, each piece offering a story that bridges past and present, reality and imagination.

The Galerie des Amis will feature the vibrant works of Alison Delaney in her exhibition "Beauty as Well as Bread." A resident artist at River Oaks since 2009, Delaney specializes in oil painting, occasionally incorporating watercolors into her practice. Her work is largely inspired by the natural world, particularly her travels to National Parks across the United States. Her pieces vividly capture the essence of these landscapes, celebrating their beauty while also hinting at their fragility.

Delaney's style varies from realistic interpretations to more abstract and impressionistic renderings, depending on her mood and artistic vision at the time. "Beauty as Well as Bread" is a testament to her ability to translate the awe-inspiring grandeur of nature onto canvas, making it accessible for all to experience.

In the Stokes-Harris Gallery, "Art For All & Hearts of Hope" highlights the transformative power of art in the community through the River Oaks Outreach Programs. This special exhibition showcases student works from Hope House and Matthews Memorial Healthcare, guided by instructors Carla Guillory and Chastity Smith. These programs provide residents with the opportunity to use art as a form of self-expression, healing, and connection, resulting in deeply personal and meaningful works.



At Matthews Memorial, instructor Chastity Smith has been fostering creativity among residents by incorporating collaborative projects that encourage teamwork and artistic exploration. "Working with the residents at Matthews Memorial has been an absolute blessing," says Smith. "Along with my help and guidance, they create beautiful, expressive artwork. I am incorporating more collaborative projects, allowing the residents to work together to create large, beautiful pieces that will be displayed in the halls of Matthews Memorial."

Meanwhile, at Hope House, Carla Guillory fosters artistic expression among women and children experiencing homelessness. "We named the annual show 'Colors of Hope' to symbolize the hope that we, as a community, can offer to these wonderful individuals," says Guillory. This exhibition stands as a celebration of creativity and resilience, highlighting the power of art to uplift and inspire.

The exhibitions will run from through March 29th. This exhibition is made possible through the generous support of GAEDA, the Alexandria Pineville Convention & Visitors Bureau, Louisiana Feed Your Soul, Red River Bank, Hotel Bentley, Diamond Grill, and the City of Alexandria. The exhibition is co-sponsored by RoyOMartin Foundation, LA Project Grant, Rotary Club of Alexandria, and LA Charities Trust & CLCF. Supported by a grant from the Louisiana Division of the Arts administered by the Arts Council of Central Louisiana. The continued dedication of our sponsors and supporters helps ensure that River Oaks remains a thriving hub for artistic expression in Central Louisiana.

River Oaks was thrilled to present two significant collaborative projects during the exhibition's opening reception, highlighting the center's ongoing commitment to community engagement and public art. The Community Heart Project, spearheaded by the Alexandria-Pineville Convention & Visitors Bureau, introduced a new public art initiative that will bring vibrant, heart-shaped sculptures to Central Louisiana. Inspired by iconic city art projects like the pelicans in Baton Rouge and the herons in Monroe, this initiative seeks to create lasting, meaningful public art that celebrates the region's cultural identity. The inaugural heart sculpture, designed and painted by River Oaks Resident Artist Leah Morace, features intricate motifs that highlight the beauty and heritage of Louisiana.

Additionally, the Alexandria Mardi Gras Association Poster, crafted by River Oaks Resident Artist Amber Voorhies, was revealed during the event. Voorhies, known for her dynamic acrylic paintings and ceramics, has designed a striking poster that captures the spirit of Mardi Gras with a theme centered on wings and feathers—symbolizing freedom, creativity, and the transformative power of art.

For more information on River Oaks, including upcoming exhibitions and classes, contact the center at (318) 473-2670, visit RiverOaksArtsCenter.com or find them at River Oaks Arts Center on Facebook.

Cane River Creole National Historical Park Hosts Student Art Exhibition



Cane River Creole National Historical Park (CARI), in partnership with the International Fiber Collaborative (IFC), announces a student art exhibition themed, Art Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. The artwork depicts historical moments, activists, and movements that have shaped civil rights.

“We are very pleased to host this student art exhibition in the historic Texas & Pacific Railway Depot which was an important part of the story of civil rights,” commented Barbara Justice, CARI Interpretation Manager. “We are extremely proud of the works created by these talented students of all ages and invite everyone to come and enjoy the art.”

The exhibit features several different mediums of varying compositions completed by 866 student artists representing 19 schools from across the United States. The art exhibit is on display at the depot through Sunday, March 2nd. Visitors to the depot, which is open Wednesday through Sunday from 9:00am to 3:30pm, will be able to vote for their favorite pieces until March 1st. Best in Show will be announced on March 2nd. The Texas & Pacific Railway Depot is located at 1927 Remembrance Way in Natchitoches.

The International Fiber Collaborative (IFC) was founded in 2008 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. They develop and promote community programs that create collaborative opportunities in art and civic engagement that link learning and creativity in the arts to science, math, engineering, and the humanities. Public programming has been a catalyst for creativity in health care facilities, libraries, schools, museums, and other locations. The IFC is proud of its efforts in engaging others in community art making, as their growth and success signify the degree to which the organization’s purpose/need is affirmed. For more information on the International Fiber

Collaboration, checkout their website, www.ifcprojects.com.

For more information on the exhibition, call (318) 352-0383 ext. 316 or email CARI_Interp@nps.gov. Visit the park website at www.nps.gov/cari or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/canerivercreoleNPS



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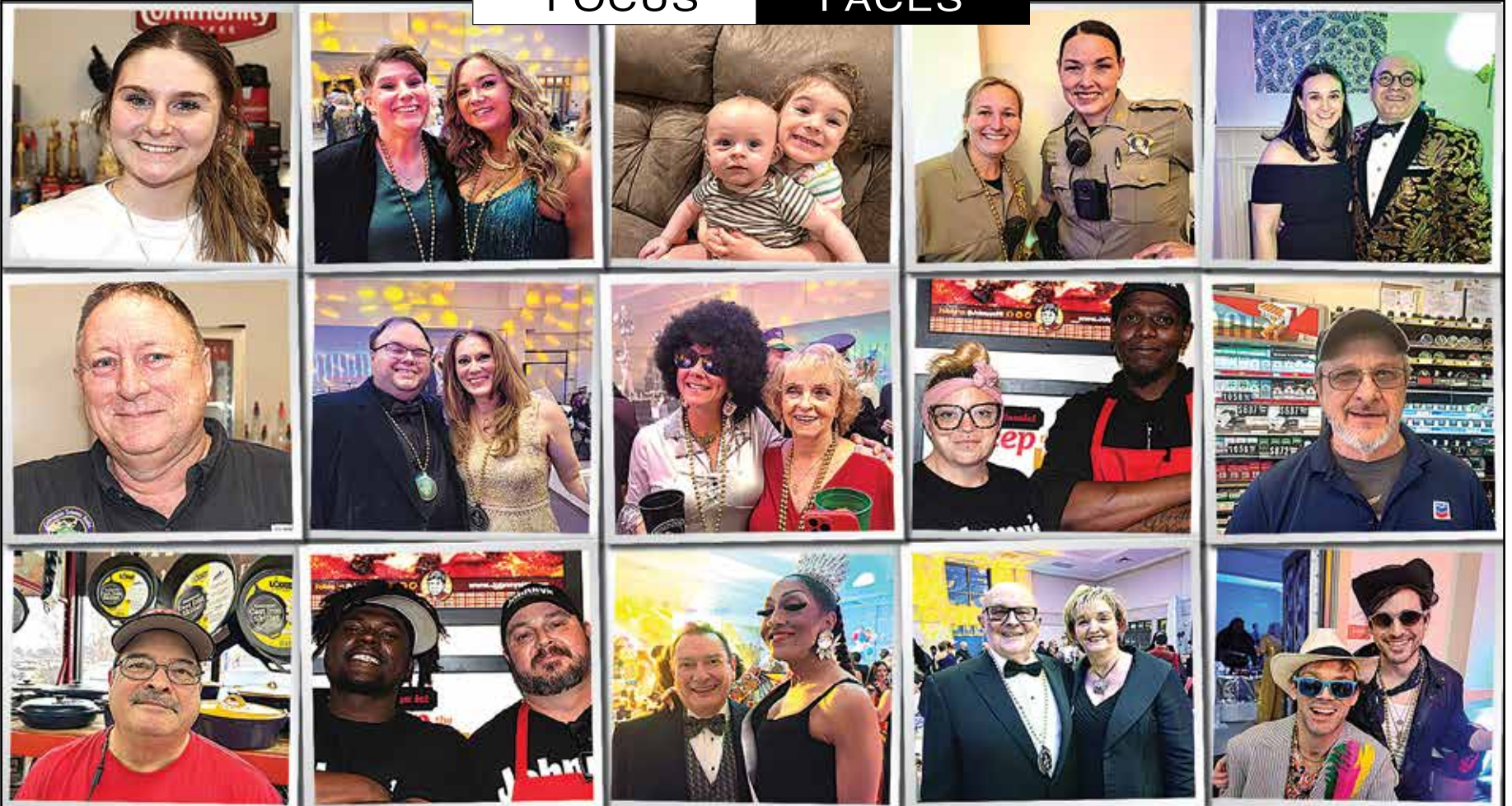
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