

# CenLA FOCUS

The Community Lifestyle/Business Profile Journal of CenLA

Volume 28 • Issue 3  
March 2025

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TEEING  
UP

Hot Meals

FOR

35  
Years



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WOMENS ALL PRO TOUR

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in this  
**ISSUE**



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*Diamond Jubilee*  
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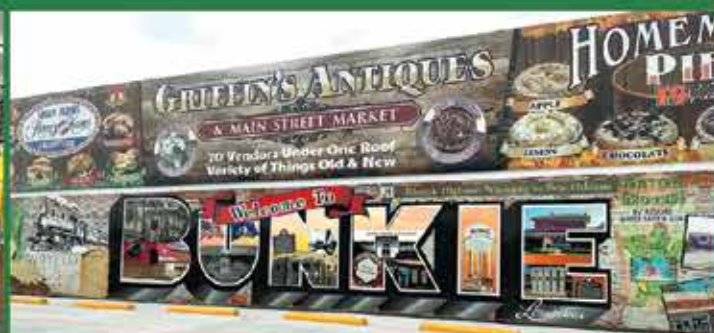
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# Community Development Works

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## CENLA BOARD BUILDERS

The Rapides Foundation and Community Development Works congratulate the Cenla Boardbuilders Class of 2024. CDW's Cenla Boardbuilders program trains emerging leaders to become active in their communities as members of nonprofit Boards of Directors.

Employers, nonprofits or individuals interested in learning more about Cenla Boardbuilders can visit [communitydevelopmentworks.org](http://communitydevelopmentworks.org) or call 318-443-7880.

### 2024 Cenla Boardbuilders Graduates

#### Track I: Currently serving on a board

Kala Jenkins	Board Member
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#### Nonprofit Partner

Raw Ingenuity Mentor Program
Raw Ingenuity Mentor Program

#### Track II: Seeking board service

Vickie Alexander	Retired - RN, Medical Certification Specialist
Cole Campbell	Personal Banker
Cheryl Dubois, LAC, LPP	Program Monitor Supervisor
Madeline Ducote, MBA	Marketing and Brand Manager
Alisha Ferrington	Director of Continuing Education and Community Outreach
Justin D. Howard	Mental Health Professional
Dr. Christina Hurd	Perkins Region 6 CTE Director
Dr. Thorn LaCaze	Campus Administrator
Emily Lohman, CPA	Associate Partner
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# Contents



## cover story

Manna House: Teeing Up Hot Meals for 35 Years..... page 6-8

## history focus

The Safest Vehicle on the Road ..... page 10-11

## home & garden focus

Homegrown Tomatoes ..... page 12-13

## faith focus

From Stone to Water ..... page 18-19

## sports focus

Relay For Life of Central La Works to Help End Cancer As We Know It ..... page 22-23

## medical focus

The Latest from Cenla's Medical Community..... page 24-29

## financial focus

Retirement: Need To Know .....page 35

## entertainment focus

What's Happening in Cenla ..... page 38-46

## who's cooking

Garfish Balls..... page 47

## lifestyle focus

Dome of Silence..... page 52

## avoyelles focus

Munch Your Way Through March in Avoyelles ..... page 56



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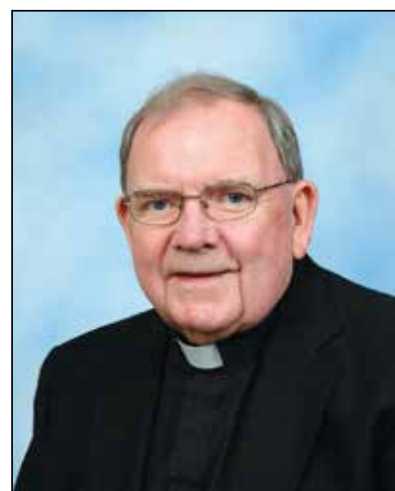
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Manna House has been serving people in Central Louisiana for nearly 35 years, providing hot nutritious meals for lunch every day. “For the majority of those who dine with us this is the only meal they will have that day,” explains Jessica Viator, Manna House Executive Director. “I was recently told by one of our patrons—hunger will make desperate people do desperate things. We believe at Manna House we provide a vital service to our community.” Manna House’s founder, the late Father Gerard Foley, believed that every individual who felt pangs of hunger—whether child or adult—should have access to a hot meal in the Central Louisiana area. Following Father Foley’s dream, Manna House serves hot meals, 365 days a year, to the less fortunate in our community in a clean and welcoming environment.



Manna House officially opened its doors at 2655 Lee Street on May 1, 1990. Nineteen people showed up to eat a free meal that first day. By mid-summer, 1990, Manna House was feeding hundreds of people each day. Today, with the increasing number of people suffering from food insecurity, Manna House has been feeding 9,200 meals per month; a total of 110,308 meals in 2024. It continues to rely on volunteers and donations to keep the ministry going. Manna House receives no financial assistance from the federal, state, or local government, or from any particular church, diocese, or organization alone. It takes everyone working together to keep the people fed. Hot, balanced, nutritious meals are served every day to anyone who shows up—no questions asked. There are no forms to fill out, no need for an ID, or even to sign in—just join the line and receive a meal.



While Father Foley and the parishioners at St. Frances Cabrini Church deserve the credit for starting Manna House, the entire community, including dedicated volunteers like the late Olla Rae Chicola, can be credited for keeping it going. As a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, Manna House operates on a budget that is 100% covered by



local contributions. In addition to monetary contributions, volunteers help daily with food prep, serving, greeting of visitors, cleaning, etc. You can be assured that 100% of any donation to Manna House goes directly to fulfilling the goal to feed the hungry in Central Louisiana. "Manna House is a totally ecumenical ministry," Fr. Foley once explained. "People from almost every denomination have volunteered to help serve or collect food. Everyone is welcome to pitch in!" That still holds true today. It takes 6 to 8 volunteers everyday (including weekends and holidays), 4 to 6 hours to prepare and distribute hot, delicious meals.

To expand its reach across the community to help those in need, Manna House launched its "Expanded Meals Program" in June of 2021. Manna House has



five distribution points, St. Julianna Catholic Church, Christian Love Baptist Church, Central Louisiana Homeless Coalition, Wardville Community Church in Pineville, and New Birth Fellowship Church. This program is designed for those in the community who are in need but do not have transportation to Manna House.



The Walker GMC ProAM / Coca-Cola Dr. Pepper ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour Golf Tournament is the Manna House's signature fundraising event which helps fund the mission of feeding the hungry.



Manna House is excited to host this year's Walker GMC ProAM tournament on Wednesday April 2nd, and the Coca-Cola Dr. Pepper ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour Golf Tournament April 3rd through 5th. The entire community is invited to enjoy the ProAM tournament. Together, we can continue Manna House's long-standing community tradition of providing nourishment to any and all who visit. All proceeds will ensure families and children have access to a healthy meal at no cost. In 2019, K&G Sports LLC, launched the Women's All-Pro Tour (WAPT). The same year, the WAPT announced a partnership with the LPGA's Epson Tour providing playing opportunities via Epson Tour tournament exemptions. The partnership expanded in 2021 with the addition of the Race To Stage II program. The season-long program rewards the top five points earners each an exemption directly to Stage II of the LPGA Qualifying School.





In July 2023, World Golf Hall of Famer Annika Sörenstam and the Women's All Pro Tour (WAPT) announced a five-year strategic alliance set to begin in 2024, in which the Women's All Pro Tour would become the ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour. The ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour conducts only 72-hole championships with a full week of activities including parties, clinics, proAMs, and more.



The primary goals of the ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour is to provide mentoring, a highly competitive tournament setting, and more opportunities to the next level. Since its inception, the WAPT has graduated a number of strong players who have gone on to play on the LPGA Tour. The WAPT has also produced 5 Epson Tour winners including Sarah White, Gabby Then, Grace Kim, Fernanda Lira and Emma Broze. "The WAPT not only provides more playing opportunities but a true path to the Epson and LPGA Tours," said WAPT President Gary DeSerrano.

This year's Tournament will feature a host of accomplished players, including 2024 FCA Women's Champion, Victoria Gailey; previous ANNIKA Tour winners Mary Parsons and Jean Reynolds; EPSON Tour Winner, Riley Smyth; Anna Nordfors, Jackie Lucena, and more.

The Walker GMC ProAM Tournament will be held on Wednesday, April 2nd at Links on the Bayou golf course. Each ProAM team of three (3) will be paired with a professional golfer for the tournament. The entry fee of \$1,250 per team includes green fees, golf cart, hole sponsorship, food and drinks including the opportunity to

play with a professional golfer. There are a limited number of teams, so please get your entry form in early. You can register at <https://alexandria-coca-coladr-pepper-open.perfectgolfevent.com> or scanning the QR code on this page. Tournament entry deadline is Monday, March 31st. Payment is due prior to the tournament.

This year's tournament events are free and open to the public to enjoy. "We are excited to be the beneficiary of this world-class golf tournament," said Viator. She noted that a number of sponsorship packages are available including Presenting Sponsors, Driving Range, Putting Green, Cart Sign, and Hole Sponsors. It provides a great opportunity to promote your business as well as your personal commitment and support of the less fortunate in our community.

In addition to benefitting the mission and work of the Manna House, there will also be a positive impact on the local economy. Organizers anticipate over 180 professional golfers plus family members and friends to visit Cenla. The hard dollars spent are then multiplied by a conservative turnover ratio of four times, to arrive at the economic impact of over \$400,000.

Whether you're a golfer or not, your donation is a great opportunity to show your support in helping the needy in our community. If you are not a golfer and would like to make a donation, there are several great ways to get involved. You can "Adopt Manna House for a Day" with an \$800 contribution, feed 160 people with a \$500 contribution, purchase a sponsorship for the Golf Tournament, or make a donation of any size. "The cost to serve one meal is approximately \$3.20," explains Viator. "There is no donation too small or too large. Monetary donations help us buy items needed in bulk, at a reduced price, enabling us to buy exactly what is needed. Therefore, nothing is wasted or sitting on a shelf."

To make your secure donation, visit the Manna House online at [givetomannahouse.com](http://givetomannahouse.com), scan the QR code on this page, or send a check to Manna House P.O. Box 6011 Alexandria, LA. 71307. For more information about the Walker GMC ProAM / Coca-Cola Dr. Pepper ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour Golf Tournament, contact Theresa Slater, Chairperson at (318) 664-3603. For more information about Manna House, reach out to Jessica Viator, Executive Director Manna House at (318) 445-9053.

Fr. Foley perhaps said it best when he remarked, "The Manna House is a perfect example of what happens when a community pulls together to do God's work!"





Rapides Early Childhood Network

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# The Safest Vehicle on the Road

By Dr. Jerry Sanson



DR. JERRY SANSON

What color is a school bus? If you answered “yellow” to that question, you are in the ballpark. If you answered “school bus yellow,” you rounded second and are headed for third. If you answered “National School Bus Glossy Yellow,” you are standing on home plate waving to the crowd, and you likely work for a school district transportation department. The third answer is correct, but why is that the case? Why not use lime green, or light blue, or bright red, or fluorescent orange paint on a school bus? Why not allow school districts to choose their individual color(s) for their buses without any outside input? The answers to those questions come down to the work of one man obsessed with the objective of making the trip that students take to school and back one of the safest on the nation’s roads.

Here is the formula in case you ever want to paint a school bus: NASDPTS-EEC2138; ASTM International-ASTM D6335-16,  $L^*:83.14$ ,  $a^*:14.36$ ; CIE Lab Color Space- $b^*: 67.46$ . This combinations of letters and numbers prescribe the exact formula to create paint of the correct chromaticity values, lightness, brightness, hue, and saturation to be applied to a school bus, The National Institute of Standards and Technology Federal Standard No. 595a, Color 13432, or simply National School Bus Glossy Yellow.

National School Bus Glossy Yellow has been the standard color for buses across the United States since 1939 and in Canada and Mexico slightly later. The color

resulted from a decision made by a conference on establishing national standards for school transportation safety held at Columbia University in New York City in 1939 organized by Dr. Frank Cyr, “Father of the Yellow School Bus.”



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Cyr was born in a sod farmhouse in 1900 in Nebraska's Republican River Valley, studied at Grinnell College, and earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture at the University of Nebraska. He spent about a decade in rural education, teaching in Winner, South Dakota, and serving as superintendent of education in Chappelle, Nebraska. His work in education led to his interest in safe school transportation, and he conducted a study of transportation in 1937 that revealed that students traveled to school in many different forms of potentially unsafe transportation. Wagons, buggies, sleighs, sleds, and other vehicles brought their charges to school. Parents in South Louisiana even used their boats to navigate the bayous to school. Some

districts that used buses painted them varying shades of yellow, while others used other colors, including a red-white-and blue color scheme that was supposed to promote patriotism among passengers.

The General Education Board, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, financed Cyr's study and the resulting conference. Cyr invited educators, representatives of paint companies, school bus manufacturers, and others interested in the subject to his conference to discuss school transportation safety. One of the primary concerns was color. Cyr hung up strips in the Grace Dodge Conference Room where the meeting was held, demonstrating 50 different shades of yellow from lemon yellow to bright yellow-orange so those attending the conference could compare them from a distance, in different lighting, and in other conditions. The orange-yellow color they chose became National School Bus Yellow Chrome as it was originally named,

and with slight modification, continues to be the color of a school bus. Delegates also adopted 43 other safety regulations for school buses.

Optometrists have noted that the color could not be more useful for making school buses visible. The combination of ingredients produces a color that is in the middle of the red-green spectrum and stimulates two cones in the eye rather than one cone as some other colors do. Discussion of that aspect of their choice did not dominate debate at the Yale Conference in 1939, but delegates could not have made a safer choice. School Bus Glossy Yellow is one of the easiest colors for the human eye to see in the gloom of early morning or in twilight, when school buses often operate.

Despite the conference decision, the federal government does not actually require school buses to be yellow. The National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration states on its website that state and local governments establish regulations for school transportation and only recommends that buses be painted National School Bus Glossy Yellow. Nevertheless, it is the nearly-universal color associated with the vehicles.

The school transportation system is the largest mass transit system in the United States, but school buses are involved in less than one per cent of traffic fatalities each year. And, those fatalities mostly occur among the motorists who collide with the buses, not among the passengers.

Frank Cyr lived to see the good results of his groundbreaking Columbia University Conference. He earned his PhD in Education at Columbia and taught in the Teacher's College on campus for 30 years before retiring in 1965. He served as president of the National Education Association, authored three books focusing on various aspects of education, and co-authored three others. He was designated a Professor Emeritus of Rural Education when he retired from Columbia in recognition of his distinguished contributions to the field. Cyr died in 1995 at the age of 95, leaving behind a son, three grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

## Homegrown Tomatoes

By Molly Lyles



Growing your own tomatoes is a rewarding experience. One of my favorite meals in the summer is a tomato sandwich with mayo, salt and pepper, and a few nice slices of a homegrown (or locally grown) tomato. If you are interested in growing tomatoes, there may be a few factors to consider with your setup.

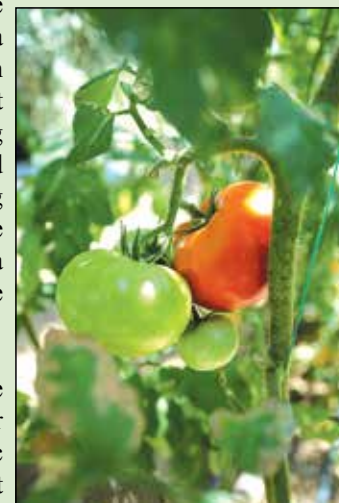
**Rotation:** If you have space, rotate where you plant your crops based on the family. Tomatoes are in the solanaceous family with eggplant, peppers, and Irish potatoes. If you can grow in an area that didn't have those crops growing in it the previous year, do so. This helps with fertility and reducing pest population buildup.

**Sunlight:** Tomatoes produce best with 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight so choose a location with full sun.

**Soil:** Choose a location that has good drainage. In Louisiana, there are many places with heavy clay soil that are slow draining. If you can avoid those areas, do so, but if you cannot, consider raising your beds high and adding organic matter like compost to the beds to improve drainage, or grow in containers.

**Varieties:** There are thousands of varieties to choose from. If you are unsure of which you should grow, talk to neighbors and your local garden stores to see what other people find grow well in your area and check out the LSU AgCenter's recommended varieties. If you are growing in containers or if you prefer a bush type plant, choose a determinate variety. Many hybrid varieties (if you see F1 on the label, it is a hybrid) are bred for disease resistance so there are good options there for our Louisiana climate. Disease resistance is often shown as an acronym such as TSMV for Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus. Heirlooms are often preferred but harvesting before vine ripening may be necessary to avoid cracks as heirlooms are prone to cracking during heavy rain events. For fall tomatoes, you will be starting them in the summer. Make sure you have a heat tolerant variety (typically their names will be related to heat such as Heatwave 91 or Phoenix).

**Fertility:** You can get your soil tested to see where you are in terms of nutrients but a general rule for tomatoes is to apply a complete fertilizer (organic or synthetic) or add organic matter like compost



## Congratulations! Jacob Murchison

BOM Bank would like to congratulate Jacob Murchison on his promotion to Community Redevelopment Authority (CRA) Officer. Jacob graduated from Northwestern State University with a bachelor's degree in business administration and also graduated from LA Tech's University Banking School. He is currently enrolled in the Graduate School of Banking at LSU. In his spare time, Jacob enjoys traveling with his wife, Bailey, and playing golf. Jacob has been with BOM for eight and a half years, holding positions as a credit analyst, lender, and now CRA officer. While doing this, he also manages the CDFI fund. Jacob stated that, working for BOM, he most enjoys that his whole job is now geared toward ensuring that BOM is investing in its communities in the most impactful ways possible. Jacob is excited for his new role and states that BOM's investments and services are a testament to the BOM spirit and its love for our communities.

Congratulations, Jacob!



# BOM



or aged manure a few days before planting. At first and second fruit set, you want to apply a side dressing of nitrogen fertilizer such as calcium nitrate as a liquid feed.

Reducing disease: Blossom-end rot (calcium deficiency), early blight, southern blight, late blight, bacterial spot, southern bacterial wilt, and tomato spotted wilt virus are common diseases. Many of these diseases can be reduced through good cultural practice such as good drainage, proper pruning, mulching, and selecting disease resistant varieties, when you can. Staking tomatoes

allows plants to stay off the ground which reduces the chance of infection from soil-borne diseases. Mulch around tomatoes to reduce the chance of soil splashing up on tomatoes and causing disease infection. Prune and take suckers off tomatoes to increase airflow in and around plants. How you prune will depend on if you have determinate or indeterminate tomatoes. Indeterminate tomatoes keep growing and can take more pruning, while determinate tomatoes have determined growth so should not be pruned as much.

Insects: These are nearly unavoidable in Louisiana. If they show up, contact your local agent for identification and treatment options. Tomato fruitworms, tomato hornworms, armyworms, stinkbugs, thrips, mites, and aphids are the most common insects. Healthy plants have better resistance to insect pressure so choose healthy plants with no signs of disease at your local nurseries.

For more information, visit the LSU AgCenter website at [lsuagcenter.com](http://lsuagcenter.com).



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## Get Your Garden Ready: Spring Fertilization for Fruiting Plants

By Michael Polozola II, PhD



Spring is the ideal time to consider fertilizing your garden, especially for fruiting plants and trees. The perfect time to apply fertilizer is as your plants are leaving winter dormancy. My most common recommendation for the first application in a calendar year is in early March, right before warmer temperatures trigger a flush of growth.

The type of fertilizer you use depends on what you are growing. For fruiting plants and trees, it's crucial to do a soil test before making fertilizer choices. Your best options will vary based on your soil pH and the nutrients

already present. If you have previously fertilized the area, you may find that no additions are necessary or that a pH modification is needed.

Soil pH is one of the biggest factors that determine whether a plant can use the nutrients in the soil. In extreme cases, soil may have all the nutrients a plant needs, but an unsuitable pH can prevent plant uptake. The best range for most fruiting plants falls within 6.0 to 7.5, but different plants thrive in different pH ranges. For example, blueberries do best in very acidic soils with a pH of around 4.5. In general, for a home orchard, aim to keep the pH around 6.5.

Correcting a low soil pH with a lime application can readily bring it up to an acceptable level. A high soil pH is slightly more difficult to manage but can be treated by



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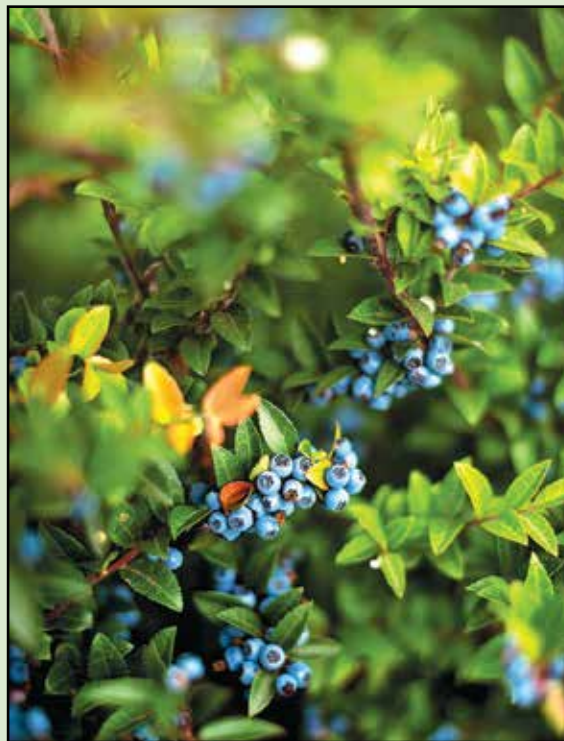
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changing your nitrogen source, using elemental sulfur, or increasing soil organic matter. I encourage you to contact your extension agent to find what would be best for your specific situation.

Different fruiting plants have specific nutrient needs. For example, pecan trees often require additional zinc and, rarely, nickel. Incorporating these nutrients into your fertilization plan can help ensure healthy growth and nut production.

Most established fruiting trees and plants benefit from regular, balanced fertilization rather than heavy or specialized treatments. Using a general-purpose fertilizer, such as 8-8-8 or 13-13-13, applied at appropriate rates, can support healthy growth and fruit production.

Fertilization rates vary for different fruit species and ages. Young fruit trees typically need 0.5 to 1 pound of balanced fertilizer per tree annually. Intermediate trees (those that are not fully mature but older than young trees) may require 1 to 5 pounds of fertilizer per tree annually. Mature fruit trees generally need 5 to 10 pounds of fertilizer per tree annually, depending on their size and species. Larger trees, like Pecans, needs can change over time. Young pecan trees require about 1 pound of fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter annually. Very large pecan trees can require 25 to 50 pounds of fertilizer annually.

Consider using organic fertilizers like compost or manure, which can improve soil

health over time. Organic options are beneficial for long-term soil fertility and plant health. They release nutrients slowly, providing a steady supply to your plants and enhancing soil structure and microbial activity.

Establishing a fertilization schedule can help ensure your fruiting plants and trees receive nutrients at the right times. Start with a heavier application in early spring to support initial growth, then apply lighter amounts in late May and early August. This approach helps prevent excessive vegetative growth, which can occur at the expense of fruit development.

Avoid common fertilization mistakes such as over-fertilizing or applying fertilizer too close to the trunk. Over-fertilizing can lead to nutrient burn, while applying too close to the trunk can damage the root system.

Remember, your soil is just as unique as you are. It's best to get a soil test done to find out what conditions are distinctive to your yard and growing conditions. With that information, your local extension agent can help you make choices tailored to perfectly fit your needs.



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# Author Brian Henderson

By Michael Wynne

In my interviewing of authors all of these years, I never know what to expect that they will be like or what they will say. Sometimes, authors themselves are nearly not as interesting as their books are. Other times, authors can be much more interesting than their books should have been. On rare occasions, I meet an author that proverbially “blows me away” by being both fascinating personally as well as their equally fascinating books. The rare author that actually meets those criteria is Mr. Brian Henderson of Alexandria, a name that I expect that we all will be hearing a lot more in coming years. Here is his impressive story.

The son of an Air Force Tech Sergeant, Brian was born in California, but lived in half a dozen states where his father was assigned. Prior to his father’s marriage to an Alexandria native, his father had been transferred to Alexandria in 1954 as an early staff member of England Air Force Base. Brian attended Tioga and Peabody High in Alexandria before dropping out to work at Martco. But Brian had something in him to want to pursue a better life and he remarkably returned to high school, graduating at age 20. He then went to LC (now LCU) during the day while still working all night. At LC, he decided to go into social work. “I liked talking with people and helping people with their problems,” Brian shared with me. But Brian didn’t like the negative parts of the job, like “taking people’s children away from them.” Even with all of this going on to fill up his day, he also married and had a son along with two stepdaughters.

His earliest memory of wanting to write was at age nine. “When I was a little kid, I had severe asthma and couldn’t go outside to play, so I started reading encyclopedias. I got an idea from them when I read about the Sahara Desert and the French Foreign



Legion, so I created a story.” The story that he created way back in 1981 was called “Desert Bandits.” “I wrote a story about three soldiers trapped in the desert facing many different obstacles.” When I complimented him on his great imagination as he provided details on the story, he humbly responded, “I felt like God was helping me write the story. I don’t take any credit for any of my writings.”

Brian continued to write, even ghostwriting book reports and term papers for others upon request, without asking for payment. While he seemingly wrote constantly, writing that resulted in 12 full-length novels of which seven have been copyrighted, many ideas would come to him that he wanted to pursue further on paper. His first full-length written adult novel was “The Dirty South,” written in 1997. Subsequently, he has published three novels so far: “Alamo Dawn,” “When The Levee Breaks,” and “When The Rain Came.” “Alamo Dawn” concerns the political aspects of the government dealing with the Black community. “When The Levee Breaks”

is a comedy about two brothers, one Creole and one Cajun, and a woman, who got tired of trolling for a living and went on a crime spree. “When The Rain Came” is the retelling of Hurricane Katrina from the perspective of the people of New Orleans and the development of what became Drug Cliques that brought up the city’s murder rate. One of Brian’s future books, “Awakening- The Crisis” is about two African-American parents and their child caught in an African hostage crisis. Another upcoming book, “The Extremists,” is about eight international jewel thieves going to war over a diamond heist.

Brian is planning to work with Netflix on a television series based on one of his books. Knowing Brian as I know him now, if anyone can accomplish that difficult task, Brian surely can. His books are available on Amazon and make a good read.

## Ruff Ride?

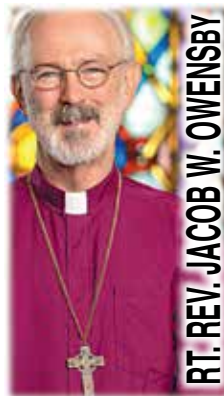
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# From Stone to Water

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



RT. REV. JACOB W. OWENSBY

“Be like water.” I first heard this at the height of my wary cynicism phase. In my universe, most other people and all of society’s institutions would eventually let you down. To be fair to my younger self, I was only just learning to navigate young adulthood. My childhood memories of abuse, rejection, and exploitation were still open wounds.

Paradoxically, these wounds announced themselves to me in nagging feelings of shame that occasionally erupted into turbulent, overwhelming storms. In other words, the anger I felt at those who injured me had mutated into a persistent sense that I could never measure up. I was just no good.

Admitting to my inner turmoil and to the injuries that gave rise to it felt too risky at the time. So, I adopted the posture of wary cynicism. To borrow a phrase from Timon of The Lion King: when the world turned its back on me, I turned my back on the world. Then, I heard, “You are like stone. Be like water.” For once, instead of dismissing what I heard with my habitual internal eye roll, I stopped and listened. Something like this is what followed:

Consider what it’s like to draw on a stone, on sand, and on water. Of the three, the

stone is the hardest, the least vulnerable. Leaving a mark on the stone is difficult. You may need to use a hammer and chisel. As a result, marks left on the stone endure for a very, very long time.

By contrast, sand offers a more cooperative medium. If you’ve been to the beach, you know that, with a rake or a shovel or even a toe, you can draw all manner of things on the sand. What you draw will last for a while, but it won’t be permanent. Wind and waves will soon erase the marks you’ve made.

You can draw on water with your finger if you like, but the mark you make disappears just as soon as you make it. Water remains open to the world and receives the world’s influence even to its very depths. Water is moved, and yet it is not disfigured. Water is always moving beyond what has happened to it.

In a moment clarity, I realized that there is a different way to inhabit planet Earth. I was like a stone. My identity was bound up with my habitual resentment, bitterness, and sense of alienation. My wounds were defining me.

Now I believe—I have experienced—that new life emerges from broken places. A new kind of life, not merely the next chapter of the old sort of life we had lived previously. Stone becomes water. That’s one way that I understand the resurrection.



The apostle Paul characterized the resurrection as a physical body giving way to a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44). Elsewhere, he said that in Christ we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul had in mind both what happens to us after we die and how Jesus’s resurrection transforms our lives right here on planet Earth.

In Christ, God’s love radically transforms us. Or, more accurately, God’s love decisively restores us to our true selves—the image of God. You see, Jesus teaches us to live in this world in a way startlingly different from the usual pattern of things because that way of living resembles how God loves: If someone steals your coat, give them the shirt off your back. Forgive the unrepentant. Love your enemy. Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the shabbily dressed. Deserving has not the first thing to do with it. Welcome the stranger—especially the one you think will ruin the neighborhood.

Apparently, some among the fledgling Christian community in Corinth were having a difficult time buying all of this. They couldn’t believe that the resurrection was a real thing, at least, not real enough to act on it during the work week. I can’t really blame them. Just look at the world they inhabited. Look at the world we inhabit. It can make you wonder about this way of love that Jesus teaches. Powerful



people enrich themselves by exploiting the vulnerable. Nations are addicted to war. The luxuriously well-fed dwell alongside the famished. Mass shootings occur so frequently that they disappear from the news cycle in the blink of an eye. Racial hatred still leads to oppression and violence.

But Paul was relentless. He could have taught faith alone, as if what we believed is all that matters. Or he could have told us to hope for what might happen in the afterlife. But he did more. He told us that faith and hope are crucial, but love is the key. Love what God loves how God loves it. Now. Right here on planet Earth. That’s the love that will change each of us. That’s the love that

will change this world (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Much of the world is stone-like. Honestly, on plenty of days, so am I. But I have seen people who are like water. And on my best days, I have been water-like, too.

*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](http://jakeowensby.com).*



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# LSUA Men's Basketball Earns Back-to-Back RRAC Tournament Championships

By Caleb Dunlop

The LSUA Men's Basketball team has once again proven its dominance, securing its second consecutive Red River Athletic Conference (RRAC) Tournament Championship with a hard-fought 88-79 victory over the University of the Southwest (NM) in the tournament final. This win caps off a stellar season for the Generals, who were also crowned RRAC Regular Season Champions for the second straight year in February.



Trailing by as much as 14 points in the first half, LSUA (28-2, 22-2 RRAC) mounted an impressive comeback before halftime, tying the game 41-41 as the buzzer sounded. Fresh off being named RRAC Player of the Year, Kashie Natt delivered a season-high 36-point performance, leading the Generals with relentless offensive execution. After battling for the lead in the second half, LSUA pulled away in the final minutes, answering every challenge from the Mustangs (17-13, 12-12 RRAC). Key plays from Xavier Smith, Jordan Decuir, and Kaleb Pouncy helped keep LSUA ahead, solidifying the victory. Decuir added 17 points in a strong team effort, while Pouncy contributed 16 points off the bench.

With the tournament title secured, the Generals now shift their focus to the NAIA Men's Basketball Championship, where they await their first-round opponent. LSUA has already been announced as a host site for the first and second rounds,



ensuring the Generals will have a home-court advantage as they continue their pursuit of a national title.

The LSUA Women's Basketball team fell just short in the RRAC Tournament Final, dropping a 54-51 contest to LSU Shreveport. A clutch three-pointer from Dannah Martin-Hartwick with 18.2 seconds left tied the game at 51-51, but a three-point play from LSUS in the final moments sealed the victory for the Pilots (27-3, 23-1 RRAC). The Generals (23-8, 18-6 RRAC) showcased strong defensive efforts, holding LSUS to just 31.3% shooting, including a 21.4% first-quarter mark. Jewel Jones led LSUA with 18 points, while Justice Young recorded a double-double with 11 points and 11 rebounds. Head Coach Billy Perkins praised his team's effort, emphasizing their defensive resilience and commitment throughout the tournament.

Keep up with the Generals at [LSUAGenerals.com](http://LSUAGenerals.com).

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# Relay For Life of Central Louisiana Works to Help End Cancer As We Know It

The annual American Cancer Society Relay For Life of Central Louisiana presented by RoyOMartin, slated for Friday, April 4th in Downtown Alexandria, will unite the community to celebrate survivors and remember those lost to the disease

On Wednesday, April 2nd, Relay for Life of Central Louisiana is hosting a cancer survivor event at Bayou Haven Wedding and Events. Join us for a special evening as we celebrate our amazing cancer survivors. This heartfelt gathering joins our local cancer survivors to connect, share stories, and enjoy a delicious meal together. Let's honor their strength and resilience!



This is a 16+ event for guests. Space is limited so register today! <https://Relayforlifecenlasurvivordinner.eventbrite.com>

In 2025, roughly 2 million new cancer cases and 618,120 deaths from cancer are expected to occur in the United States, with more than 29,980 new cases expected to occur here in Louisiana. Cancer continues to be the second most common cause of death among Americans, after heart disease. The American Cancer Society Relay For Life of Central Louisiana aims to help end cancer as we know it for everyone..



“Relay For Life is a volunteer-led movement that unites communities to celebrate cancer survivors, remember loved ones lost to cancer and raise funds to improve the lives of people with cancer and their families,” said Jennifer Nichols, 2025 Event Co-Chair. “Thanks to that shared passion, we are working to help the American Cancer Society advance its mission through advocacy, research and patient support in an effort to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat and survive cancer.”

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Relay For Life of Central Louisiana, Presented by RoyOMartin, will include:

- Entertainment by Rouge Krewe;
- Disney themed opening ceremonies;
- Cancer Survivor celebration with confetti cannons;
- Luminaria Ceremony with fireworks sponsored by Rapides Regional Medical Center;
- Food, Kids Games, Desserts, and more!

Founded by Dr. Gordy Klatt in Tacoma, Washington, in 1985, Relay For Life unites communities across the globe to celebrate people who have been touched by cancer, remember loved ones lost and take action for lifesaving change. Since 1985, Relay For Life has raised over \$7 billion to help save lives from cancer.



Relay For Life of Central Louisiana raises money for research, advocacy, and patient services. Last year, Central Louisiana cancer patients received over 845 free rides to treatment and over 2200 free nights of out-of-town lodging for treatment.

Money raised each year by the more than 250,000 Relay participants across the country help support the American Cancer Society's mission in countless ways, including funding and conducting breakthrough research, providing education and advocating for the needs of cancer patients and their families, and providing essential services throughout their cancer journey.

There are many ways to get involved in Relay For Life, including:

- Join: Host a campsite, fundraiser, or both! [Relayforlife.org/cenla](http://Relayforlife.org/cenla)
- Register as a survivor: visit our website [relayforlife.org/cenla](http://relayforlife.org/cenla) or call (800) 227-2345
- Donate: Your donation fuels the American Cancer Society's fight against cancer. [Relayforlife.org/cenla](http://Relayforlife.org/cenla)
- Attend Relay on Friday, April 4th!



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# Giving Cenla a Healthy Start

By Rebekah Galle

Cenla Healthy Start is a free support program for expectant mothers and parents with children up to 18 months of age. Becoming a parent brings many new questions and decisions, and joining Healthy Start may be one of the most important choices you make for you and your baby. Our program provides information to better understand pregnancy, prepare for labor and delivery, and meet the challenges of parenting a newborn.

Cenla Healthy Start offers case management, individual and couple's counseling, doula services, car seat adjustments, breastfeeding support, fatherhood support, and assistance with obtaining baby items. Our program incentivizes healthy habits by offering points which can be redeemed in our parent store. All of our services are 100% free, regardless of the family's insurance or income status.



We serve all families who live in Region 6, which includes Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant, Lasalle, Rapides, Vernon, and Winn Parish. We hope to meet mothers where they are comfortable, so we offer visits in-home, virtually, or in a community setting.

Having a child comes with many challenges, and we hope to create a sense of support and community for families. Cenla Healthy Start has also started maternal support groups, which includes in-person and virtual options. We also recently launched "Love & Loss," which is a maternal bereavement support group. Our support groups are open to any mother, regardless of the age of her child!

We have also started a Healthy Start Consortium, which is a multifaceted, multidisciplinary group of providers, partners, and community members with a common goal—to improve infant and maternal health. The Healthy Start

Consortium meets on a quarterly basis to discuss community needs and take action to address the identified needs.

If you are interested in learning more about joining our Consortium, please email Rebekah Galle at [rgalle@acadianafamilytree.org](mailto:rgalle@acadianafamilytree.org). If you are pregnant or a new mother, please give us a call at (318) 725-4220 or reach out via email at [cenlahealthystart@acadianafamilytree.org](mailto:cenlahealthystart@acadianafamilytree.org)




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# Dr. Gary Jones: Leading the Way in Cardiovascular Care, Limb Salvage, and Diabetes Management



*On June 27, 2023, Dr. Gary Jones performed life-saving open-heart surgery on Major Bailey of Natchitoches, bypassing two arteries, replacing his mitral valve, and implanting the Impella 5.5® with SmartAssist heart pump. Dr. Jones was the first surgeon in Rapides Parish and several surrounding parishes to implant this advanced device, marking a significant milestone in cardiac care.*

For over 36 years, Dr. Gary P. Jones has been a trusted name in cardiovascular and thoracic surgery in Central Louisiana. Born and raised in Franklin, LA, he relocated to Alexandria in 1989 to provide expert cardiovascular care to the CENLA community. Dr. Jones's distinguished career includes prestigious training and honors, reflecting his dedication to exceptional patient care. After earning his undergraduate degree from Tulane University, he received his M.D. from Tulane School of Medicine. He trained with the U.S. Army Medical Corps and completed his cardiovascular residency at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. His expertise led to extraordinary assignments, including serving as the Cardiovascular & Thoracic Surgeon on President Ronald Reagan's medical team during his visit to Guam and later as the Cardiovascular & Thoracic Surgeon assigned to Nelson Mandela's medical team during his visit to Baton Rouge.

Over the years, Dr. Jones has steered and molded his practice into a "one-stop shop" for cardiovascular care, where patients can access a wide range of services all under one roof, making their healthcare journey more seamless and efficient. He utilizes the latest advancements in minimally invasive procedures to enhance healing, shorten hospital stays, and expedite recovery times. However, should a more complicated surgical procedure be warranted, Dr. Jones has the training and expertise to provide the best care in any situation.

His practice provides an array of services, including open surgeries for cardiovascular and thoracic disease, advanced wound care, remote patient monitoring, and treatment for peripheral artery disease. Specialized programs like Diabetes Relief of Louisiana integrate innovative technology with compassionate care, supporting the well-being of patients across the region.

Dr. Jones has been at the forefront of minimally invasive cardiac interventions, including Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR). This procedure offers a life-changing option for patients with severe aortic stenosis, restoring heart function and improving quality of life with reduced surgical risks and faster recovery times. He also performs Endovascular Aneurysm Repair (EVAR) for Abdominal

Aortic Aneurysms (AAA), using stent technology to treat aneurysms while minimizing patient downtime. A passionate advocate for limb preservation, Dr. Jones founded a limb salvage program to prevent unnecessary amputations due to PAD. Using techniques like angioplasty, atherectomy, and stenting, he restores blood flow, enhancing patients' mobility and quality of life. Beyond patient care, he supports the Amputation Reduction and Compassion (ARC) Act, working with legislators to mandate coverage for PAD screenings, ensuring early detection and intervention.

With over 40 years of experience, Dr. Jones launched "Keep Louisiana Walking," a program dedicated to raising awareness of PAD risk factors and encouraging early screenings. Through education and outreach, the initiative empowers residents to take control of their vascular health, promoting prevention and healthier lifestyles.

Dr. Jones has been a pioneer in adopting cutting-edge technologies. Here are a few of his medical "firsts":

- September 2022: First in Louisiana to use Medtronic's IN.PACT™ 018 drug-coated balloon for femoropopliteal artery revascularization.
- June 2023: First in Rapides and surrounding parishes to implant the Impella 5.5® heart pump with SmartAssist during open-heart surgery.
- July 2024: First in Louisiana to perform endovascular abdominal aneurysm repair using Medtronic's Steerant™ Aortic Guidewire.

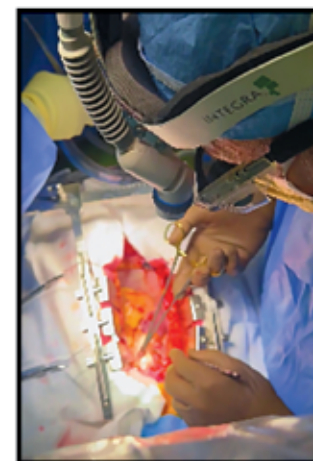
In addition to surgical care, Dr. Jones established an Advanced Wound Care Clinic at LACVT, specializing in diabetic and vascular wound management. The clinic offers cutting-edge treatments, including biological tissues and specialized dressings, to promote faster healing and prevent serious complications such as infections and amputations. As Dr. Jones often says, "No blood flow, no healing."

Understanding the strong link between heart disease and diabetes, Dr.

Jones opened Diabetes Relief of Louisiana to focus on prevention, early diagnosis, and intervention. Now celebrating its fourth anniversary, the center has transformed diabetes care with its patented metabolic restoration therapy.

Patients report remarkable benefits, including 95% less neuropathy, a 50% reduction in medications, improved kidney function, improved diabetic retinopathy, faster wound healing, and lower A1C levels. These results highlight the life-changing impact of Dr. Jones's innovative approach, helping individuals regain health and quality of life.

For nearly four decades, Dr. Jones has worked alongside cardiologists, healthcare providers, and hospital administrators in Alexandria, LA to deliver advanced cardiovascular care. His dedication to saving lives and limbs continues to make a lasting impact on the CENLA community. Patients trust his expertise, compassion, and commitment to personalized care. At LACVT and Diabetes Relief of Louisiana, Dr. Jones's mission extends beyond medicine, offering support, trust, and a personal connection at every step of the healthcare journey.



# The Importance of Good “Eye Hygiene”

By Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.



When one thinks of hygiene, they usually immediately think of general body cleanliness or the teeth and gums. The eyes should not be overlooked, especially if the eyes are dry, red, or irritated.

The eyelids can trap debris and become inflamed if not properly cleaned around

the lash and lid area. Normal everyday face cleaning usually does the trick and “no tears” shampoo and pre-moistened lid scrubs are perfect for cleaning around the eyes. Blepharitis is an eye condition in which the lids become inflamed and can lead to a dryness and irritation. It can be caused by poor lid hygiene. The

glands that secrete natural lubricants from the lids to the eyes can also become inflamed (*meibomian gland dysfunction*) due to poor lid hygiene. Allergies can cause the eyes to be red and itchy. Simply using artificial tears or allergy eye drops can greatly reduce these symptoms.

Granted, most of us go through life without eye problems and a normal routine keeps the lids and eyes clean and healthy. If eye irritation and dryness persist, a visit to the eye doctor can result in some helpful recommendations for eye drops and hygiene regimine.

Dr. Carney is available for all your eye care needs by appointment at Wallace Eye Associates by calling (318) 448-0221.





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# Spring Forward With Your Health

By Cornel D. Leblanc D.C.



One of the main objectives at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center is that we want to see our patients thrive in all aspects of their health, whether that be competing in sports, traveling, work, or even spending time with family. Spring is around the corner, and many people suffer from chronic headaches, stress, anxiety, TMJ, chronic fatigue syndrome, and so on. In the effort to help everyone maximize their health, we are bringing in state-of-the-art equipment that will help manage and treat these symptoms, called the Rezzimax. The Rezzimax is an amazing instrument that will target chronic pain and muscles that retain stress and tension for optimal health relief.

Rezzimax is a handheld device that utilizes vibrational therapy to optimize your nervous system. The vibrational therapy is also known as Pulsed Electromagnetic Field Therapy (PEMF), which inspires healing, relieves pain, and improves circulation. The Rezzimax can help anyone that suffers with chronic pain, stress, anxiety, headaches, migraines, sleep disturbances, joint pain, and stiffness, increases blood circulation, and help potentially supports organ health.

We have had firsthand accounts of patients in our office that have benefited from the Rezzimax. One of our success stories is of a patient that went to a conference in Atlanta, Georgia, and while she was there, she was experiencing nausea, upset stomach, and was vomiting. The unit is small enough to travel with and she used the Rezzimax to achieve relief from her symptoms. We had another patient who had chronic headaches, used the Rezzimax, and has found relief from her headaches. We,





also, had a two-year-old boy that had abnormal muscle spasms from his arm muscles being contracted for long periods of time. His mother bought him into our office and had amazing results with the Rezzimax restoring her son's range of motion.

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# Learn About Colorectal Cancer and When to Start Screenings

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month and CHRISTUS Health recognizes this important campaign by providing crucial information about the second-deadliest cancer in the U.S., which can be detected with screenings. “Colorectal cancer is cancer located in the colon or rectum, which can start out as a noncancerous tumor or polyp,” said Dr. Baochong B. Chang, hematology oncology specialist with CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital. “It is very important to recognize the signs and symptoms of the cancer.”



younger adults. Experts are not sure why there is an increase in younger adults getting colon cancer, but point to poor diet, obesity, lack of exercise, tobacco and alcohol use as well as environmental impacts such as exposure to chemicals as possible factors. Family history also plays a role. “Early detection increases the chance of a cure,” Chang said.

Chang said recognizing National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month is a

way for people to learn about the cancer, how to spot it and when to be screened for it.

To learn more about colorectal cancer and screenings, speak with your primary care provider or visit [CHRISTUSHealth.org](http://CHRISTUSHealth.org).



Chang said those symptoms can be changes in bowel movements, such as diarrhea or constipation; the consistency, color and even shape of the stool; and abdominal pain, cramping or bloating. If symptoms last for one to two weeks, you should seek medical attention and speak with your primary care physician, he said. “A colonoscopy is needed to evaluate for colorectal cancer,” Chang said. “During that procedure, we will inspect the inside lining of the colon and rectum, and the sooner a polyp is found, the better.”

A colonoscopy is performed while a patient is sedated. A colonoscope, which is a small, lighted camera attached to the end of a long, thin, flexible tube, is advanced through the colon to the end. While advancing, the catheter pumps air into the colon to inflate it and the camera transmits video of inside the colon to a monitor.

Chang said treatment for colorectal cancer depends on the stage of cancer. “If we find the tumor is isolated in the colon, then surgery becomes our first option,” she said. “If it is advanced colorectal cancer that has traveled to the lymph nodes, chemotherapy and/or radiation may be used to shrink the tumor before its removed surgically.”

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force now recommends adults start getting screened for colorectal cancer at age 45, five years earlier than the previous guidelines. The change in 2021 was based on the trend of growing cases among



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# River Oaks Membership Drive and Summer Arts Studio Early Enrollment



River Oaks Square Arts Center is starting 2025 strong with its highly anticipated annual membership drive already underway. Becoming a member offers an opportunity to support and deeply engage with the local arts community. “Membership contributions support much more than exhibitions,” says Rachael Dauzat, Executive Director at River Oaks. “They provide vital resources that enable us to maintain outreach programs, educational workshops, community events, and continue showcasing high-caliber artists that would typically be accessible only in larger metropolitan areas. We are deeply grateful for the continued generosity of our community, whose dedication has sustained River Oaks for over four decades.”

In addition to its exhibition lineup, which can now be found on posters all over Central Louisiana, River Oaks is preparing for the Annual Summer Arts Studio, Central Louisiana’s largest and longest-running visual arts summer camp. Registration opens on Wednesday, March 19th for members, and Wednesday, April 2nd for non-members. The 2025 Summer Arts Studio invites participants on an exciting journey around the globe to discover the rich artistic cultures of the seven continents. Each of the seven weeks will focus on a different continent, immersing students in diverse artistic traditions, from the vibrant colors of Aboriginal art to the intricate details found in Hindu and Buddhist sculptures.

Students will also explore techniques used in Chinese ceramics and paintings, the elegant simplicity of Japanese screens and woodblock prints, and the historical significance of Indian and Persian miniature paintings. Under the guidance of professional

artists, these themed sessions promise a well-rounded artistic experience, fostering creative exploration, cultural understanding, and personal growth.

All SAS registrations will be processed through the HISawyer platform. Those interested in early registration should ensure their membership is active through the River Oaks member portal. Links for member registration will go live at 10:00am on March 19th. To become a member and secure your early registration spot, visit the HISawyer member portal at <https://shorturl.at/iOoR2>.

Preparations are also underway for the 11th Annual Dirty South Cup Call & Competition. Opening on April 10th and running through May 25th, this national competition attracts attention from ceramicists and pottery enthusiasts from across the United States. Guest Juror Chris Pate, a distinguished ceramic artist known for his atmospheric and wood-fired ceramics, will lead the exhibition. His expertise, coupled with his passion for community and clay, ensures this year’s competition will continue to captivate both artists and visitors alike.

River Oaks invites both returning and new members to join the community and share in the excitement, growth, and celebration of the arts in Central Louisiana! For information on membership, upcoming events, or to register for the Summer Arts Studio, please contact River Oaks at (318) 473-2670, visit [RiverOaksArtsCenter.com](http://RiverOaksArtsCenter.com), or find us on Facebook at River Oaks Arts Center.



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# Spring 2025 at the Alexandria Museum of Art

By Dana Lyles & Olivia Helmer

Louisiana native artist George Rodrigue (American/Louisiana, 1944-2013) is perhaps most widely known for his Blue Dog paintings, but the Life & Legacy Foundation's traveling exhibition "The River is Road" explores an earlier time in his oeuvre. This exhibition is the first of its kind and traces 45 years of the river in George Rodrigue's paintings, exploring the unique ways Rodrigue used the river as a reference to his Cajun heritage, and ultimately as a metaphor for the journey of life. Rodrigue reflected that the people of Louisiana "had no roads; we just had the water. They were the natural fairways for commerce, development, and everything necessary for settlers to expand."



Appropriately, this exhibition will culminate in the heart of Louisiana and along the Red River at the Alexandria Museum of Art this spring. Also returning to AMoA with this exhibition is a part of the museum's permanent collection, Rodrigue's 1972 oil on canvas painting, "Steamboat," which has been traveling with the exhibition for the past two years. This painting was the second piece of art to be accessioned into the museum's permanent collection, setting the tone for its collection comprised of Louisiana, Southern, and American modern and contemporary art, with additional focus on artists who influenced the modern art movement.

The museum first opened its doors in 1977 as the public organ of the Central Louisiana Art Association, which had existed since 1938. The first piece ever accessioned into the museum was by a local female artist, Kitty Wilkins, closely followed by Rodrigue's "Steamboat," a gift from Robert K. Fell. These two works of art are emblematic of the museum's collection which now contains over 1,400 pieces from artists all over the world, but maintains an emphasis on artists and works that exemplify the Southern experience, including other notable Louisiana artists such as Ida Kohlmeyer, Clementine Hunter, Alexander Drysdale, among many more.

AMoA is also kicking off registration for the Annual Louisiana Dragon Boat Races. Harkening back to Rodrigue's words, the waterways of Cenla have been central to the success of the Museum since 2010. This annual fundraiser ensures the continuance and growth of the arts hub each year. Teams of 16 paddlers and a drummer will gather at Buhlow Lake on Saturday, May 3rd for a day of community and friendly competition. Teams comprise of coworkers, friends, church families, and school groups. If you are interested in joining the fun, visit our website at [louisianadragonboatracetraces.com](http://louisianadragonboatracetraces.com) for more information and registration forms. The

Museum is grateful for the current Louisiana Dragon Boat Sponsors: Christus St. Francis Cabrini Hospital, Ratcliff Construction, Boise Cascade, Walker Automotive, Explore Alexandria Pineville, CLECO, and the City of Pineville. It's not too late to become a sponsor! Call the museum at (318) 443-3458 for more information.



The River is the Road will be on view from March 7th through June 21st at the Alexandria Museum of Art, located at 933 Second Street in Downtown Alexandria.

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# Hope Out of Darkness

By Rev. James G. Theus

Finally, the fullness of time has arrived. This nation—our Motherland—has matured into the prophetic vision of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character.”



Dreams can come true, but first, we must feed them so that they can feed us. My dream has come true. Doing ministry in Cenla for a half a century now, lately in south Rapides and Avoyelles parishes, has awakened in me an awareness of the heroic fiber and faith-filled character of Solomon Northup. His autobiography, “Twelve Years a Slave,” was unearthed and edited at LSUA by Sue Eakin (Myrtle Sue Lyles was born in 1918 just north of Cheneyville). The award-winning film based on the book and directed by Steve McQueen, the Black British artist, has become an enduring salute to this extraordinary human being.

Northup was born a free man in 1807 in upstate New York; kidnapped and sold into slavery at the slave market in New Orleans. He was then shipped to Cenla in 1814. Twelve years later, he was rescued by gaining his freedom at the courthouse in Marksville. This true American hero returned home to write about his experience as an enslaved person. These writings became fuel to the fire which led to Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Evidence suggests that he join the Underground Railroad effort to help rescue others from slavery.

In my work as a pastor over the last half century, I have felt the shadow if his legacy in my attempts at helping others find their own path to freedom from all that shackles the human spirit. His story is filled with the salvific power of God’s redeeming Grace. All the boxes are checked which define Solomon Northup as a true hero.

Thus and therefore, I am pleased and honored to announce that the Solomon Northup Committee for Commemorative Works (snccw.com) has created a masterful statue of Solomon Northup. The artist is the Emmy award-winning sculptor, Wesley Wofford. “Hope out of Darkness” is the title of this masterful piece of public art. This a true odyssey of a real man, worthy of the title “hero.” Solomon Northup serves as a role model of courage, endurance, and faith. In the words of the sculptor, “It stands as a reminder that our freedoms are rooted in uncomfortable truths we must



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*Solomon Northup*

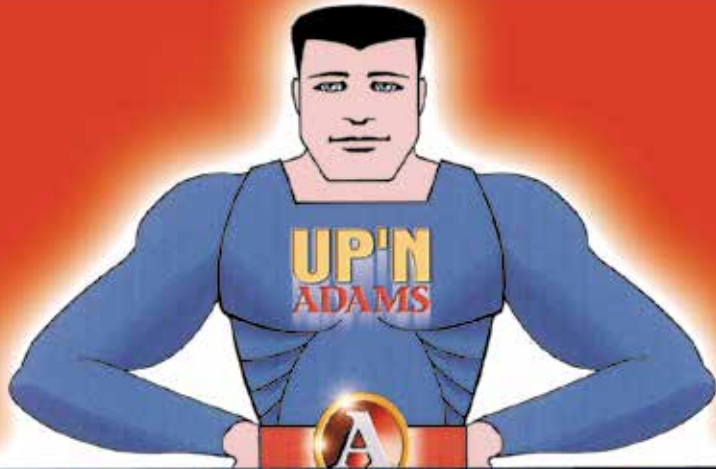
continually face. Solomon Northup’s steadfast perseverance will echo for generations, inspiring others to overcome their own struggles, no matter how insurmountable they may appear.”

This month, on Thursday, March 20th, the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce will host a reception at the Alexandria Museum of Art, located at 933 Main Street in Downtown Alexandria, beginning at 5:00pm. The reception is open to the public and will include refreshments

following. For the remainder of 2025, the statue will travel, retracing the steps of Northup’s amazing journey.

The statue’s permanent home is the Marksville Courthouse grounds, the place where Northup’s freedom was recognized. The statue will be unveiled at 2:00pm on Sunday, January 4, 2026, the anniversary of his release from slavery. The public is invited, so mark your calendar and be sure to attend.





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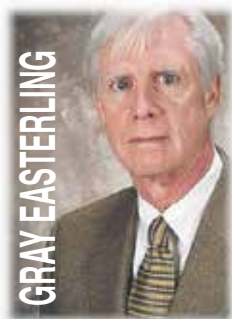
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# Retirement: Need To Know

By Gray Easterling



The January 2025 Financial Advisor Magazine had an eye-opening article concerning retirement and I think it is important to share some of the information with you. 60% of the people who try to escape from prison are caught within the first 24 hours and 85% are caught within a week. Why? Because they were so focused on the escape, they forgot to plan for the tools, resources, and support they might need to remain free. Likewise, many people focus so much on retiring that they also forget about what it takes to enjoy life after becoming unemployed. It requires a lot more than managing your retirement financial nest egg. First, realize that without planning, retirement is an empty vessel. It is up to you to fill up that vessel with things that you value, want to do, and are important to you. If you don't, you will have problems with the transition. Statistically, retirees are twice as likely to report feelings of depression; alcohol abuse can come into play, as can feelings of isolation. These problems have little to do with the amount of money saved, but more with mindsets, daily actions, health, and relationships.



We often hear from new retirees that they are “busier than ever,” but what they don't say is that the activities are meaningless, and they feel less connected because they aren't seeing family, friends, or former associates. It may be because they have not made concrete and specific plans that produce positive, “happy” feelings.

Retirement should not eliminate work. It could be just a reorientation of work. Instead of going to the office, they may choose to work on themselves, their health, their relationships, identity, purpose, and more. Plan to walk into retirement prepared to embrace the jobs ahead rather than thinking that they are going to be on a permanent lunch break. Take steps to connect with a new group of folks in a similar stage of life. Research suggests that active people with a strong social network are happier in retirement, live longer, and may delay the onset of medical problems.

Another suggestion is to start working on your bucket list before retirement so that it becomes part of your normal routine. We are creatures of habit and there is a higher likelihood of continuing an ingrained activity than starting postretirement. Why not start living your dreams a little bit earlier? Finally, we must be honest and realize

that we will not live forever. Avoid putting off things that are most important to you. Try not to come to the end of live with a list of “I wish I had.”

I hope you take these words to heart. Beverly and I talk a lot about how we will spend our time and money once I retire. We have had many of the thoughts noted above. It is not an easy discussion, but a very important one that we are still exploring. My suggestion is not to wait as long as we have. Start earlier. Cherish the ones you love and stay close to your loved ones. Life is full of surprises and not all of them are positive. Consider these words from 1 Timothy: “As for those who in the present world are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.” God's peace and love to all.

*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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# Can My Minor Children Draw Off of My Social Security Disability?

By Annie Lemoine Newton



Yes, your minor children can be eligible to receive up to half of the parent's benefit amount. The amount depends on the parent's Social Security earnings record and how many other people are drawing from the parent's record. The child must be younger than 18, unless he or she is still in high school at age 19. Social Security can sometimes even pay benefits to stepchildren, grandchildren, or adopted children. This depends on if the parent was financially responsible for the child prior to becoming disabled.

If you have questions or need help filing for Social Security Disability, 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](http://www.lemoinelawfirm.com).



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## The Pros and Cons of Critical Illness Insurance

By Wesley Watkins



In the United States—and especially the deep South—health concerns among families are an everyday conversation. Medical bills increase every year and insurance benefits either decrease or cost more every paycheck (or both). Critical illness insurance is an insurance policy that has gained popularity over the recent years. But what exactly is critical illness insurance, and what are its advantages and disadvantages?

Critical illness insurance is a type of insurance that provides a lump-sum payment, such as \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$25,000 if the policyholder is diagnosed with a specified critical illness. These illnesses typically include: cancer, heart attack, stroke, major organ transplant, Parkinson's disease, and other severe conditions. The money received from the policy can be used at the policyholder's discretion, whether for medical expenses, household bills, or any other financial needs.

There are several upsides of Critical Illness Insurance:

**Financial Security:** One of the most significant advantages of critical illness insurance is the financial security it offers. The lump-sum payment can help cover the high costs associated with treatment, rehabilitation, and any necessary lifestyle changes, such as home modifications or hiring in-home care or just some extra money to pay bills. You would be amazed how many families don't have any emergency funds.

**Flexibility:** Unlike traditional health insurance, the money from critical illness insurance can be used for any purpose. This flexibility allows policyholders to address their unique financial needs during a challenging time.

**Peace of Mind:** Knowing that there is a financial cushion in place can provide peace of mind to policyholders and their families. This assurance allows them to focus on recovery rather than worrying about financial strain.

**Supplement to Existing Coverage:** Critical illness insurance can serve as a valuable supplement to existing health insurance policies. It can cover gaps in coverage, such as high deductibles or out-of-pocket expenses, ensuring comprehensive financial protection.



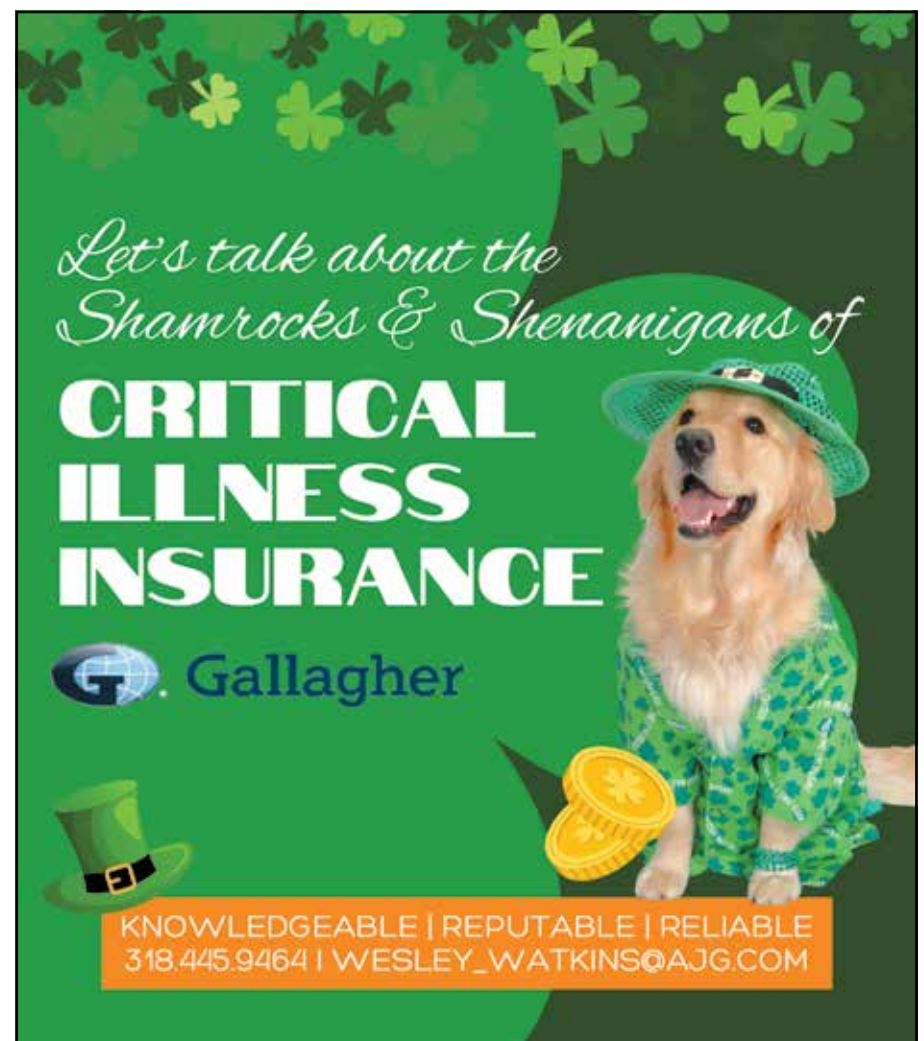
Critical Illness Insurance also has some drawbacks:

**Limited Coverage:** The main drawback is that critical illness insurance only covers specific illnesses listed in the policy. If someone is diagnosed with a condition not covered, they will not receive a payout. It's crucial to understand what is included in the policy before purchasing. Most policies won't cover illnesses like asthma or diabetes.

**Complex Terms and Conditions:** Policies can be complex, with various terms and conditions that may affect eligibility for a payout. For example, most don't cover minor strokes, just major strokes. What is a minor or major stroke and who determines that?

Critical illness insurance can be a valuable tool for managing the financial impact of severe health conditions. However, like any insurance product, it comes with its own set of pros and cons. Individuals considering this type of coverage should carefully consider all aspects and discuss them with an advisor.

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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# Entertainment Focus

## “Diamond Jubilee” Cabrini Ball: Honoring 75 Years of Service

Since 1950, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Health System has been dedicated to caring for Central Louisiana’s most vulnerable patients. For 75 years, individuals from across the region have found compassionate care and healing through the hands of our skilled physicians and associates. In celebration of CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini’s 75th anniversary, the CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation aims to raise \$75,000 in 75 days, honoring 75 years of unwavering service to Cenla. Launched on January 7th, the campaign is set to conclude with a lavish “Diamond Jubilee” Cabrini Ball on Saturday, March 22nd.

The evening will feature a seated, gourmet dinner prepared by celebrity chef John Folse, signature drinks from Jack’s, luxury live and silent auctions, and a high-energy musical performance by Elevation, a renowned party band from Dallas. Funds raised from this year’s event will directly benefit CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini’s 75th Anniversary Campaign, which will fund high-tech equipment, enhanced technology and vital patient programs for generations to come.



As a non-profit hospital, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital depends on the Cabrini Ball, and other Cabrini Foundation campaigns throughout the year, to generate the funds needed to purchase the latest cutting-edge equipment and medical advancements to serve Central

Louisiana’s sickest residents. Established in 1983 by a committed group of community leaders, the CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation plays a vital role in ensuring patients receive the highest level of care possible, close to home. Their efforts help bridge the gap between public funding and the growing costs of health care, making a direct and lasting impact on patient outcomes and overall health care in Central Louisiana.

“Thanks to philanthropic efforts, our health system has been able to expand and advance, providing even greater support to our community members in need,” said Ashley Walker, executive director of development at the CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation. “By joining us in celebrating this landmark occasion, you are making a direct investment in the health and well-being of every patient who walks through our doors.”

This year’s “Diamond Jubilee” Cabrini Ball promises to be an unforgettable evening, celebrating not only past achievements but also looking forward to future advancements in health care. The event will bring together over 600 distinguished guests, including local business leaders, health care professionals, and community members, all united by a common goal: to support and enhance the health and well-being of the Central Louisiana community. By participating in this event, you are playing a crucial role in ensuring that CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Health System continues to provide exceptional care for the next 75 years and beyond.



Festivities for this year’s Cabrini Ball begin at 6:30pm, kicking off with a cocktail reception. To purchase tickets or to donate to this year’s 75th Anniversary Campaign, please visit [christus.io/CabriniBall](http://christus.io/CabriniBall).



To check out this year’s Mobile Silent Auction or register as a Bidder, visit [2025cabriniball.cbo.io](http://2025cabriniball.cbo.io) or scan the QR Code. The silent auction opens Thursday, March 20th at 10:00am and closes Saturday, March 22nd at 10:00pm. All bidding occurs via cell phone. You do not have to be present to participate.

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## Brahms & (Mrs.) Schumann Plus Peter & the Wolf

By Joshua Zona



Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann, one of the great love stories in classical music that never really was. Clara was the wife of the young Brahms's mentor, Robert Schumann, a great Romantic composer in his own right. After Robert's death, Brahms and Clara Schumann became close with both confessing love

for the other, but history really does not know how far the relationship went. Brahms (thirteen years Clara's junior) continued as a lifelong bachelor and Clara, likewise, never remarried.



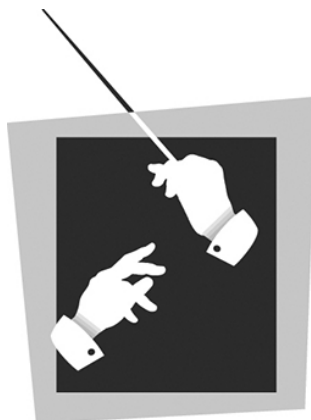
So, it is fitting that we pair these two on a concert called we've called "Brahms and (Mrs.) Schumann." Clara Weick Schumann was an accomplished pianist and composer in the middle 1800s, a time when female composers enjoyed less acceptance than they do today. Among other works, she wrote one excellent Piano Concerto which we will perform with piano soloist Anna Shelest. Twenty years ago, Anna was the first winner of the Louisiana International Piano Competition that was held in Alexandria. Her career has blossomed since her victory and we are excited to have her back.

In addition to the piano concerto, we will be performing Brahms' Symphony No. 4 in E

minor, one of the greatest symphonic works ever written. This is Brahms' final symphony and a true masterpiece, combining deep emotional expression and perfect musical structure, characteristics of all of Brahms's music.



The very next day, at 2:30pm, the Symphony will be performing a free family concert at the Alexandria Zoo featuring Serge Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." This charming musical tale that introduces the instruments of the orchestra will be narrated by Laine Berry Miller. Admission to the Zoo is free to all that attend the concert, so bring the family and enjoy a fun and educational day at the zoo!



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"Brahms and (Mrs.) Schumann" is on Saturday evening, March 15th at 7:30pm at the Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center, located at 1202 3rd Street in Downtown Alexandria. Call (318) 442-9709 or visit [RapidesSymphony.org](http://RapidesSymphony.org) to get your tickets. "Peter and the Wolf" will be presented inside the Alexandria Zoo located at 3016 Masonic Drive in Alexandria on Sunday, March 16th at 2:30pm. We hope to see you all there!

## Entertainment Focus

# Four Old Broads on the High Seas

All aboard for another round of laughter! The sassy seniors you loved in “Four Old Broads” are back—this time, they’re hitting the high seas for a cruise full of chaos, comedy, and a little intrigue! City Park Players is proud to present Leslie Kimbell’s “Four Old Broads on the High Seas,” directed by Jim Leggett and Michael Dalme. Beatrice is determined to have her pick of all the eligible men on the ship, but Maude, fresh from her win at The Miss Magnolia Senior Citizen Pageant, plans on being her biggest competition. Wedding bells are ringing for Sam and Imogene...maybe. And Eaddy...well, she just wants to know what all the fuss is about up on the topless sun deck.

Throw in a murder mystery, a fabulous drag queen, and a crazy costume party, and you’re in for a laugh-a-minute, side-splitting laugh-out-loud night of fun! The cast features Theresa Louviere, Ruth Weinzettle, Melissa Savage, Kim Patton, John Broderick, Quintin McMickens, Jared Guillory, Rodney Smetak, Claressa Nixon, Greg Coco, and Johnette McNeal-Coco. Last year’s “Four Old Broads” shows sold out, so don’t wait to grab your tickets for this hilarious sequel! “Four Old Broads on the High Seas” will run April 3rd through 13th on the Hearn Stage at Kress Theatre, located at 1101 4th Street in Downtown Alexandria. Performances begin nightly Thursdays through Saturdays at 7:30pm; Sunday matinees begin at 2:30pm. Get your advance tickets at [cnptheatre.com](http://cnptheatre.com).



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# Entertainment Focus

## Art

**March 7: George Rodrigue-The River Road Opening Reception**, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm. Culminating its traveling schedule in Alexandria, this exhibit is the first of its kind and traces 45 years of the river in George Rodrigue's paintings, exploring the unique ways Rodrigue used the river as a reference to his Cajun heritage, and ultimately as a metaphor for the journey of life. The exhibition, organized by the Life & Legacy Foundation, includes 45 original artworks, including paintings, pastels, and sculptures from the private collection of Wendy Rodrigue, the George Godfrey Rodrigue, Jr. Family Trust, and selected works borrowed from collectors—including AMoA's "Steamboat." The Exhibit will be on display through June 21st. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

**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

**March 8: The Tales of Beatrix Potter**, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 2:00pm & 4:00pm. Red River Dance Theatre Company & Alexandria Museum of Art present "The Tales of Beatrix Potter Composition" by John Lanchbery in the third-floor gallery. Reserved seating is required. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

**March 11 & April 8: 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

**March 20: Hope Out of Darkness Reception**, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 5:00pm. The Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce will host a reception to receive the sculpture of Solomon Northup by Emmy award-winning sculptor, Wesley Wofford, before the statue embarks on its year-long tour following the path of Solomon Northup on his journey to freedom. Refreshments will be served. Cost: Free.

## Music

**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

**March 15: RSO Presents "Brahms & (Mrs.) Schumann"**, Coughlin-Saunders

Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:30pm. Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann, one of the great love stories in classical music that never really was. The Symphony will present one of Mrs. Schumann's piano concertos and Brahms' Symphony No. 4. Call: 318-442-9709. rapidessymphony.org

**March 16: RSO Presents "Peter & the Wolf"**, Alexandria Zoo (3016 Masonic Drive, Alexandria), 2:30pm. The Symphony will perform a family concert at the Zoo featuring Serge Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." This charming musical tale that introduces the instruments of the orchestra will be narrated by Laine Berry Miller. Admission to the Zoo is free to all that attend the concert, so bring the family and enjoy a fun and educational day at the zoo! Cost: Free. Call: 318-442-9709. rapidessymphony.org

**March 21: The Marshall Tucker Band**, Laborde Earles Entertainment Center (5600 Coliseum Boulevard, Alexandria), 7:30pm. Southern rock legends, the Marshall Tucker Band, stops at the newly renovated Laborde Earles Entertainment Center as part of their "All Our Friends Tour 2025." Cost: \$55.00+. rpclive.org

**March 29: Jourdan Thibodeaux Trio Concert**, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm-8:00pm. In keeping with George Rodrigue's life's work documenting and preserving Cajun cultural traditions, the museum will engage Jourdan Thibodeaux and his trio to play a concert in Cajun French at the museum during its River is the Road exhibition. Jourdan Thibodeaux is a musician and cultural figure working tirelessly to preserve Cajun French language and traditions through his music and active social media presence. Visit AMoA online for tickets and information. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

**March 29: DJ Troy-D's Birthday Bash**, Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 7:30pm. See contemporary southern soul singers Calvin Richardson and David Sylvester perform live on the MARI Showroom stage, hosted by DJ Troy-D! Cost: \$35.00+. paragoncasinoresort.com

## Theatre

**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

**March 10, 17, 35, 31 & April 7: 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.

**March 21: "LIFT" Screening**, Kress Theatre at Hearn Stage (1102 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. Filmed over ten years, "LIFT" shines a spotlight on the invisible story of homelessness in America through the eyes of a group of young homeless and home-insecure ballet dancers in New York City. After performing all over the world, ballet dancer Steven Melendez returns to the Bronx shelter where he grew up to give back to his community, offering a New York Theatre Ballet workshop to children. His traumatic reaction to the shelter from his childhood sends him on an unexpected journey with three kids to reckon with a past he had escaped from through ballet. Meet the filmmaker for a Q&A after the screening. Cost: \$10.00. Call: 318-484-4475. louisiana-arts.org



Scan for a full listing of events at



# Entertainment Focus

**March 21-23: Guys and Dolls,** Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria). Holy Savior Menard presents its spring musical, "Guys and Dolls." Performances begin nightly Friday and Saturday at 7:00pm; Sunday matinee begins at 2:00pm. Tickets are available through [i2tickets.com](http://i2tickets.com) by searching Venue "Holy Savior Menard". [holysaviormenard.com](http://holysaviormenard.com)

**April 3-6: Heathers The Musical,** Alexandria Senior High (800 Ola Street, Alexandria). What's your damage, Heather? This cult favorite film-turned musical is a candy-coated comedy with a dark edge. The Teen Edition of this musical explores the darker side of high school and the heroes who can rise above the gossip and bullying. Don't miss the nationally recognized talent at Alexandria Senior High bringing this rad 80's musical to life! Performances begin nightly Thursday through Saturday at 7:00pm; Sunday matinee begins at 2:00pm. Cost: \$15.00. [ashtheatre.com](http://ashtheatre.com)

**April 3-13: Four Old Broads on the High Seas,** Hearn Stage at Kress Theatre (1102 Third Street, Alexandria). All aboard for another round of laughter! City Park Players presents Leslie Kimbell's "Four Old Broads on the High Seas," directed by Jim Leggett and Michael Dalme. The sassy seniors you loved in "Four Old Broads" are back—this time, they're hitting the high seas for a cruise full of chaos, comedy, and a little intrigue! 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. [cpgtheatre.com](http://cpgtheatre.com)

**April 5: The State Ballet Theatre of Ukraine Presents "The Sleeping Beauty",** Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 2:00pm. Witness the captivating performance by the State Ballet Theatre of Ukraine as they tell the story of Princess Aurora, cursed to a century-long slumber by the evil fairy Carabosse. Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Classical Arts Entertainment, this production features lavish sets, hand-painted scenery, exquisite costumes designed by the most talented artists of Ukraine, and Tchaikovsky's iconic score, which promises an unforgettable experience in

a ballet in 3 Acts, with 2 intermissions. Be spellbound by the iconic variations, stunning choreography by Lev Ivanov after Marius Petipa, and the graceful movements of the talented Ukrainian dancers. Cost: \$38.00. [louisiana-arts.org](http://louisiana-arts.org)

## Events

**Ongoing-March: 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.

**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.

**March 8: World Wildlife Day,** Alexandria Zoo (3016 Masonic Drive, Alexandria), 9:30am-12:30pm. Discover the future of wildlife conservation! Join Zoo and FOTAZ staff and volunteers for World Wildlife Day and learn about the cutting-edge tools and technology being used to protect our planet's most precious species. Explore interactive Discovery Carts, hear from zookeepers, and learn how you can make a difference. Regular admission. [thealexandriazoo.com](http://thealexandriazoo.com)

**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](http://themuseum.org)

**March 8: Crawfish for a Cause,** Huckleberry Brewing Company (4724 Sterkx Road, Alexandria), 4:00pm-7:00pm. Enjoy 5 pounds of crawfish with 2 corn and 2 potatoes for \$35.00 or a Party Pack of 10 pounds with 4 corn, 4 potatoes, and sausage for \$65.00. Proceeds benefit Fostering Community. Pre-order online at [givebutter.com/2025crawfishforacause](http://givebutter.com/2025crawfishforacause).

**March 11, 18, 25 & April 1, 8: 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.

**March 11-12, 26-27 & April 2-3: 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. March 11-12: Dry Prong; March 26-27: Pineville; April 2-3: Winnfield. Visit website for registration and location information. Open to ages 16+. Mental health professionals can receive 12 CEUs after taking this workshop for \$60.00 through [livingworks.net](http://livingworks.net) (a \$300 value). Cost: Free. Call: 337-519-1888. [SaveCenla.com/ASIST](http://SaveCenla.com/ASIST).

**March 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

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# Entertainment Focus

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.

**March 15: Czech Fest,** Libuse Czech Hall (94 Industrial Road, Libuse), 10:00am-4:00pm. Enjoy the best of Czech culture right here in Cenla. Enjoy food, fun, and music. Bring the whole family and be a Czech for the day! Sponsored by the La Czech Heritage Association. Call: 318-319-7854.

**March 15: HSM Shamrockin' Fest,** Randolph Riverfront Center (707 2nd Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm-10:00pm. The HSM Shamrockin' Fest is Menard's annual spring fundraiser. There will be numerous Mixology Teams providing samples of custom beverages, along with a Silent Auction, live band and delicious food. All are welcomed! Proceeds from this year's Shamrockin' event will be used to replace heaters in the school gym. Please consider contributing to our event by purchasing a table, an individual ticket, contributing to a Mixology Team and/or making a monetary donation. Wear your St. Paddy's day best! Cost: \$50.00. hsmfest.com

**March 19: Cenla Women's Connection Luncheon,** Alexandria Convention Center (2225 North MacArthur Drive, Alexandria), 12:00pm. The March Luncheon will feature speaker, Sandy Oestricher presenting "Owning Our Belovedness." Enjoy this inspirational speaker, special feature, fellowship, and delicious meal. Please pre-register.

Admission includes lunch, fun, and lots of door prizes! \$25.00. 318-447-4673.

**March 19 & 31: New Foster Parent Orientation,** Fostering Community (3336 Prescott Road, Alexandria), 12:00pm-1:00pm. Join Fostering Community for a one-hour lunch to learn about the rewarding journey of becoming a foster parent. This session is designed for anyone considering fostering with insights into the process, support systems, and the impact you can have on a child's life. Lunch is included. Pre-registration is required. fosteringcommunity.org

**March 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.

**March 22: Diamond Jubilee Cabrini Ball,** Randolph Riverfront Center (707 2nd Street, Alexandria), 6:30pm-12:00am. The lavish evening will feature a seated, gourmet dinner prepared by celebrity chef John Folse, signature drinks from Jack's, luxury live and silent auctions, and a high-energy musical performance by Elevation, a renowned party band from Dallas. Funds raised from this year's event will directly benefit CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini's 75th Anniversary Campaign. Black tie affair. Cost: \$300.00 Individual;

\$3,000 reserved table for 10. christus.io/CabriniBall

**March 27: Cenla Author's Club Meeting,** Westside Regional Library (5416 Provine Place, Alexandria), 6:00pm. The Cenla Authors' Club is open to authors and writers of all levels and genres, and anyone interested in learning more about the book-writing process, even if you haven't written your first word (yet!). This month's speaker, Paul Schexnayder, is an award-winning children's author/illustrator with three picture books published with University of Louisiana Press and two by Pelican Publishing. Paul and his wife, Lee live in New Iberia. They have owned A & E Gallery for over 15 years which features over 10 local artists. He has taught art for over 30 years and is currently a visual arts teacher in the Talent Program in Iberia parish. Cost: Free. 318-442-2483.

**April 5: 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! Cost: \$10.00 Donation.

**April 5: Spring Herb Day/Arts & Crafts Fest/Yard Sale,** Kent Plantation House (3601 Bayou Rapides Avenue, Alexandria), 8:00am-1:00pm. Shop an amazing selection of quality herbs & plants with gardening experts on hand to help select the perfect plants for your garden. After selecting your plants, browse the wide assortment of local arts, crafts & food vendors as well as our gigantic indoor Yard Sale for your shopping pleasure. If you are interested in becoming an arts and crafts vendor, please contact the Kent House Office. Cost: Free. 318-487-5998. kenthouse.org

**April 5: 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.

**April 5: Louisiana Dogwood Festival,** LaCroix Park (3168 Highway 8, Pollock), 9:00am-5:00pm. Dogwood Festival is held annually on the first weekend of April in Pollock, LA. Festivities include a 5K, car show, arts & crafts vendors, entertainment, and a parade rolling at 10:00am. Cost: Free. Email: sbddogwood@gmail.com

**April 12: Breakfast with the Easter Bunny,** Kent Plantation House (3601 Bayou Rapides Avenue, Alexandria), 10:00am-2:00pm. Kids aged 2 and up will enjoy face painting, photos with the Easter Bunny, crafts, games, prizes, and breakfast! The menu includes pancakes, sausage, and milk. Cost: \$10.00. 318-487-5998. kenthouse.org

## Sports

**March 8: 26th Red River Run 10K,** Big Island Park (Babe Ruth Drive, Alexandria), 8:00am-10:00am. This family friendly run will take runners and walkers all throughout the city including the garden district, downtown and city park along a flat and fast USATF-certified 10K course. Food and refreshments will follow for participants. redriverrun.com

**March 11, 18, 25 & April 1, 8: 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

**March 22: Pickleball Palooza Doubles Tournament,** Ward 10 Recreation Complex Pickleball Courts (4600 Pardue Road, Ball), 8:00am. All teams welcome: Men's, Women's, and Mixed. Proceeds benefit Fostering Community. Cost: \$70.00 per team. Register at givebutter.com/h6rT0d.

**March 22: AKA 44 Live Mixed Martial Arts Fights,** Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 7:00pm. Bishop Promotions presents The American Kombat Alliance AKA 44 Live. Cost: \$60.00+ paragoncasinoresort.com

*\*All events subject to change.*



# Entertainment Focus

## Set Sail with the S.S. S'Iriser

The Goddesses of S'Iriser Set Sail with S'Iriser this February at their annual Gala held at Best Western Conference Center. The ballroom was transformed into an international waterway complete with flags and life preservers.

Masked Goddesses paraded into the Ballroom to traditional Second Line Music. Guests joined in the revelry by catching beads and traditional throws. Guests were welcomed and the Goddesses toasted the night and season. Music was provided by the Chase Tyler Band from Baton Rouge and a breakfast feast was served at midnight.

La Grace Royale', the S'Iriser Royal Court included two Goddesses of Muse and The Empress S'Iriser. The XIX Royal Court of S'Iriser made their Grand Entrance to the Ballroom and were presented to the Krewe and guests. Her Empress S'Iriser XIX, Samantha Bloodworth, Goddess of Wisdom, Hope and Beauty was escorted into the Ballroom in her full regalia by her husband Scott Bloodworth and brother Greg Zelenski. Adding to the splendor of the evening and presented as well were Her Grace Laia XIX, Shawn Gorden, Goddess of Splendor, Festivity and Rejoicing,



escorted by her son Lance Gorden and Her Grace Irisia XIX, Linda Knight, Goddess of Witt and Charm, escorted by her husband Jim Knight.

The Krewe of S'Iriser Board for 2024-2025 includes Christy Booth, captain, Tammy DeRouen, co-captain, Melanie Nunnally, secretary/treasurer, Shelly Barton, special events coordinator, Katlyn Misner, parade coordinator, Candice Gaspard and Colleen Spurgeon, gala coordinators.

S'Iriser means "to become iridescent." Friendship and imagination are two key ingredients to this gumbo in the land of S'Iriser where sprites ride on dragonflies and sit on iris petals. They polish their

moonbeams with pixie dust that falls on members-making all of their dreams come true during Mardi Gras. The all-women Krewe has a capacity of 80 members and was founded by Ann West, Eva Long, and Terri Stephens in 2004.

For more information, visit [www.kreweofsisiriser.com](http://www.kreweofsisiriser.com).

**Krewe Of**  
*S'Iriser*  
**La Graces Royale**

**Her Grace Laia XIX,**  
**Shawn Gorden**  
*Goddess of Splendor, Festivity and Rejoicing*

**Her Empress S'Iriser XIX,**  
**Samantha Bloodworth**  
*Goddess of Wisdom, Hope and Beauty*

**Her Grace Irisia XIX,**  
**Linda Knight,**  
*Goddess of Wit and Charm*



# Entertainment Focus

## Let the Good Times Roll at the Laborde Earles Entertainment Center

The newly renovated Laborde Earles Entertainment Center, formerly the Expo Hall at the Rapides Parish Coliseum, is open and ready to host concerts, trade shows, banquets, Mardi Gras Balls, parties, and more. The Entertainment Center reopened after being shuttered for 10 years on January 11th with a performance by local and regional acts Rearranged, Knuckle Sammich, and the Cartoons, followed by classic artists the Drifters, Coasters, and Platters on January 18th.

The 20,000 square foot space has been remodeled with sound dampening curtains, new heating and cooling units, fresh paint, and updated fixtures. The final stage of renovation, currently in progress, is the installation of professional sound and lighting equipment. The law firm of Laborde Earles made this installation possible by obtaining Naming Rights for the Entertainment Center and the Coliseum. This addition will be instrumental in attracting artists to perform in Rapides Parish.

With seating for 1,500 attendees, the venue is perfect for experiencing concerts, comedy, and other live entertainment in an intimate setting. Future plans include hosting many genres of entertainment, including Cajun, Zydeco, Blues, Classic Rock, Hip-Hop, Comedy, Tribute Bands, and up-and-coming artists of all genres.



On Friday, March 21st, Southern rock legends, the Marshall Tucker Band, will rock the Laborde Earles Entertainment Center. The Marshall Tucker Band (MTB) came together as a young, hungry, and quite driven six-piece outfit in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1972. Having duly baptized themselves with the name of a blind piano tuner after they found it inscribed on a key to their original rehearsal space, they've been in tune with tearing it up on live stages both big and small all across the globe ever since.

A typically rich MTB setlist is bubbling over with a healthy dose of hits like the heartfelt singalong "Heard It in a Love Song," the insistent pleading of "Can't You See" (the signature tune of MTB's late co-founding lead guitarist and then-principal songwriter Toy Caldwell), the testifying "Fire on the Mountain," the wanderlust gallop of "Long Hard Ride," and the explosive testimony of "Ramblin,'" to name but a few.



Tickets are available at the Laborde Earles Coliseum Box Office Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 4:00pm or online anytime at Ticketmaster.com.

A special thank you goes to the Rapides Parish Police Jury for enabling the renovation of the "Expo Hall" to be done in a manner that repurposes the facility to better accommodate musical entertainment events.

For rental inquiries or for information about upcoming events, visit [rpclive.org](http://rpclive.org) or call (318) 442-9581.



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# Garfish Balls

By Wilbert Carmouche

Avoyelles Parish like all areas of Louisiana and beyond have their food ways, and as the Louisiana Office of Tourism's annual campaign for 2025: The Year of Food, I would like to share a couple of recipes for garfish balls, an Avoyelles tradition, that you are most likely to find in some food locations and homes during the Season of Lent which began on Ash Wednesday, March 5th this year.

## **Mrs. Marie Strawiz's Garfish Balls** by the late Beryl Quinn

1 Cup Scraped Garfish (Ground Garfish Can Be Found at Local Fish Market)  
1 Slice Bread, Dampened and Crumbled  
1 Small Onion, Chopped Fine  
1 Egg  
1 Small Bell Pepper, Chopped Fine

Oil For Browning Fish Balls

1 Clove Garlic, Minced  
Small Amount of Flour for Rolling Fish Balls  
Salt, Black Pepper, And Red Pepper, to Taste  
1/4 Cup Onion Tops, Chopped Fine  
1/4 Cup Parsley, Chopped Fine  
1 Small Irish Potato or 2 Tablespoons Mashed Potatoes

Wilt onion, bell pepper, and garlic and add to fish; add salt, black pepper, and red pepper to taste. Add potatoes, bread, and egg. Mix well and form small balls. Fry fish balls until brown. Drain off most of the grease. Add 1 1/2 cups hot water and let simmer slowly. Cook thoroughly. When almost done, add onion tops and parsley. Serve over cooked rice.

## **Garfish Balls and Rusty Gravy** by the late Mrs. Irvin J. Bordelon, contributor

2 1/2 Pounds Garfish, Ground  
2 Raw Eggs  
1 Cup Ground Onion  
1/2 Cup Oil  
1/2 Cup Ground Bell Pepper  
1 Pound Can Whole Tomatoes  
2 Tablespoon Salt  
1 1/2 Cup Flour  
2 Cups Water  
1 Teaspoon Black Pepper

Mix in large bowl the fish and other ingredients. Mix well. Shape into balls, dust with flour, and brown, using 1/2 cup oil in heavy skillet.

Rusty Gravy: Brown 3 tablespoons flour; add tomato juice from can and 2 cups water. Crumble 2 fish balls into gravy, stirring well to make gravy heavy. Add



remaining fish balls to gravy; carefully so they do not break. Cover skillet and simmer for 30 minutes. Serve with gravy over lots of rice. Serves 6.

Recipes were taken from "La Cuisine des Avoyelles, Avoyelles Parish Recipes by

La Commission des Avoyelles Historical Society" and is for sale (\$15.00), include additional \$5.00 for shipping, at the Avoyelles Commission of Tourism Office, located at 8592 Highway 1, Suite 3 in Mansura or email [tourism@cricket.net](mailto:tourism@cricket.net).

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# Food Connects Us

By Jennifer Duhon, MS, RDN, LDN



March is known as National Nutrition Month, which is a yearly campaign created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. During this month, individuals are asked to come learn more about making healthier, more informed food choices and engaging in physical activity on a regular basis. The theme this year is “Food Connects Us.” Using food as a way to connect with family members, friends, and our cultural backgrounds is so important. Memories and traditions are so often made when individuals gather around a table to share a meal.

Sharing meals can help us learn who was involved in its preparation and how the food made it from the farm to the table. To explore the connection that exists between the food we eat and culture is essential to learning how food truly connects us. Experimenting with recipes that use different ingredients or cooking methods can help you learn more about how individuals in other cultures eat their food.

Here are five things to try during National Nutrition Month:



1. You and your family try one new fruit or vegetable each week;
2. Have family members pick out different recipes to cook;
3. Eat more meals with family members;
4. Try new herbs and spices to provide extra flavor;
5. Learn how foods you are eating make it from the farm to the table.



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Tips for Learning How Food Makes it from the Farm to the Table:

1. Visit a local farmer's market;
2. Build a garden at home;
3. Take a tour of a farm;
4. Cook meals that incorporate local ingredients;
5. Educate yourself on sustainable agriculture.

Here are a few herbs and spices to try to add to your meals for extra flavor:

- Thyme: Use it as a rub for pork tenderloin, chicken, turkey. Add it into chicken soup, beans, lentils, beef stew, broth.
- Dill: Use it to season canned tuna, salmon, sardines, fish, chicken soup, etc. Sprinkle it over steamed cauliflower, beets, carrots.
- Cumin: Add it into bean dishes (soups, hummus dips, chili). Integrate it into a spice rub for meat dishes.

If you are looking for ways to incorporate more spice to your diet, contact us at the LSU AgCenter for Herb and Spice of the month information and recipes. Herbs and Spices help add flavor and reduce sodium intake. And join us Saturday, March 15th from 10:00am to 12:00pm at the Alexandria Zoo for the 3rd annual Healthy You at the Zoo Health Fair. There will be 10+ community partners providing resources. Rapides Parish SNAP recipients can enter the zoo for free with matching Rapides Parish ID during the Health Fair.

Our next Rapides Parish Lunch and Learn will be Wednesday, March 19th at noon at the LSU AgCenter Extension office. Please call (318) 767-3968 to register.

*LSU AgCenter Dietetic Intern, Kirsten Thiels, contributed to this article.*

# Spicy Moroccan Chickpea Stew

By Jennifer Duhon

- 1 Tablespoon Olive Oil
- 2 Cups Cubed Peeled Butternut Squash (1/2 Inch Cubes)
- 1 Large Onion, Chopped
- 1 Large Sweet Red Pepper, Chopped
- 1 Teaspoon Ground Cinnamon
- 1 Teaspoon Pepper
- 1/4 Tsp Ground Ginger
- 1/4 Tsp Ground Cumin
- 1/4 Tsp Salt
- 1 Can (15 ounce) Chickpeas or Garbanzo Beans, Rinsed and Drained
- 1 Can (14.5 ounce) Diced Tomatoes, Undrained
- 1 Cup Water
- Chopped Cilantro, Optional



In a Dutch oven, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add squash, onion, and red pepper; cook and stir until onion is translucent and red pepper is crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in seasonings until blended. Add chickpeas, tomatoes and water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer until squash is tender, about 8 minutes. If desired, top with cilantro.

This recipe adds lots of flavor with spices from around the world as well as being packed with fiber and plant-based protein.

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# Coffee Sommeliers Steve and Cindy Woodham

By Michael Wynne

In my half century of living and learning in Cenla, I have never met anyone (and I mean anyone) who I haven't learned from, admired, and/or now consider a friend. That includes some couples. There are those people that I have found that stand heads above most others for their charm, wit, friendliness, happiness, and their passion for what they do. The couple that I will highlight here is delightful and is most giving of themselves to others. That couple is Steve and Cindy Woodham of Alexandria.

As I have always said: If one is willing to sit down and listen to their fellow man (or woman), we would love and appreciate them more for the fundamental good people that they are. Steve, the son of a well-known Pentecostal pastor of Monroe, saw his early life traveling with his parents to his father's various pastoral assignments around the South. Arriving in Monroe in 1974, Steve closely watched his father on television, even singing on his father's program, and immediately "fell in love" with the media. But Steve's first job started on radio as a D.J. at station KNOE, "back when radio was live." An unhappy listener temporarily ended all that one day by coming to the radio station to



try to kill Steve by shooting through the control room door where Steve was seated. That, combined with the murder of another fellow radio host, led Steve to realizing that enough was enough with radio.

He entered the hotel business, continuing his traveling life, even leading to working with President George H. W. Bush and meeting many famed actors, such as Robert Conrad. He rose through the various hotel chains to eventually helping create hotels "from the ground up." But the incredible stress of the hotel grind and his remembrance of his love of radio eventually brought Steve back home to radio. As his last hotel gig was then in Alexandria, Steve shifted back to radio, to local "Sunny" 106.9 and 104.3 "The Bridge". At his peak, Steve says, "I had a Southern Gospel program that was broadcast around the world." But the radio business, like all businesses, would not be forever.

Two years ago, at Steve and Cindy's church, Connect Church on Bayou Rapides Road, someone donated a school bus to the church. Steve and the church's pastor, Grover "Bubba" Warren, found they had no

use for the bus and couldn't even give it away. Grover made the joke that the bus could be used as a coffee shop. It was a standing joke for a while, but after Steve finally came to take it seriously, he persuaded his wife to support the business. Cindy has had a happy life of working with her husband, even as a desk clerk at his hotels. The bus would take 93 days to gut and renovate, transforming it into a full-fledged coffee shop, currently located on Versailles Boulevard, one block off Jackson Street Extension in Alexandria. It is the only school bus-turned-coffee shop in Louisiana and one of a very few in the nation. But as special as that is, it is Steve and Cindy that truly make it a center of attention. Steve notes, "We charge for coffee, but prayer and friendship is always free." Many a person have come to share their burdens of life with Steve and Cindy and have left the bus fully refreshed (and caffeinated, too!)

The coffee business can be a strange, but often an entertaining business. Cindy noted one order in particular: "an eggnog-toasted marshmallow coffee with two shots of espresso." Steve whipped it up and the purchaser just loved it! Dr. Jonas Gauthier, a dentist from Pineville, comes there seven days a week for his coffee. "They are truly amazing. They not only have the best coffee in town, but they are the most friendly people in town."

Steve proudly states, "We want our bus to be part of the community. This is our retirement and our mission in life." Steve and Cindy are also proud to have three sons and four grandchildren. Their website is [busstopbrews.com](http://busstopbrews.com).





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# Dome of Silence

By Debbie Guy, LCSW



I sent my kids a text before dawn: “Today is a ‘dome of silence’ day”. I coined the phrase from the “Cone of Silence” in the old Get Smart series. Remember that ridiculous plastic dome that lowered from the ceiling and rested over Agent 86 and the Chief? If not, Google it. It’s great ironic humor. And because I mix up words, “dome” was born. This is my funny way to let them know I’m mentally, emotionally, physically empty, therefore, no text, calls, or facetime. I’m calling down the dome and putting myself in time out.

Do you have a “dome”? A place or time designated with no interruptions to zone out. The criteria? It’s screen-free time. Anything with a screen is forbidden. In other words, it’s using our five senses to ground us, bringing us back to point. It’s old fashion paper-pencil, hands-on creating, digging in the dirt, walking outside, or a long, quiet bath. Remember those “Calgon, take me away” commercials? We all need a sanctuary, our “dome!”

Says who? Research, that’s who! Studies indicate the following potential benefits of flipping the “off” switch: It reduces stress and anxiety, reduces stress hormones, lowers blood pressure—which reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease—improves sleep quality, and boosts the immune system. Unplugging forces us to focus, recharge and recalibrate. Our bodies can run full speed only so long. Even our Fitbit reminds us that we worked hard yesterday so slow down today. Whew! Need I say more?



I can hear the “Yikes” now! Logging off...on purpose?! But I suffer from FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) Syndrome. And, besides, silence is scary, loud, and lonely. Haven’t we all had the power go out and our contact with the outside world vaporizes? But that’s not the quietude I’m referencing. It’s down time with

established boundaries. It’s carving out moments to reconnect, reflect, relax. It’s taking back control. It’s going back to what’s important. This is not easy, so start small.

And I do mean small. First, make friends with the quiet, like, when leaving work, drive sans music, podcast, cell phone. Silencing our environment invites inner stillness. It is there that we can “hear ourselves think.” We need periods of quiet to face the noise. Next, it’s easier to subtract an activity than add. Therefore, remove activities that are just exhausting, futile fillers which keep us busy doing “good” things but maybe not the “best” thing. Then, under our dome, unapologetically enjoy Zumba, where we focus on staying upright, or work in the flower bed and hopefully get upright, or choose to stay in our pajamas, pull out the Play Dough or Legos and play with our children. Or, try that new three-hour-prep-to-finish recipe; or start and finish that novel in one sitting; or go to the lake alone. The list is endless. Finally prepared, we raise the dome and re-enter that noisy world with a refreshed, peaceful, full heart.

So, blessings my fellow supercharged silence seekers as we—hold on, just got a text from the kids—“Mom, we’re having a ‘dome of silence’ day.” ’nuff said.



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# The Power of Transition: Rediscovering Yourself in Times of Change

By Christy Pennison, LPC-S



I'll never forget the moment I transitioned into a new role in my career in 2018. For so long, I had been responsible for others—leading a team, guiding a program, carrying the weight of decisions and outcomes. And then, one day, I found myself in a position where my responsibility was only to myself and the people I served. It was a shift I didn't fully anticipate.

At first, it felt like a loss—an identity I had built for so long was no longer there. I had spent almost five years shaping the direction of others, and now, I had more time to breathe, more space to think. It felt unsettling, even uncomfortable; but in the midst of that uncertainty, I discovered something profound—it was exactly what I needed.

That period, though challenging, became a season of rediscovery. It was a time for reflection, a chance to reconnect with who I truly was outside of the roles I had worn for several years. I wasn't just a leader anymore. I was me, unfiltered and present in a way I hadn't been in years.

Life has a way of pushing us into transitions, whether we choose them or not. Some transitions are planned, others are forced upon us. Regardless of how they come about, those moments of change present an opportunity—not just to adapt, but to reinvent.

Letting go of an old identity can be hard. Moving forward is often easier said than done when the past still holds so much weight. The comfort of what we knew keeps us anchored, but it's in those moments of transition that we have the chance to redefine ourselves. We don't have to stay stuck in the past; we have the power to move into something new, something better aligned with who we are becoming.

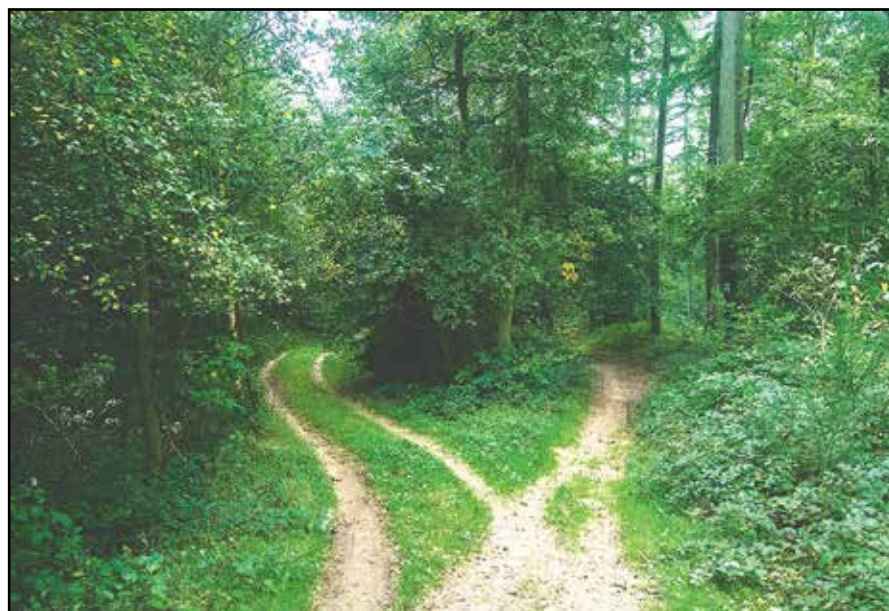
If you find yourself in the midst of a transition, here are a few strategies that helped me along the way:

1. Allow yourself to grieve. Transitions often come with a sense of loss. The identity you had for so long is no longer part of your present, and that can stir up a range of emotions. It's okay to grieve. Giving yourself permission to feel sad, uncertain, or even frustrated creates space for healing and growth.

2. Rediscover your core values. When everything around you changes, it's a great opportunity to reconnect with your true values. What truly matters to you? What do you want your life to reflect? For me, this period helped me focus more on personal well-being, meaningful connections, and serving others in ways that felt more authentic. Rediscovering your values can guide you through the transition with clarity and purpose.

3. Give yourself time and grace. Transitions take time. There's no need to rush the process or force yourself to have everything figured out. Take it day by day. The space I gave myself during this period allowed me to reflect and gain clarity on what mattered most in the present.

4. Challenge your old narrative. We often define ourselves by past roles, accomplishments, or labels. But those old narratives don't have to dictate who we are now or who we'll be in the future. What parts of your identity are truly yours, and which parts were shaped by external expectations? Letting go of outdated labels can open the door to new possibilities and a deeper understanding of yourself.



5. Embrace the possibilities ahead. While transitions can feel overwhelming, they also hold incredible opportunity. Letting go of what no longer serves you creates space for something new. Look ahead with curiosity and openness, knowing that the future holds possibilities you might not have imagined. In my case, stepping into this new role allowed me to reconnect with the essence of why I do what I do—to serve others in a meaningful way.

Moving forward isn't always easy, but it's always worth it. To move forward, you have to make peace with what was. That doesn't mean forgetting your past; it means honoring it, learning from it, and finding gratitude for the lessons it brought. Only then can you fully embrace the potential of what's to come.

Looking back, I see that it was in that pause—that space of letting go—that I truly rediscovered what I was called to do. After some time of reflection and growth, I stepped back into a leadership role when I moved back to Central Louisiana to open Be Inspired Counseling & Consulting. This time, the work was different—I was no longer just guiding others; I was building something new, leading a team that shared my values and vision for a counseling practice that could deeply impact our community. But I know now that I would have never had the clarity or confidence to take on this role if I hadn't taken that season to breathe, reflect, and rediscover what mattered most. That pause was not just a break; it was a critical step in preparing me to lead again, but this time with a deeper sense of purpose and alignment.

So, if you're in the middle of a transition, know that it's okay to let go. Take a deep breath, honor the past, and open yourself up to what's next. You might just find that this new chapter is exactly what you needed all along.

# GET CONNECTED!

Connect with your local community members.  
Find out about programs and resources in your community.  
Share issues of concern to make positive change where you live.

Central Louisiana Human Services District invites you to join in any of the eight parish Healthy Initiatives Coalition meetings that it supports.

**1<sup>st</sup>**

**Tuesday**

## **VERNON @ NOON**

Vernon Parish Library 1401  
Nolan Trace, Leesville, LA 71446

**1<sup>st</sup>**

**Thursday**

## **CONCORDIA @ NOON**

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

**2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Tuesday**

## **GRANT @ NOON**

Hopewell Baptist Church, 1100  
Graham Street, Colfax, LA

**2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Thursday**

## **Winn @ NOON**

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

**3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Tuesday**

## **AVOYELLES @ NOON**

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

**3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Thursday**

## **RAPIDES @ NOON**

Westside Regional Library, 5416  
Provine Place, Alexandria, LA

**4<sup>th</sup>**

**Tuesday**

## **LASALLE @ NOON**

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

**4<sup>th</sup>**

**Thursday**

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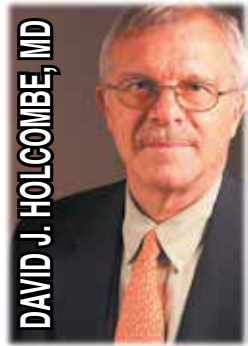
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# Glass Act Recycling, A Class Act Indeed

By David J. Holcombe, MD, MSA



Founded on March 5, 2021, Glass Act Recycling began as the brain child of community activists, spearheaded by Annie Collins. The goal was to introduce glass recycling to Central Louisiana as a way of keeping glass out of landfills and incidentally providing a product (ground glass) for commercial utilization. From its inception almost four years ago, Glass Act has recycled over 400,000 pounds of glass. Glass drop-offs come from 60 zip codes and twelve parishes from across Central Louisiana and beyond. In addition to individual drive-up glass donations (over 9,000 pounds), the Diamond Grill and Hotel Bentley have contributed over eight thousand pounds of glass. Individual monthly curbside home pickups (a subscription service for \$25.00 per month) have exceeded twelve thousand pounds.

Starting with a handful of dedicated volunteers, Glass Act expanded to include over 240 volunteers from 22 public and private schools (including Louisiana Christian University, LSUA and numerous high schools), community homes, the Garden Club, several sororities, United Way, the Children's Advocacy Network employees, Unitech Training Academy, Crest Industry, Fostering Community of Alexandria and others. At least 25 volunteers, many unaffiliated with any organization, work weekly and have provided in excess of 900 in 2023 and 1,200 hours in 2024.



Currently, there is a small crusher which can accommodate smaller bottles (i.e. beer bottles) and generates a coarsely ground product (not suitable for commercial use). This, plus laborious hand crushing by dedicated volunteers, fills large sacks that are transported (for a cost) to a large, commercial grinder in Houston. The bagged product returns to Alexandria for sale for pool filters and as a sandblast abrasive. Finely ground glass can also be used as "soil-less" soil, crushed glass countertops, terrazzo floors, and in construction and landscaping.

Glass Act Recycling only exists because of the dedication, blood, sweat, and tears, and financial contributions of local environmentally-minded citizens and organizations. Even though saving 400,000 pounds from local landfills represents a huge benefit to municipalities, they do not currently budget any funds for this effort. Instead, the financial resources come from individual and



organizational donations (including Red River Bank and others) and whatever money can be recovered through the sale of ground glass.

For the general public, there are four important ways to contribute to Glass Act's success: (1) Recycle your glass by bringing it to the facility at 5215-B Leo Street, Alexandria between 8:00am and noon each Monday through Friday; (2) volunteer your time to help receive, weigh, and sort glass, feed the small crusher, or hand crush larger bottles; (3) subscribe to home curbside glass pickup for \$25.00 per month; (4) contribute to the maintenance costs of Glass Act; or (5) donate for the purchase of an AFS-Mini crusher that would allow Glass Act to produce the finished product locally. That machine costs \$200,000 and would take four months to arrive. Only \$24,700 has been donated so far, so pitch in if you can!

If you want to contribute glass, time, or money to this amazing project, please contact Mrs. Annie Collins at [annie@glassactrecycling.com](mailto:annie@glassactrecycling.com) or donate whatever you can at [www.glassactrecycling.com](http://www.glassactrecycling.com). Send checks to 5215-B Leo Street, Alexandria, LA 71301. Help make Central Louisiana a better and more beautiful place, one glass bottle (or one check) at a time.



# Munch Your Way Through March in Avoyelles

By Wilbert Carmouche

Avoyelles Parish observes the Lenten season with so many meaningful traditions, and the anticipation of Easter adds to the excitement. Fish dinners on Fridays are a cherished tradition in many communities, providing a chance for people to gather and share a meal while observing the season. The Egg Knocking competitions are such a fun and unique way to mark the end of the forty days, symbolizing the joy and renewal that comes with Easter.

St. Alphonsus Catholic Church in Hessmer will have their annual fish dinner on Friday, March 7th at Rateau Center in Hessmer (drive through service). Meals of fried fish, white beans & rice, coleslaw, and a roll will be served from 4:30pm to 6:30pm. Your \$12.00 donation may be made by calling (318) 201-3209.

Ready to work off some of those calories? Join the Avoyelles 4-H Clover Buds for their 5K Race and 1 mile Fun Run on Saturday, March 15th. Awards will go to the top 3 finishers in each age group and top 3 finishers in the 1-mile fun run. An award will also be presented to the runner who is St. Patrick’s Day Best Dressed! The youth club or group with the highest participation will win a pizza party. Race time is 8:00am and the entry fee is \$20.00.

Entry forms can be found at [www.lsuacenter.lsu.edu](http://www.lsuacenter.lsu.edu). Please print the form and return it along with the entry fee to the Avoyelles LSU AgCenter. Late entries will be accepted until 8:00am on race day but are not guaranteed a shirt. All proceeds benefit Avoyelles 4-H!

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Fifth Ward invite you to join them for their annual food tasting event on Saturday, March 15th from 5:00pm to 7:00pm following the 4:00pm Mass. Twenty food tasting stations from the “local chefs” will be ready for sampling and seconds if you wish along with beverage center, raffle, and live auction. Come for a night of fun and fellowship all for a good cause to support programs and operations of Our Lady of Lourdes Church. \$15.00 tickets are available by calling (318) 240-4272, (318) 305-0280, or (318) 253-9936.

Jacob Ducote invites all to Open Mic Night at Bailey’s on The Square on Thursday, March 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 on March 20th and see over 10 artists each night, or on any third Thursday of each month. Open to all ages. No cover; always a vibe!

How about a Battle for the Paddle Jambalaya Cook-off! On Saturday, March 22nd, grab your team and show off your culinary skills at Riviere de Soliel for their annual competition benefitting the resident activity fund. Judges Choice Awards will go to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners and the people will vote for their favorite dish and the winner will be presented the People’s Choice Award. For more information and registration details, please contact Rachel or Meyhan at (318) 964-2198 or [rgaspard@commcare.com](mailto:rgaspard@commcare.com).

Friends of Sarto Old Iron Bridge & Big Bend Museum invite you to their Louisiana Wild Edible and Medicinal Plant Workshop by Survival HT on Saturday, March 22nd at 10:00am. The Event will be held at the Bordelonville VFD Training Facility, located at 4662 LA Highway 451 in Moreauville. Learn about plants that grow locally and how to use them, listen to in-depth explanations about how these local plants can benefit you as you meet the Survival HT Team. The cost for the onsite registration is \$10.00 cash per person. For additional questions, call Brittany at (318) 500-4036 or email [BigBendMuseum1927@gmail.com](mailto:BigBendMuseum1927@gmail.com).

Knights of Columbus Council #1217 is hosting its 6th Annual fundraising Bass Tournament on Saturday, March 29th at Spring Bayou Boggy Bayou Landing. Sign up starts at 4:00am, yes 4:00am, at the landing, located at 398 Spring Bayou Boat Ramp Road. Entry is \$90.00 per boat (Pick Your Partner). A few rules and options are: 5 fish limits (12” minimum), Big Bass (Optional \$10.00 per boat), 100% payback on Big Bass participants!


Weigh-in is at 2:00pm, prizes are awarded as follows: 1st Place, 2nd Place, 3rd Place, 4th Place, and a \$100 prize going for Biggest Trash Fish. All are invited to come and enjoy the weigh-in activities. Hamburgers, chips, and drinks will be sold along with must be present raffle tickets for same day prize drawing. For additional information, contact Jordan Bordelon at (318) 359-2406. Please come out and support KC Council #1217’s fundraising efforts!

Paragon Casino Resort hosts its legendary Gator Feeding Show Saturday, March 29th at 4:00pm. Hotel guests, casino visitors and the public can enjoy a free, educational and entertaining 30-minute live-feeding with the live 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 will be free to the public.

Remember, while you are in “da Parish”, drive to Old River Road and take your selfie at the CenterPoint of Louisiana—Centre de la Louisiane!

For additional information, contact Mary, Murial, Penny, Karen, or Wilbert to plan your travels to [www.travelavoyelles.com](http://www.travelavoyelles.com) at (800) 833-4195 or email [tourism@cricket.net](mailto:tourism@cricket.net).

EXPLORE AVOYELLES



CALENDAR of EVENTS

**Jefferson Highway Kiosk Dedication**  
Bunkie Depot  
March 6, 2025 @ Noon  
318.964.2025

**KC 3088 Fish Fry**  
St. Alphonsus CC  
March 7, 2025  
318.201.3209

**Allons Souper A' Lourdes**  
Our Lady of Lourdes Church  
March 15, 2025 (5PM-7PM)  
318.240.0641

**Avoyelles 4-H Clover Run**  
LSU AgCenter-Mansura  
March 15, 2025 @ 8AM  
318.964.2245

**Open Mic Night**  
Bailey's on the Square  
March 20, 2025  
FB: Bailey's on the Square

**Battle for the Paddle Jambalaya CookOff**  
Riviere de Soleil - Mansura  
March 22, 2025 @ 8:00am - NOON  
318.964.2198

**LA Wild Edible & Medicinal Plant Workshop**  
Bordelonville VFD Training Facility  
March 22, 2025 @ 10:00am  
FB: Friends of the Sarto Old Iron Bridge

**KC Council #1217 Bass Tournament**  
Spring Bayou Complex  
March 29, 2025  
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**Alligator Feeding Show**  
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# Bunkie Shines At You!

By Robert Smith

Meanwhile, in the heart of the Bunkie Buz District, the beat goes on! It's rhythmic and resounding, while at the same time resilient and refreshing. Even as we have passed into the sober season of Lent, all is not restive in the hearts and minds of Bunkiennes, both young and yester-young. For the egg-spectation and egg-citement egg-scalates at the approach of the celebration of Christ's Resurrection in the spring! As we do so love to celebrate good times and good news, the Bunkie Buz District beats loudly and steps lively. There are new windows and wonders to enjoy, new feasts and flavors to savor, and new families and friends to meet, to greet and make Bunkie-shines with!

Of course, due to the price of eggs, their presence will be more diminutive, but there will be plenty of crack-ups, running yolks with egg-stra yuk-yuks egg-spessed. However, eggs of chocolate have begun to appear, even Pysanky eggs sporting bright and colorful shells have been observed nesting cage-free in the shoppes of the Buz District.

As to the heart beat of the Buz, it is easy to hear the throb on The Bunkie Buz Live Radio Show broadcasting every Tuesday from 5:00pm to 6:00pm on KVPI FM 92.5 based in Vill Platte. KVPI now has added a more powerful transmitter, boosting both signal and broadcast territory! Catch the Buz with your favorite simian blue brothers, Joel and Bob, amidst all things Bunkie both near and far! We have just celebrated our Sweet Sixteenth broadcast with more sponsors, more music, and more of the Bizness, pleasure, and news of our favorite center of the universe...Bunkie!

We always like to put our best paw forward so we regularly boast of our windows and wonders because it's so fun to window shop on your walkabout the Buz District. We really sparkle at night, too! Steeles Florist and Jewelry regularly wows you up close and personal, but Griffin's, Fitzgerald's, New Parrino's, Hoovers, BeEncourage, and Saxon Studio boast plenty to gawk and gaze at. Once the parks are pruned, lit, and spiffed up, we'll have an "all season" wonderland all the time!

The Bunkie Buz District is going "bananas"! Notably delicious concoctions of puddings, pies, and, parfaits—all of the banana kind—are presently proliferated by Crispy Chicken and Bernie's. Poppa J's (shake), Rockies (pie, pastry), Griffin's (pie, pastry), Palace Market (fruit) all geaux Bananas in Bunkie!

In the Bunkie-shines department, we indeed are shining brightly, enjoying an up-tick in sales and visitors; even several sell-outs! We've welcomed many more visitors from all over, multi-state and multi-parish! Our family Buz adopted population is slowly growing and we are so grateful to have such support. Even with "back-agains" and "had to returns," we are seeing remarkable growth and support, truly warming the heart of the Bunkie Buz District. Wilbert C. and family at Travel Avoyelles are the place to find out all about our area—where to geaux and what to see, Merci! Thank you Cenla, Cenla Focus, friends, and family du Buz! You are welcome to drop in and we consider it an honor to infect you with the Buz of Bunkie, indeed! Come Catch dat Buz!



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February 28<sup>th</sup>

# EDUCATION FOCUS

## LSUA Ranked 4th Best College in Louisiana as Enrollment Surges 28%

Louisiana State University of Alexandria (LSUA) has secured the #4 spot in Niche's 2025 Best Colleges in Louisiana rankings, placing it among the state's top institutions. With 17 public and 12 private four-year universities in Louisiana, LSUA stands alongside Tulane, Louisiana Tech, and LSU, underscoring its growing reputation as a premier institution in the South.

This national recognition reflects LSUA's sustained growth and increasing appeal as a university of choice within the state. As student interest in LSUA continues to climb, the university has once again set a record-high enrollment for the Spring semester, reflecting its strong trajectory into 2025.



LSUA's enrollment has reached an all-time high of 6,904 undergraduates, marking a stunning 28% increase over the past year—the highest growth rate among all Louisiana institutions. This growth follows the university's recent milestone of celebrating over 500 graduates in December.

A significant driver of LSUA's growth is its thriving online programs, which have surged by 46% in just one year, now serving nearly 4,000 students. On-campus enrollment has also experienced substantial growth, rising by 9% since Spring 2024 to a total of 2,921 students. These figures highlight LSUA's commitment to accessibility and flexibility, meeting the diverse educational needs of modern learners in all of Louisiana's 64 parishes, all 50 states, and 25 countries across the world.

For prospective students and families, college rankings serve as a crucial resource in the decision-making process. Niche's methodology evaluates institutions using a combination of quantitative data from the U.S. Department of Education and qualitative insights from student and alumni reviews. A key component of the rankings is the Student Experience Score, derived from detailed surveys assessing satisfaction across academic quality, campus life, and faculty engagement.

Student feedback on LSUA remains overwhelmingly positive. One freshman shared in a five-star review, "LSUA makes you feel confident and capable, and that you can actually start your journey in life as an independent young person. I made the decision to attend LSUA after I did extensive homework on the programs they offer." Additionally, Niche reports that 95% of surveyed students agree that "professors are approachable and helpful."

PAGE 58 [www.cenlafocus.com](http://www.cenlafocus.com)

LSUA

#4 BEST COLLEGE IN LOUISIANA

2025 NICHÉ BEST COLLEGES

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LSUA Chancellor Paul Coreil highlighted the university’s momentum, stating, “LSUA’s recognition as the #4 best college in Louisiana by Niche, along with our largest enrollment of 6,904 students this spring—a remarkable 28% increase in just one year—demonstrates the incredible momentum we are experiencing. More and more students are choosing LSUA because they recognize the unparalleled value of a high-quality, affordable education that leads to workforce ready career opportunities for our graduates right here in central Louisiana. Our success is built on continuous innovation, dedicated faculty and staff, and a commitment to student excellence. As we grow, we remain focused on ensuring that LSUA remains the best value in higher education.”

Niche’s Best Colleges rankings incorporate rigorous academic, admissions, financial, and student life data. This year, the methodology has adapted to evolving higher education trends, introducing an Economic Mobility Index that assesses



the economic advancement opportunities for low-income students while also de-emphasizing standardized test scores in admissions considerations. These updates reflect the shifting priorities of students and universities alike.

As LSUA continues its ascent as one of Louisiana’s top institutions, the university remains committed to its core mission: providing high-quality, affordable, and accessible education that empowers students and strengthens communities. With an emphasis on innovation and student success, LSUA is poised to maintain its upward trajectory, shaping the future of higher education in Louisiana and beyond.

For more information about LSUA and its academic programs, visit [explore.lsua.edu](https://explore.lsua.edu).



# Congratulations! Kayla Windham

**BOM Bank is pleased to congratulate Kayla Windham on her promotion to Branch Manager!**

**Kayla brings over ten years of customer service experience, with six of those years spent at BOM. .**

**Outside of work, Kayla enjoys spending time with her husband, Colton, and her bonus daughter, Stella. She loves being outdoors, traveling, and spending time with family and friends.**

**Kayla stated, “I am thankful for all the opportunities BOM offers, and I look forward to seeing what else I can accomplish in the future!”**

**Congratulations, Kayla!**



## Louisiana Christian Elects Johnson its 10th President

The Louisiana Christian University Board of Trustees has approved Dr. Mark Johnson, the current director of the Doctor of Ministry program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, its 10th president, upon recommendation of the presidential search committee.

“There have been countless hours of prayer, listening, seeking, reading resumes and other application materials, while asking God to guide this process and have His way,” said Tommy Kiker, chair of the search committee. “With this vote today, approving Dr. Mark Johnson as the 10th President in the history of Louisiana Christian University, we believe God has graciously and wonderfully answered those prayers and blessed this labor.”

In May 2024, the Board of Trustees created a presidential search committee comprising four board members and two LCU faculty, assisted by a candidate search consultant. The committee was tasked with conducting its search independently and as transparently as possible while maintaining the confidentiality of the candidates being reviewed. The firm of CarterBaldwin Executive Search, one of the top 50 executive search firms in the United States, assisted in the search.

“We are thrilled to announce that Dr. Mark Johnson has been elected by the Louisiana Christian University Board of Trustees as the next president of our esteemed institution,” said Anthony Bunting, chair of the Board of Trustees. “Dr. Johnson’s exemplary leadership and profound love for the students and staff will undoubtedly support our mission and foster the growth and support of our university. Dr. Johnson emphasized his commitment to a transparent leadership style and expressed his eagerness to build meaningful relationships. He believes that through open communication and mutual respect, the university can achieve new heights of excellence.”



LOUISIANA  
CHRISTIAN  
UNIVERSITY

Johnson earned a Doctor of Ministry from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, with his project titled Racial Reconciliation in the Southern Baptist Convention, focusing on the themes of repentance, reconciliation, and restoration. His debut book, “Black Church White Convention: A Pastor’s Story of Hope,” set for release in spring 2025, chronicles his experience leading an African American church into the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 2019, Johnson and his family relocated to New Orleans to pursue a Ph.D. in Evangelism, Pastoral Ministries, and Christian Leadership. After guiding Edgewater Baptist Church of New Orleans through the COVID-19 pandemic as senior pastor, he joined the faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary as assistant



professor of evangelism and pastoral ministries and director of the Doctor of Ministry Division.

Dr. Johnson and his wife, Heather Williams Johnson, a former LCU Board of Trustees member, have been married for 29 years. They have four children. Johnson is a third-generation Baptist minister. He graduated with his B.A. from Washington and Jefferson College in 1994, becoming the first African American senior class commencement speaker in the college’s 243-year history. After a professional basketball career in Europe and South America, he earned his Master of Divinity in 2004 and Master of Theology in 2005, both from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Dr. David Jeffreys, LCU executive vice president, has served as interim president since the retirement of Dr. Rick Brewer in the spring of 2024. “Dr. Jeffreys jumped into the role and maintained the momentum of the university in the interim,” Bunting said. “I want to thank him for his dedication to the university and his unwavering commitment to her success. He will take on a leadership role at the university alongside the new president, ensuring a seamless transition and continued excellence in our academic and spiritual endeavors.”

### PUTTING YOUR FAMILY FIRST

**THOMAS DAVID**   
CLERK OF COURT

**“I believe this is the time for a new generation of leadership to step forward and invest their time and talents toward building a stronger future for Rapides Parish. Faith, family and community are my inspirations and set my moral compass.”**

*-Thomas David*



**EXPERIENCED ATTORNEY. COMMUNITY LEADER.**

**ON MARCH 29<sup>TH</sup> VOTE THOMAS DAVID FOR CLERK OF COURT**

(PAID FOR BY THOMAS DAVID FOR CLERK)





Melissa Le



Mimi & Dr. Ben Close



Dr. Mark & Heather Johnson



Chris & Tiffany Chellette



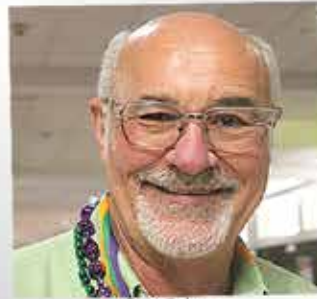
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David Crutchfield



Greg Beard, Ronnie Beard



Greg Baker



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Rebecca Morris, Linda Guay



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# Let's Get Lucky!

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AKA 44  
KOMBAT ALLIANCE

MMA, KICKBOXING AND  
**BARE KNUCKLE**  
MAIN EVENT  
MARCH 22 - 7PM



**DJ TROY D'S BIRTHDAY BASH**  
Featuring  
**CALVIN RICHARDSON & DAVID SYLVESTER**  
SAT, MAR 29  
DOORS: 7PM • SHOWTIME: 7:30PM  
TICKETS FROM \$35



**Rox's Diner**

**CHICKEN FRIED STEAK**  
Dine-in only. No take-outs.  
**TUESDAYS**  
11:30AM-10PM

**\$6.99**



**PIZZA PASTA SET GIVEAWAY**  
SUN-TUE • 12-10PM  
EARN 125 POINTS TO RECEIVE ONE GIFT



**The Draft Room**

**WEDNESDAYS • 5-10PM**

**PRIME RIB \$9.99 DINNER**  
Dine-In Only  
Includes Baked Potato & Vegetable



**BOURBON FRIDAYS**  
IN MARCH • 5-9PM  
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**Legends STEAKHOUSE**

**FOUR-COURSE Dinner for Two**  
THURSDAYS

SOUP • SALAD • ENTRÉE  
BAKED POTATO • VEGETABLE  
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**BIG BAD BINGO**  
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- TUESDAYS • Senior Days
- WEDNESDAYS • Bingo 6PM
- THURSDAYS • Bingo 6PM, Senior Days
- FRIDAYS • 2-for-1 Seafood Buffet
- SATURDAYS • 2-for-1 Steak & Seafood Buffet
- SUNDAYS • Buffet Breakfast, 8-10:30AM, Buffet Brunch, 11AM-3PM
- SUPER BINGO - WED, MARCH 5 & THUR, MARCH 27

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