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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Will Harp, Jr.
GRAPHIC DESIGNERS: Vickie R. Cofer,
Micah Touchet, Deidre McNamara
COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: Candiloro & Co.
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CONTRIBUTORS

Marilyn Wellan, Gray Easterling, Michael Wynne, Rt.
Rev. Jacob W. Owensby, Wilbert Carmouche, Dr. Jerry
Sanson, Dr. David J. Holcombe, Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.,
Dr. Cornel D. Leblanc, Reilly Willis, Christy Pennison,
Debbie Guy, Dr. Michael Polozola II, Molly Lyles,
Jennifer Duhon, Wesley Watkins, Annie Lemoine Newton,
Ramona Moore, Amy Pillarisetti, Jeremiah Honea, Adam
Lord, Jeff Burns, J. Michael Parham

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inquiries, photographs and written contributions. Return
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assume responsibility for unsolicited materials. We can be
reached via the following:

Phone: (318) 442-8277 • Fax: (318) 484-3745
E-mal: contact@cenlafocus.com
Website: www.cenlafocus.com
Media Kit: www.cenlafocus.com/media-kit/
Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 12774, Alexandria, LA 71315
Shipping Address:
3911 Parliament Drive, Alexandria, LA 71303

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Alexandria Garden Club

By Marilyn Wellan

The Alexandria Garden Club is celebrating its 100th Anniversary in this, the year 2025! Our founding date is always shown on the cover of our yearbooks, but when the realization was upon us—that we were about to be 100 years old—that seemed a remarkable achievement for an organization of believers and achievers who are devoted to beautification—of our homes, our gardens and the communities where we live. But it's not about beautification alone. Beautification calls for education, both studying and teaching. It calls for restoration and maintenance. And it requires dedication and participation.

So, we are the Alexandria Garden Club in our 100th year of service. Yes, we are a Louisiana corporation; a 501(c)(3) service and educational organization. Our official mission is “to stimulate the interest, knowledge and love of gardening; to encourage and advance the fine art of gardening, landscape design, floral design, and the study of horticulture.” Our mission includes the conservation of our natural resources, historic preservation, and city beautification. We are working for the well-being of the

community; we pride ourselves in our commitment to our communities and to the quality of life where we live.

We all want to be proud of the cities we live in. In telling this story, we believed that, if the community knew more about the Alexandria Garden Club, we would be providing another source of pride.

The Alexandria Garden was founded in 1925. Our first president was Mrs. Fayette Ewing, the second wife of Dr. Ewing, who was a local ear, nose, and throat specialist. The doctor also had a great passion for dogs—specifically Scottish Terriers. In fact, he was so widely known in dog circles, having authored the Standard Text on the Scottish Terrier, the New York Times reported on his death in 1956. So, we claim that we began our existence with a club president of some prestige.

We could do a lot of name-dropping of past Alexandria Garden Club presidents, back in the day when hats and gloves were the dress code. These family names may be familiar to some of you: Hunter, Crockett, Turregano, Dodd, Brame, Harris,



McSween, Laird, Kingsley, and Sterkx. It is interesting to note that, from 1925, presidents were listed in our yearbooks by their husband's name—for example, Mrs. Homer Harris or Mrs. Joseph Brocato, Sr. Their award-winning floral arrangements were frequently celebrated in the Alexandria Daily Town Talk back in the day when it was a “daily” and when the paper reported on social news and events. The tide was turned in 1977 by Mrs. Tim Bloch—as club president, she used her given name, Phyllis—which was probably somewhat brazen at the time.



A few presidents served more than one term, notably our beloved Joe Betty Sterkx, who served two terms and a third as co-president. She was “famous” as a great realtor and preservationist, and for placing her chair in the middle of Albert Street in an effort to block the city’s removal of the bricks. Most probably don’t know of the show-stopping flower arrangements that she made with us. She was a leader and a citizen extraordinaire—to the club and to the community.

Historian Michael Wynne tells us that we held our first meetings at Hotel Bentley. Then, for many years, we held regular meetings and flower shows at the Bolton Avenue Community Center. When we had to leave there, we began to meet at the Kent Plantation House Meeting Room, where we still meet on the first Wednesdays from September through May. As a club, we are especially proud of our association with the Kent House, and we work to make that association mutually beneficial, by maintaining a garden on Kent House grounds, teaching flower arrangements for “Jane in June”, participating at garden sale events, and by being a sponsor.

There was no state or national organization when our club was founded in 1925, four years before our parent organization was founded. The National Garden Clubs was organized in 1929 at a meeting of 13 state organizations, representing 25,000 members. A few years later, in 1934, they leased their first office space for \$1.00 at the new Rockefeller Plaza in New York. They recorded over 84,000 members across the nation, more than tripling their membership in just 15 years. They grew to a maximum 418,000 members in 1961, with 15,233 clubs. Today, the total is half the highest peak in membership—but we gardeners are still thriving in the national organization, and in our state organization, the Louisiana Garden Club Federation, Inc. which was founded nine years after Alexandria Garden Club. Our members recently participated in hosting the state club’s successful annual convention in Alexandria.





The Alexandria Garden Club's existence has been continual. Think of this: we were founded just seven years after the Armistice was signed at the end of World War I. It is believed we met continuously during the years of the Great Depression, and we continued to work together through World War II and all wars since. We continued to meet during Covid, when we learned to work with the new meeting program, Zoom. Through good times and desperate times in our history, we have proven to be an enduring organization, and you can see that we keep moving with the times. It's no longer hats and gloves for us, unless it's sun hats and garden gloves that we wear. We are not just about making beautiful floral arrangements and taking tea.

We bring you through all that history to show how amazing it is to us that our club—or any club—has survived and thrived for 100 years! Last year, we celebrated one member on her 60th year in the Alexandria Garden Club; she followed her grandmother into the club, an example of the generational club that we are. My club presidency (2023-2025) followed my daughter's term in the two years prior. Many of our members have served for 30 to 40 years; and young people are joining and active members.

Our club flower is not the Rose, Camellia, Louisiana Iris, or Magnolia. Our club flower is the Marigold! As our "Legend of the Marigold" goes, in the 1930s, a member of our young club planted seeds that a friend brought to her from Mexico. After growing the amazing Marigold in her home garden, its orange and golden blooms proved to be exceedingly large, showy, and "sweetly fragrant." The grower enlisted the aid of a local seed man who helped to arrange for the seed to be grown by Burpee's Seed Company. The Marigold, specifically the variety *Tagestes erecta* (Aztec Marigold) 'Sunset Giant,' was adopted as our club flower in 1937. Our Marigold variety is still available in Burpee's Seed Catalog.

The Club has distinguished itself in many ways, including working with the State Cleanest City Contest—a program where many of our members participate and both Alexandria and Pineville have won numerous state awards through the 67 years of the program. We are becoming more and more prominent in our focus on city beautification and litter control. We were granted a billboard on litter control during the month of April last year, during the "Keep Louisiana Beautiful" campaign. Our message: "The Only Cure for Litter is You." We look forward to working with the Chamber of Commerce on its newly formed Keep Alexandria Beautiful campaign, a part of Keep Louisiana Beautiful and Keep America Beautiful. How we would love to be known as a beautiful city—a garden city!

Judging teams go out each month to recognize good landscaping and well-kept gardens with our "Garden of the Month Award"; and we recognize well-kept non-members' gardens, all with well-recognizable signage. We also present our "Civic Beautification Award" to a selected business or organization each month. It is a recognition for maintaining a clean and inviting landscape surrounding their facilities.

We support Arbor Day and provide annual programs as we give away trees for planting. We measure, register and work to preserve Live Oak Trees through the state organization's Live Oak Society, whose only members are live oak trees. One of our most memorable experiences as a club was the celebration of one garden's live oaks. We actually measured 22 giant 200-year-old trees at Wellwood. That outing



was followed by the dedication and induction of eight of the larger of the 22 trees into the Live Oak Society; all named for descendants of the property; all over 20 feet in circumference. The largest measured 23 feet, 6 inches! It was a grand event, including a beautiful outdoor luncheon and blessing of the trees.

We are patriotic in support of our Military, including participating in Wreaths Across America and Veterans Day, and through Blue Star Memorial highway and byway markers. Also, in the year of the Centennial of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Alexandria Garden Club organized a state-wide campaign with garden clubs of the state, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Louisiana members of the American Rose Society to create a “Never Forget Garden” of roses at the Louisiana Veterans Memorial Park in the shadow of the State Capital. It was declared a “Never Forget Garden” at its dedication by Governor Jon Bel Edwards. The Alexandria Garden Club continues to support public gardens, including the Kent House Gardens and the Blue Star Memorial Garden at England Air Park.

We also enjoy a fruitful relationship with the Rapides Parish Library. Our newest project—and one of our most exciting and ambitious—is the restoration of the garden at the historic Huie-Dellmon House. It has been renamed “Myrtle Groves Garden” in honor of the former occupant, the daughter of Town Talk founder, Henaraie Huie, and the wife of Joe Dellmon. We invite you to follow our progress, as a large team of members don those hats and gloves to plant and preserve the garden. It is being planted with mostly Louisiana native plants; it is open and will be open for visits and tours. Our outreach program annually provides educational garden-related programming for children and adults at Rapides Parish Library branches.

Myrtle Groves Garden was also the site for the celebration of our 100th Anniversary on Sunday afternoon, May 4th, when Alexandria Mayor Jacques Roy proclaimed it “Alexandria Garden Club Day.”

We are the Alexandria Garden Club! We study, we teach, we work, we grow, and we have a good time, too. We are just one great organization among many, but this year, we are celebrating our staying power. Throughout this new year, you will find us continuing the commemoration of our 100 Years. As part of our commemoration, the Alexandria Garden Club is making two major gifts to the community: 1) We are ordering the restoration of the historical marker at Kent Plantation House; and 2) The AGC will offer an annual scholarship to an LSUA student in a field of horticulture-related education.

Remarkably, LSUA Archives and Central Louisiana Special Collections maintains a collection of our yearbooks and scrapbooks that date from the 1920s to the present day. The Archives is planning a reception in October to honor our contributions to the community through the years. We look forward to seeing 100 years of our work and dedication on display.



The Queen of the Cakewalk and So Much More

By Dr. Jerry Sanson



DR. JERRY SANSON

Have you ever heard the name Aida (sometimes spelled Ada) Overton Walker? Probably not, unless you have studied dance, or the history of musicals, vaudeville, or New York musical theater. And yet, Aida Walker has been described as “the most famous Black woman of the Gilded Age,” the historical period that covers the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries.

Her parents, Moses and Pauline Overton, migrated from their native North Carolina to New York City, an occurrence that was not unusual among Black southerners after Reconstruction ended and the beginnings of a segregated South showed that other locations would provide more hope for a better future. Their daughter, Aida, was born on February 14, 1880 in New York. Moses’ work as a waiter might have placed them at the lower end of the socio-economic scale at the time, but it offered better opportunity than being caught in the economic trap that was sharecropping during the late nineteenth century.

Residing in the North also enabled Aida to obtain an education and considerable musical training at an early age that led to her beginning her show business career in 1895 at age 15 when she joined John Isham’s “Octoroons,” a touring group of Black performers. Success with that group led to her joining “Black Patti’s Troubadours,” a musical group led by concert singer Madame Sissieretta Jones.

Her association with Jones’ show led to an event that changed Aida’s life. A friend from the show invited her to pose as one of four Cakewalk dancers on a trade card for the American Tobacco Company. She and her friend, Stella Wiley, were paired with George Walker and Bert Williams, an emerging vaudeville duo on the verge of national fame. George and Aida felt a mutual attraction, and she became part of their act. The pair married in June 1899 and, along with Williams, became famous as “the major black vaudeville and musical comedy powerhouses of the era,” according to one biography.

Their first touring show was a production entitled “Senegambian Carnival,” a longer version of “The Origins of the Cakewalk,” the first all-Black ragtime musical. Williams and Walker played the lead roles while Aida Williams choreographed the show and led the dancers. The show was a hit and led to other musicals that brought the Walker combination and Williams to national fame. The success of “The Policy Players” in 1899 and “Sons of Ham” in 1900 proved that Black musical comedy could achieve success without resorting to minstrelsy that capitalized on stereotypical characters and dialog.

Aida Overton Walker took on leading female roles in the shows and added to her fame as an increasingly independent Black woman with performances of songs such as “I Don’t Want No Cheap Man,” “I Want To Be A Leading Lady,” and “Miss Hannah from Savannah.” “This was one Black woman who wouldn’t sweep your floors or make you hotcakes,” in the words of one biographer.



Welcome! Gen Maxie

BOM Bank would like to welcome Gen to our Maintenance team! He is a graduate of Tulsa Trade School out of Houston, TX and a certified welder. Gen loves cooking, “anything and everything.” He is married and enjoys fishing, hunting, gaming, going to church, the gym and riding horses. He stated, “I would be happy if the Lord continued to wake me up every day from here on out!”
Welcome, Gen!



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The Cakewalk dance that George and Aida Walker performed in “Senegambian Carnival” (and that became a signature part of their shows) was a popular but controversial dance craze at the turn of the twentieth century, apparently originating on southern plantations during the 1840s. Enslaved people parodied white social events by developing the Cakewalk, posing as stiffly as plantation society appeared and promenading side by side along a chalk line. The person who performed the dance moves most gracefully won a cake for their performance. The revival of the Cakewalk during the late nineteenth century reminded some people of slavery days, but others interpreted it as a venue for Black performers to win national reputations and steady income. Eventually, even white performers in blackface incorporated the dance into their routines.

No one could perform the dance better than Aida and George Walker. Aida Walker became known as the “Queen of the Cakewalk” through the many times she performed the dance for audiences. “Anyone who ever saw her dance never forgot it,” one biographer wrote, and another writer who saw her and George perform called the show “one of the great memories of the theatre.”

The Walkers and Williams scored their biggest success in 1903 with their production of “In Dahomey,” the first musical to feature a book written by a Black writer, music composed by a Black composer, and performed by Black performers at a major Broadway theater. The show attracted audiences of all colors, even though Blacks were ironically segregated in balcony seating, a

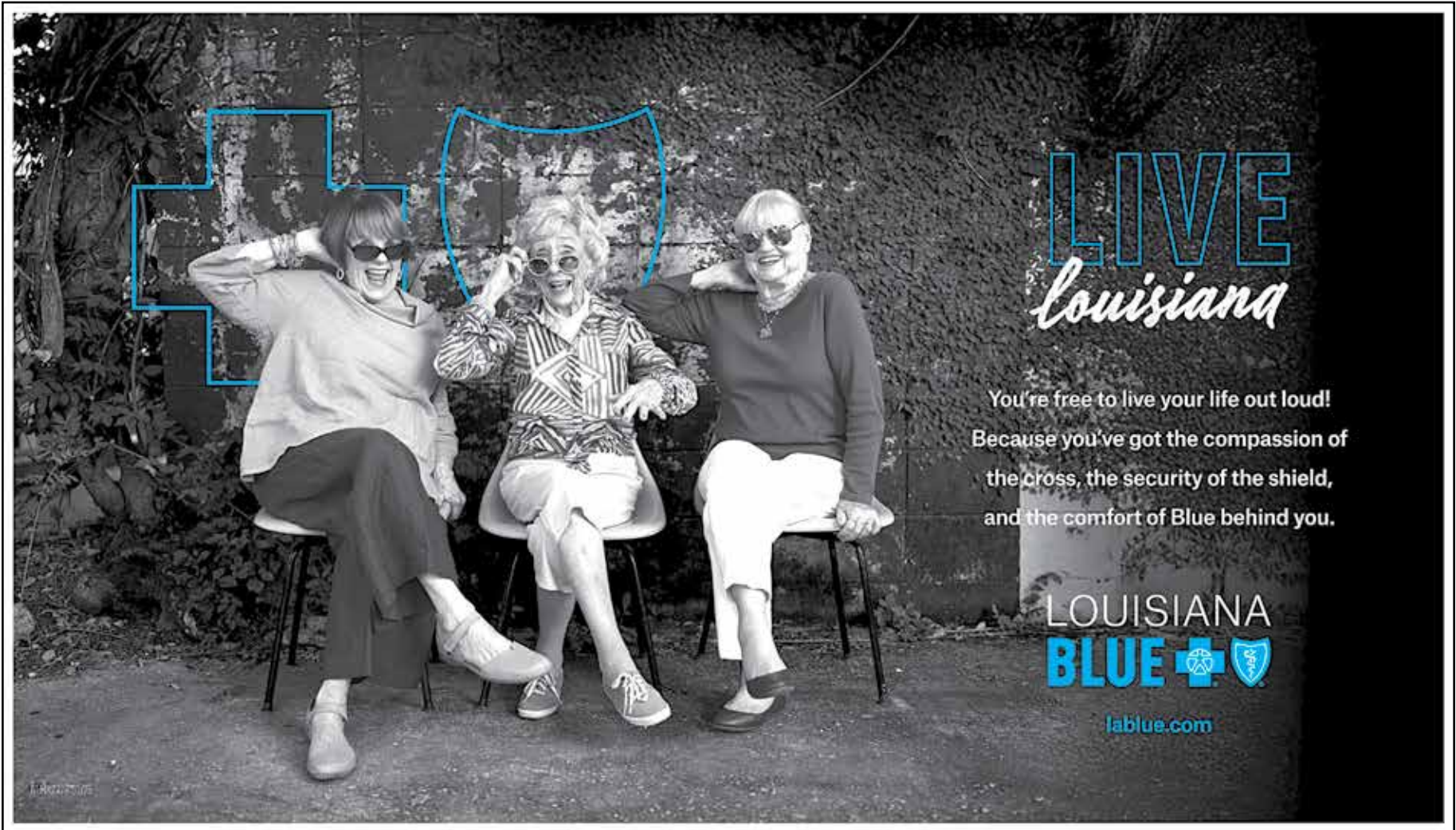


practice common throughout the country at the time. The show’s popularity on Broadway led to a tour of England and Scotland. Its initial lackluster reception in London changed dramatically when King Edward VII asked for a command performance that led to an extended tour. The Williams added a Cakewalk finale to the show at the request of the Royal Family, and toured the United States with the revised show after their return to the country.

“Abyssinia” and “In Bandanna Land” followed. Performers in the latter show noticed that George Williams experienced increasing difficulty with his steps and lines when the show played in Chicago in 1908. He never recovered and died in 1911. His loss led Aida to continue their shows with her dressing in men’s clothes and taking over his roles.

Aida Williams accepted an offer from legendary showman Flo Ziegfeld to star in his famous “Follies” about a year after her husband’s death and continued to perform dressed in male attire and singing George’s songs as well as her own. She also starred in William Hammerstein’s production of “Salome” in 1912 and founded two vaudeville troupes in 1913 to provide experience and employment for Black women.

Aida Overton Walker died of kidney failure on October 11, 1914. She was 34 years old.



Ward Hardware: Celebrating a Century of Service and Community



This year marks a truly remarkable milestone—100 years in business for Ward Hardware, a name that has become synonymous with quality, reliability, and hometown service. What began in 1925 as a small but ambitious endeavor by founder John Ward has grown into a cherished local institution. Nestled originally at 1734 Lee Street, John Ward Hardware quickly became the go-to destination for everyone in the community tackling projects big and small. From

were n't just transactions, they were neighbors and friends.

As the years passed and challenges arose, Max brought his nephew, Clint Ward, into the fold. In 1985, Clint officially purchased the business and began writing the next exciting chapter in the John Ward Hardware story. Ever the visionary, Clint expanded operations, opening a second store in 1990 at 4204 Jackson Street. It was in 2000 that a bold new step was taken. Both previous locations were combined into one larger, modern storefront at 1415 Metro Drive, where the business continues to thrive to this day.

In 2020, after decades of dedicated leadership, Clint passed the legacy on to his son, Taylor Ward, ushering in the fourth generation of Ward family stewardship.



the very beginning, the store built its reputation on two foundational pillars—exceptional customer service and an unmatched selection of quality products. These values weren't just marketing slogans, they were a way of life.

In the 1950s, John passed the reins to his eldest son, Max Ward, who proudly carried the torch, ensuring the family legacy not only endured but thrived. Max continued to emphasize that same gold standard of service, creating an experience where customers

Under Taylor's guidance, Ward Hardware remains deeply committed to its founding mission—to offer top-tier service, trusted Ace Hardware products, and unwavering support for the local community.

From a humble corner shop in 1925 to a cornerstone of the community a century later, Ward Hardware's journey is a testament to family values, hard work, and a whole lot of heart. Here's to the next hundred years!



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Seasonal Lawn & Landscape Tips: Burweed & Crape Myrtle Bark Scale

By Molly Lyles



MOLLY LYLES

This time of year, I get a few familiar calls. Many are seasonal issues that show up like clockwork. When it comes to your lawn and landscape, having a yearly calendar of tasks can help you stay ahead of recurring problems.

Burweed (a.k.a. “Sticker Weed”) is one of the most common spring complaints, though it actually starts growing in the fall. Most people don’t notice it until spring or early summer, when the sharp stickers start showing up in the lawn. By then, it’s too late to treat—the burs (seeds) have already formed.

Burweed has small, parsley-like leaves and produces painful burs that make barefoot walking unpleasant. The best way to manage it is through timely treatment. In the fall (when air temperature is around 70 degrees Fahrenheit), apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent it from germinating. In winter, use a post-emergent herbicide to kill any small plants that sprout.



Once the burs appear, spraying won’t help. Add a reminder to your calendar in early fall to begin treatment. Many herbicides labeled for southern lawns will work, but your local extension service can help with product selection.



Another issue that pops up often is Crape Myrtle Bark Scale (*Acanthococcus lagerstroemia*). This insect sucks sap from crape myrtle trees and secretes honeydew, a sticky substance that leads to the growth of black sooty mold on bark and leaves. The mold reduces flowering and can slow down the tree’s growth by covering the leaves, thus reducing rates of photosynthesis. Look for white, fuzzy spots on the trunk and branches—these are the female insects or their pupae.

To treat in the spring—when the trees come out of dormancy and start producing leaves—apply a systemic insecticide like imidacloprid or dinotefuran as a soil drench. In summer, smaller infestations can be reduced with high-pressure water or scrub with soapy water. This is limited to what you can safely reach. Prune heavily infested branches, if needed.



By addressing these issues early, you’ll help keep your lawn soft underfoot and your crape myrtles blooming strong. When in doubt, don’t hesitate to reach out to your local extension office for region-specific guidance.

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Brighten Your Porch with Bougainvillea

By Michael Polozola II, PhD



One question I often get is, "What can I grow on my front porch?" The answer to that depends on the growing conditions of that space. For many with established trees and shade, classic fern baskets can be the perfect choice.

Not everyone has a shaded porch, though. In fact, many of us have quite a sunny spot

that we would like to brighten up with some colorful plants. For those with sunny spaces that have been struggling to find something to survive and bring color, Bougainvillea may be the perfect plant for you.

Bougainvillea is a colorful plant native to South America. It can be a bit thorny, but its excellent drought

tolerance, love of sun, and ease of cultivation make it a great choice for challenging spaces. Even though it is not cold hardy, it can make the perfect plant for a seasonal hanging basket in sunny spots. There are a multitude of color choices and growth habits to choose from, so you are bound to find one that complements your home.

With a few tricks and trade secrets, you can keep your Bougainvillea looking great all season long and even carry it into the following season with the right care. The first thing to keep in mind is that they love to outgrow their space but respond really well to pruning. If they start to look a little woolly or leggy, don't be bashful about pruning them back. They respond well to pruning and will quickly put out new growth. Generally, you want to prune them back to a semi-compact sphere, and they will put out flushes of new



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flowers and growth afterward.

Bougainvillea thrives in full sun. Make sure your plant gets at least six hours of direct sunlight each day to encourage vibrant blooms. Next, they are heavy feeders and appreciate plenty of fertilizer and water. Use a balanced fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks during the growing season. Even though they are remarkably drought tolerant and will often survive drought well, you are going to get the best results from them with regular watering. Water deeply but allow the soil to dry out between waterings. Overwatering can lead to root rot. How often to water will depend on the growing environment. Keep an eye on them and adjust your watering schedule based on how often they are drying down.

Ensure you select a container with good drainage. Bougainvillea doesn't like to sit in water, so a pot with drainage holes is essential to prevent root rot. They do great both in pots and hanging baskets, so choose the type that best suits your porch and aesthetic. Use a high-quality, well-draining potting mix to provide the right balance



of drainage and nutrients. Bougainvillea is not cold hardy, so for cold winters, you'll need to take steps to protect your plant. Before the first hard freeze and ideally before frost, prune your Bougainvillea back to a manageable size. This helps reduce the plant's energy needs and makes it easier to handle. Move the pruned plant to a warm, protected space indoors. A sunny spot in your home or a heated greenhouse is ideal. Reduce watering during the winter months to prevent root rot, but don't let the soil dry out completely. With proper care, your Bougainvillea can

survive the winter and be ready to thrive again in the spring.

Bougainvillea can bring vibrant color and beauty to your sunny porch. With proper care, including choosing the right container, sunlight, watering, fertilizing, pruning, soil mix, and overwintering, Bougainvillea can be a stunning addition to your porch, providing beauty and enjoyment throughout the season. Embrace the joy of growing Bougainvillea and watch your porch transform into a colorful oasis.

RUSTY WILDER
318-308-8080

DANA MALCOLM
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CANDACE KING
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BRANDON MELDER
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Become a Cenla Master Naturalist



The Cenla Master Naturalists will have their first workshop to reorganize the group on Wednesday, May 7th at the Westside Regional Library, located at 5416 Provine Place in Alexandria. The group had its first year of workshop in 2017-2018, but had to quit, as did many other organizations, because of COVID. Join us in developing a group of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within our communities in Louisiana

The Master Naturalist Program seems to educate citizens about their precious flora and fauna, as well as other aspects of their environment and ecosystems. Once certified, the Louisiana Master Naturalists are required to use their talents to educate others or assist programs that promote and protect Louisiana's natural heritage. There are seven Master Naturalist organizations in Louisiana and most states offer similar programs. This one is for those living in the central parishes. Others include Greater New Orleans, Greater Baton Rouge, Acadiana, Lake Charles, Shreveport, and Monroe.

The workshop will begin at 6:00pm and last about an hour, with an introduction and workshop on journaling. We will also determine future workshops and their dates. Workshops will be twice a month on Saturdays and will run about 10 or 12 each year. Workshops will vary from about six to eight hours and include a possible overnight trip. Certifications will be given to those that complete 8 or 10 workshops (also to be determined).

Participants are expected, upon certification, to continue passing on what they have learned through citizen science in community volunteering.



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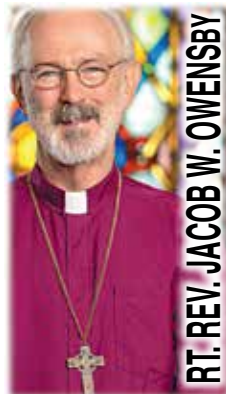


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Forgiveness Is What Love Looks Like in An Imperfect World

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



RT. REV. JACOB W. OWENSBY

Forgiveness is what love looks like when you don't feel like it. That's a paraphrase of something Wendell Berry once said. To put that a different way, forgiveness is the kind of love that we give imperfect things. Things that aren't always so likable. And since everything—simply everything—in this world is imperfect, it's the only kind of love we can give in this life.

Loving is what makes us truly happy in this flawed world. And so, I'm going to borrow the phrase "sober happiness" from Richard Rohr. It's the kind of happiness we can have

on planet Earth, because it arises from the kind of love that Jesus commended to us.

The world is good and it is flawed. We nurture each other and we hurt each other. Delight and misery reside alongside each other. Both bring tears to our eyes of very different sorts. This world fills our heart and breaks it at the same time. This is sober happiness.

Jesus teaches us that when we forgive this person or that person for the wounds they've caused us, we're taking a step toward something much broader and deeper. We're inching our way toward forgiving the world for being flawed. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he visited his friends. He said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). It may sound to you as if Jesus gives us the power of who is in and who is out, who is forgiven and who is not. I suggest a different reading. Jesus is telling us to choose one of two paths—forgiving and retaining.

Forgiving certainly includes holding others accountable, drawing life-affirming boundaries, and reweaving tattered relationships with individuals. However, forgiving is ultimately about loving in the real world with the faith that love is the only power that can mend this world's deep, pervasive flaw.



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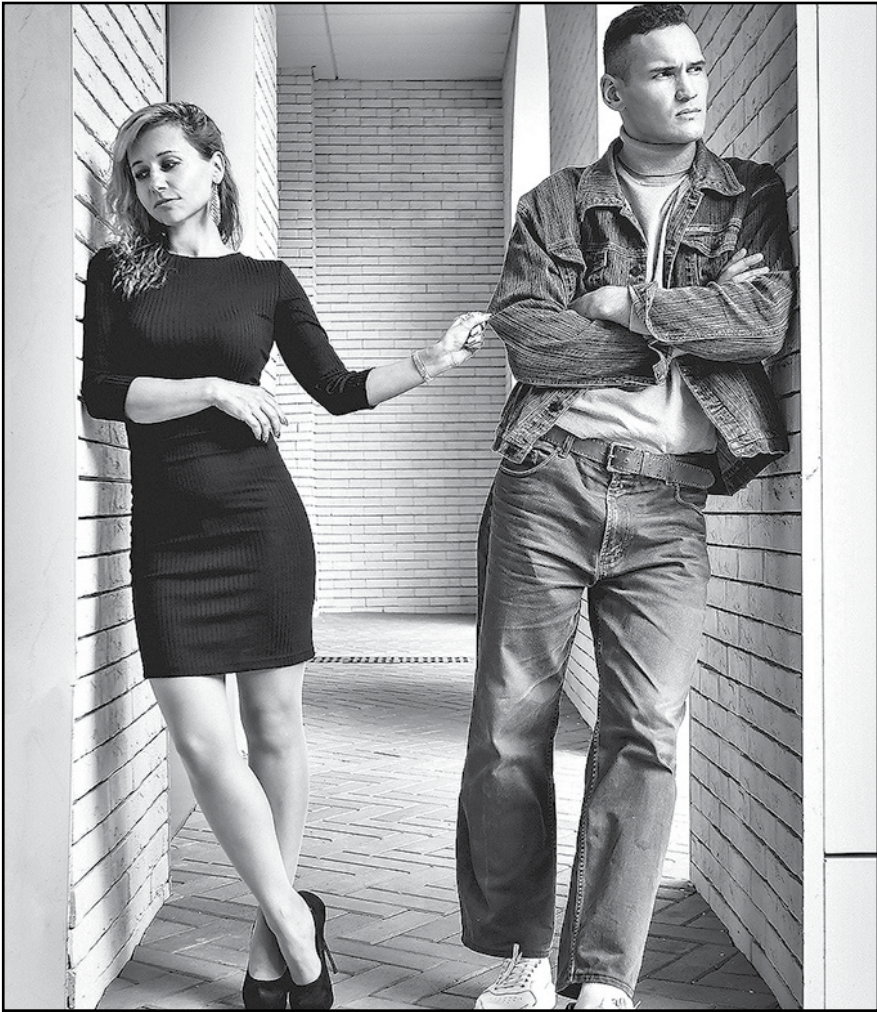
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When we retain sins, we look for someone or something to blame. We labor under the illusion that certain individuals or groups are the problem. They are the flaw. We fix the world by eradicating them, subjugating them, or forcing them to conform to our way of being.

There’s just one problem with choosing to retain. Rohr writes, “Most frontal attacks on evil just produce another kind of evil in yourself, along with a very inflated self-image to boot, and incites a lot of push-back from those you have attacked” (Falling Upward, 117).

The path to the kind of happiness available to us in this life is to lean into our very essence. We were created in the image of God. We fulfill our nature when we love what God loves how God loves it. God loves this flawed world. No exceptions.

Rohr writes, “Those who agree to carry and



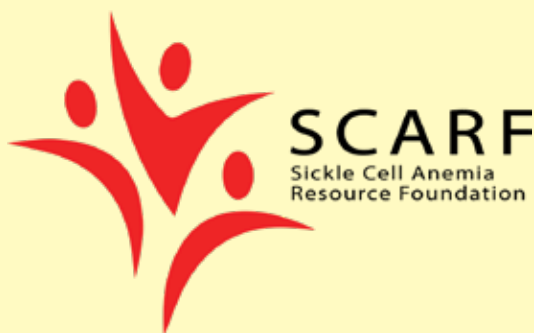
love what God loves—which is both the good and the bad—and to pay the price for its reconciliation within themselves, these are the followers of Jesus Christ. They are the leaven, the salt, the remnant, the mustard seed that God uses to transform the world. The cross, then, is a very dramatic image of what it takes to be usable for God” (The Universal Christ, 152).

As a friend of mine once told me, love is more important than how we happen to feel about it at the time.

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.

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Sickle Cell No-Tap Bowling Tournament



Join in for a day of fun, strikes, and support at the Sickle Cell Fundraiser No-Tap Bowling Tournament on Saturday, May 24th at 11:00am at Four Seasons Bowling Center, located at 3510 North Boulevard in Alexandria.

Sickle cell disease—also called sickle cell anemia—is a group of inherited disorders that affect hemoglobin,

the major protein that carries oxygen in red blood cells. Normally, red blood cells are disc-shaped and flexible so they can move easily through the blood vessels. In sickle cell disease, red blood cells are misshaped, typically crescent—or sickle-shaped—due to a gene mutation that affects the hemoglobin molecule. When red

blood cells sickle, they do not bend or move easily and can block blood flow to the rest of the body, causing potentially serious complications.



With a \$30.00 registration fee, participants will not only enjoy a thrilling tournament but also contribute to a vital cause. Proceeds from this event will directly support individuals living with Sickle Cell Disease by funding programs such as hydration therapy, wellness support, education for newly diagnosed families, and access to essential hygiene and health resources through the Sickle Cell Anemia Resource Foundation.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Rapid Furniture for their generosity in hosting this fundraiser. Your commitment to community health and support for Sickle Cell Warriors is truly appreciated.

For more information or to register, please contact Billy Quinney at (318) 794-9042. Let's bowl for a cause and make a difference—one pin at a time!



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LSUA Generals Retain Rotary Bridge Trophy



The LSUA Generals have secured the Rotary Bridge Trophy for the second year in a row. The Rotary Bridge Trophy is an award recognizing athletic competition in the “Red River Rivalry” between LSUA and Louisiana Christian University. The trophy, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Alexandria and designed by Hayes Manufacturing in Pineville, was established when LCU joined the Red River Athletic Conference.



Points are awarded for each regular-season victory between the teams for each men’s and women’s sport throughout the year. In the case of a tie, the previous year’s winner keeps the award. For the 2024-2025 season, the Generals won the Red River Rivalry for the second consecutive year, going 11-1-2 against LCU over the course of the year! The Rotary Club of Alexandria Louisiana hosted the presentation of the trophy at their April 29th meeting in Downtown Alexandria.

The “Red River Rivalry” continues to entertain fans as both universities showcase their athletic programs in Central Louisiana. For more information about the LSUA Generals, visit LSUAGenerals.com; and for the LCU Wildcats, visit LCWildcats.net.



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TBLA's Bass Unlimited Banquet a Tremendous Success

By Ramona Moore

The Toledo Bend Lake Association's (TBLA) 22nd Annual Bass Unlimited Back-A-Great-Fighter Banquet and Auction was a tremendous success. It was a beautiful evening that defied the early-week weather forecast. The sold-out event began with over 600 guests, sponsors, and volunteers browsing items available in both the Silent and Live Auctions and the Raffle Drop Boxes. Negreet High School senior Abby



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Shanley came to the stage where she led everyone in the singing of the National Anthem.

TBLA President Gaynell Goodeaux welcomed the guests and took a moment to recognize TBLA members we have lost this year—Sammie Cicardo, Mac Lyddy, Al Smart, and Tom Welch. Ms. Goodeaux then announced TBLA has awarded the Glynn Carver Memorial Scholarship in the amount of \$6,000 to Abby Shanley of Negreet High School. TBLA also awarded two \$6,000 scholarships to Trenton Sepulvado of Zwolle High School, and Allison Bordelon of Negreet High School, along with three scholarships in the amount of \$1,500 each to college students Quade Leone, Victoria Gaspard, and Kason Parker. Following these recognitions, the crowd enjoyed a delicious three-meat BBQ dinner provided by Brisket House of Jena.

Auctioneer Kevin McDonald took the stage and kicked off the evening's main event with the live auction. The first auction item was a "Patriot Package" including a carved cypress American flag, and the enthusiastic bidding set the tone for the entire evening. Several Lake Area experiences were sold in the Live Action during the evening, including two BBQ dinners for 8 by Sabine Parish Sheriff and local pitmaster Aaron Mitchell, a "Dream Day on the Bend" catch and cook experience donated by Living The Dream Guide Service, artwork by Don Edwards titled "Louisiana Swamp II", a Bass memorabilia collection of Rat-L-Trap lures donated by Don Cooper, and a George Rodrigue Foundation "Cat Tie" print.

To conclude the Banquet, Grand Prize Raffle coordinator Mike Stewart conducted the live drawing for the first two guns in the 2025-26 Gun Raffle. John Cradure of Westlake won the Ruger American Gen II 300 Blackout Bolt Action Rifle, and Lionel Deslattes of Paulina won the ATI SX Cavalry 12-Gauge O/U Shotgun. The night culminated with the "Ginormous Door Prize," a 24" Cabelas Pellet Grill that was won by Tony Mancuso.

TBLA thanks the many sponsors, supporters, and volunteers who graciously donated time, merchandise, money, and talents toward making this event a success. Early estimates from the night's events indicate that the 2025 Banquet was the most successful in recent years. This money is used not only to fund the Toledo Bend Lunker Bass Program replicas but also college scholarships for deserving students, re-stocking Florida Bass fingerlings into the Lake, assisting High School fishing and 4-H shooting teams, artificial reefs, and many other worthwhile projects around Toledo Bend Lake.

TBLA is grateful to everyone for making this Bass Unlimited Banquet an occasion to remember and hope that you put Friday, April 17, 2026, on your calendar for next year!





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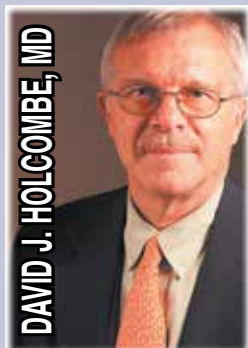


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Migraines: A Common Source of Disability

By David J. Holcombe, MD, FACP



Migraines remain a major cause of medical complaints nationwide. It is the second leading cause of disability and, although migraines are more common in women than men, they can affect both sexes at all ages. Treatments for migraines are separated into preventive and those for acute attacks. Preventive care includes a wide variety of agents—some much more expensive than others and reserved for those with recurrent, debilitating migraine episodes.

Preventive treatments for migraines should always follow a step-wise process, with agents in several groups with different modes of action and wildly different price ranges. Inexpensive first-line treatments include: (1) metoprolol or propranolol, both beta-blockers widely used for cardiac issues as well. This first line group also contains (2) valproate (a seizure medication), venlafaxine (an anti-depressant), and amitriptyline (also an older antidepressant). They are all easily available, exist in generic forms, and are reasonably priced. Each medication has its own side effect profile and efficacy, always variable depending on the individual. A trial of any medication requires a two- to three-month period to determine response. None of them can be successfully evaluated without daily use and an adequate treatment time period.

Second line medications include two different, but related, types of medications—the CGRP antagonists and the CGRP monoclonal antibodies (gepants). CGRP stands for calcitonin gene-related peptide and the antagonists or antibodies counter the vasodilatory effect of the peptide. The monoclonal antibodies are given by subcutaneous injections since they are destroyed in the stomach. The monoclonal antibody group includes erenumab (Aimovig), fremanezumab (Ajovy), galcanezumab (Emgality), and eptinezumab (Vyepti). Note that they all end in “-ab” which denotes an antibody and they are all extremely expensive.

Gepants (CGRP receptor antagonists) have a quicker mode of action, but are metabolized in the liver, where drug-drug interactions may occur. These agents include ubrogepant (Ubrelvy), Rimegepant (Nurtec), atogepant (Qulipta), and Zavegepant, an oral/intranasal drug (Zavzpret). Again, these

are second line agents, all relatively new, and all very costly. Either the CGRP antagonists or the CGRP monoclonal antibodies can cost from \$800 to over \$1,000 per month of treatment and insurance coverage can vary markedly.

The third line migraine preventive treatment is topiramate (an epileptic medication). It can be used in case of failure of either the first- or second-line treatments in those with recurrent, debilitating migraines. A generic equivalent is available and, as with



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other medications, results, side effects (notably skin reactions), and tolerability vary from one person to the next. Again, a two- or three-month trial is needed to evaluate a successful response.

Treatment of acute migraine attacks poses another challenge with different options. The current suggested treatment is a triptan (such as sumatriptan), combined with naproxen, a common non-steroidal anti-inflammatory. Triptans bind to 5-HT1B and 5-HT1D serotonin receptors, which counteracts the vasodilation related to acute migraine attacks. There are many commercial brands and the cost ranges from \$12.00 a month to up to \$900 per month, depending on the product.


Migraines continue to cause much grief, pain, suffering, and disability. Some adolescents will grow out of their migraines, but many people will experience them for life. A stepwise approach to preventive treatment should be managed by a physician familiar with migraine management. Other causes of headache need to be ruled out, of course, but that will be up to your primary care doctor or neurologist.

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Signs and Symptoms of Astigmatism

By Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.

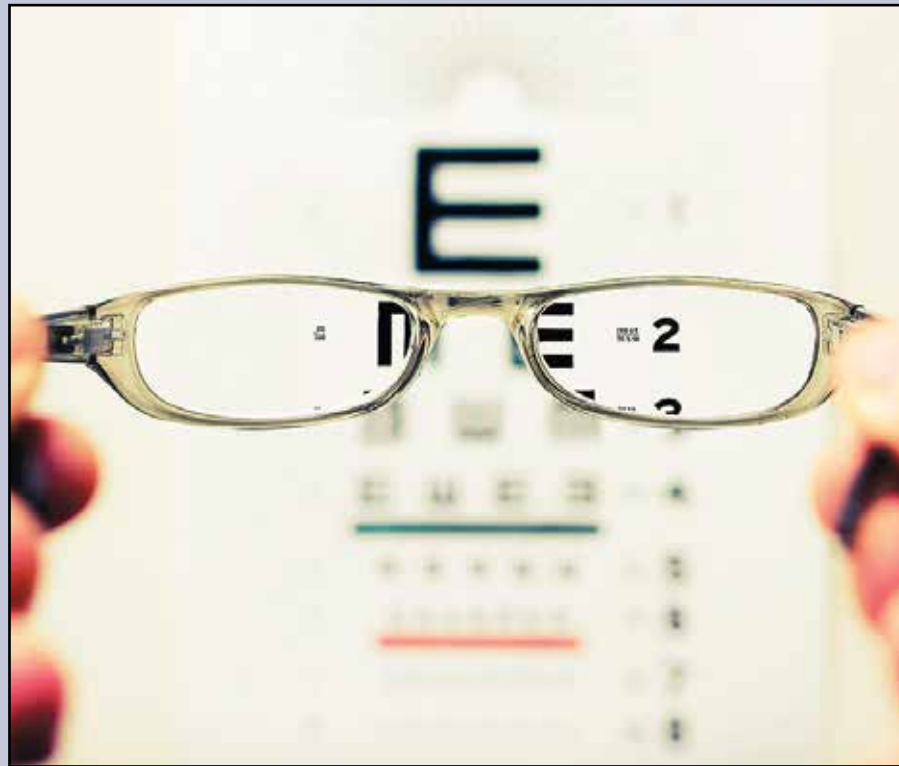


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Astigmatism is a “refractive error” of the eye, just like nearsightedness and farsightedness. A refractive error means that light entering the eye is not focused directly onto the retina, and images (depending on their distance) are blurred and out of focus. Many times, with astigmatism, the main complaint from someone is eye strain and headaches with, and sometimes without, a perceived blurring of vision. Astigmatism is usually caused by the front, clear portion of the eye (cornea) being curved differently up and down compared to side to side. It not only blurs the image, but also distorts the image. This distortion can lead to eye strain and fatigue, especially with prolonged periods of reading and computer use.

Astigmatism is usually corrected with eye glasses and/or contact lenses and even with LASIK eye surgery. It is very common for a person’s prescription, whether near- or farsighted, to also have some astigmatism incorporated into the lens. Regular eye exams are necessary to help with keeping their eyes healthy and prescription lenses up-to-date.

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Summer Skin Safety with Sunscreen

By Reilly Willis

As we head toward the hot, bright days of summer, sun protection should be at the forefront of our minds. Everyone, regardless of skin tone, can get skin cancer caused by overexposure to the sun's harmful radiation. UVA rays come from the sun and are the cause of premature aging resulting from extended time spent outdoors. UVB rays also come from the sun but are more harmful to the skin and are the cause of painful sunburns. Both of these types of UV radiation can lead to skin cancer. Therefore, everyone should have an effective sunscreen regimen in their back pocket. Here is some helpful information to guide you on proper sunscreen usage.

When choosing a sunscreen, make sure that it has "broad-spectrum" coverage. This ensures that the skin is protected from both the UVA and UVB rays emitted from the sun. Most people are not actually applying enough sunscreen to their skin. The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends one teaspoon of sunscreen to cover the face and neck and one ounce, roughly the volume of a shot glass, to cover all other exposed areas of the body. The SPF value on the bottle comes from the amount of

time your skin would take to burn if it had no sunscreen at all. So, skin covered in SPF 30 would take 30 times longer to burn than uncovered skin. However, sunscreen wears off over time and with activity, so be sure to reapply sunscreen every two hours while outdoors.



While higher numbers of SPF increase the time it takes for the skin to burn, be careful not to let your guard down. Even if using high levels of SPF, such as 80 or 100, make sure that you are still applying the correct amount, reapplying at least every two hours, and limiting time spent in direct sunlight. The AAD recommends using SPF 30 daily and increasing to SPF 50 when spending time outdoors.

Although sunscreen is a helpful tool to protect the skin from damage, wearing protective clothing such as sunglasses, brimmed hats, and long, lightweight shirts and pants in addition to sunscreen are the best options for keeping your skin safe through the summer months and beyond.

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Connect with your local community members.
Find out about programs and resources in your community.
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Central Louisiana Human Services District invites you to join in any of the eight parish Healthy Initiatives Coalition meetings that it supports.

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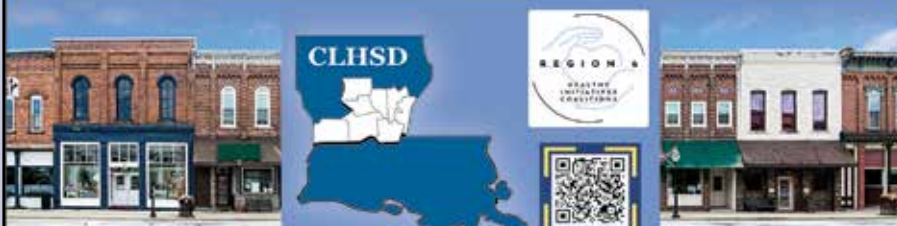
4th Tuesday **LASALLE @ NOON**
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1st Thursday **CONCORDIA @ NOON**
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2nd Thursday **Winn @ NOON**
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3rd Thursday **RAPIDES @ NOON**
Westside Regional Library, 5416
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Small Town Charm, Big City Healthcare

By Cornel D. Leblanc D.C.



There is something unquestionably unique about small town living. The familiar faces, slower pace, and the sense of belonging to a community, which all pay tribute to a lifestyle that is good for the body and soul. Now, life can still take a toll in the most peaceful of communities, and that is where chiropractic care can make huge difference.

Studies prove that decreased levels of stress and tight knit communities can lead to better mental health. Whether it is hiking trails, farmland, or fishing at your favorite fishing spot, spending time in nature has been proven to alleviate anxiety and boost physical health. Now, it is not

uncommon in small towns to run into friends at the store, know the mail man, or even get a warm smile while walking your dog. These common connections everyday can give the sense of belonging that a lot of bigger cities lack, and that deep-seated connection can lower anxiety, improve one's immune system, and even make you have a better quality of sleep.

But, even in a quiet and pleasant community, our body can still feel the daily wear and tear of life. Mothers, fathers, teachers, nurses, and farmers all spend long hours standing or bending over and living in rural places often means longer commutes or less comfortable working conditions. That is where chiropractic care can come into play and help alleviate tension, increase mobility, and improve spinal alignment, empowering you to stay active and feel amazing. Moreover, consistent adjustments help in supporting the nervous system, which plays a vital role in stress management and the perseveration of overall health.

Just because Alexandria is a small city, doesn't mean we can't take care of your health just like the big cities. At Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center, we offer state-of-the-art technology in Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression. We see people travel from all over the State of Louisiana, including New Orleans, to find relief from disc



injuries and radiating pain in their neck and low back. In this past year alone, we have seen a 95% success rate in helping patients that were recommended surgery to help avoid that surgery. Our table is an Accu-spina Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression table which specifically targets an injured disc to help rehydrate and repair the disc. It has been amazing to watch all of our patients have success. Some retired patients can now travel again, grandparents can play with their grandchildren again, and nurses regained their quality of life again, to name a few success stories.

We all should enjoy the benefits of Central Louisiana, but should not have to miss out on state-of-the-art healthcare. We have an opportunity now to help just like the big cities with all the charm of a small town. If looking for Peak Performance and Optimal Health, call us at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center today at (318) 561-6250.



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Rapides Parish Library Now Offers Blood Pressure Monitors for Checkout

Rapides Parish Library (RPL) is excited to announce the launch of a new health initiative aimed at empowering residents to take charge of their heart health. Blood pressure monitor kits are now available for checkout at all RPL branches—offering community members a convenient, cost-free way to monitor their blood pressure at home.

High blood pressure is one of the leading risk factors for heart attacks and strokes. According to a 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment by the Rapides Foundation, in Rapides Parish alone, almost half of all adults have high blood pressure (47.2% versus 36.9% across the U.S.). High blood pressure is often referred to as the “silent killer,” because it can do damage to a person’s health without any symptoms. The only way to know if you have high blood pressure is to have it checked. For those already diagnosed, home monitoring can be a vital part of managing the condition and sharing readings with a healthcare provider. For those undiagnosed, monitoring daily can help to get an accurate average of your blood pressure and identify any patterns you can share with your provider to determine your treatment needs.



“We’re proud to continue to expand our offerings beyond books and technology to include life-saving tools that support everyday wellness and improve the quality of life for our community,” said Celise Reech-Harper, Director of Rapides Parish Library. “Rapides Parish Library is dedicated to helping patrons, especially those with limited resources or access to healthcare, take control of their health.”

Kits are intended for personal monitoring and are not meant for diagnostic or emergency use. Each Blood Pressure Kit includes a digital blood pressure monitor, blood pressure cuff, easy-to-follow instructions, and batteries. Library staff can assist with general questions about the kits but cannot provide medical advice. Borrowers must be at least 18 years old, in good standing, and have a valid library card.

This program was made possible through the generous support of Forth Insurance Company in Monroe, with special thanks to agent Shelby Sims, who played an instrumental role in

securing funding for the donation of blood pressure cuffs and monitors.

To learn more or to reserve a kit, visit your local RPL branch or go to www.rpl.org.



CHECK IT OUT:

Blood Pressure Kit

Now Available!

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH AT NO COST! MONITOR YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE AT-HOME!

EACH KIT INCLUDES:

- ♥ A DIGITAL BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR
- ♥ A CUFF
- ♥ STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS
- ♥ BATTERIES

CHECKOUT PERIOD: 14 DAYS
RENEWALS: 1X ONLY

*BORROWERS MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OLD, IN GOOD STANDING, AND HAVE A VALID LIBRARY CARD.
*PLEASE NOTE: KITS ARE NOT FOR DIAGNOSTIC OR EMERGENCY USE. LIBRARY STAFF CANNOT OFFER MEDICAL ADVICE.

♥ WHY IT MATTERS:
High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for heart attack and stroke. Monitoring your blood pressure regularly is key to staying heart-healthy.

♥ HOW IS RPL ABLE TO OFFER IT:
This program was made possible by a generous donation from Forth Insurance Company in Monroe, with special thanks to agent Shelby Sims for securing the funding.

♥ HOW TO CHECK IT OUT:
Visit the main desk at any RPL location during business hours.

Alexandria/Pineville Veteran Honor Guards

The Alexandria/Pineville Veteran Honor Guards are a group of volunteer veterans that have provided military honors for fellow veterans for over a quarter of a century. This service is provided free of charge, supported entirely through donations. As a non-profit organization, all donations are tax deductible. We provide full honors—or whatever the family chooses—following the loss of a veteran. Our services do not depend on rank or length of service. We also work with active-duty personnel, providing firing rifles. They may provide part or full honors to veterans. It depends on your rank and time of service.

At each service during which we fire the rifle volleys, we provide surviving family members with the spent cartridges. The goal of the Honor Guards is to provide a full honor group at each service, depending on the availability of our volunteers. To schedule an honor guard at the service of a veteran you love, please have your funeral director contact us at least 24 hours before service so that we may have time to form a group.



For veterans, it is very important that your family knows your wishes with regard to military honors in advance. If you do choose an honor guard, please ensure that your family or the administrator of your estate knows where to find your DD-214 discharge papers. Without the appropriate paperwork, we are not able to provide services.

If you are a veteran and are interested in volunteering as part of the Veteran Honor Guard, please feel free to join us. We meet on the first Monday of each month, except when it falls on a holiday when the meeting is transferred to the second Monday. We meet at the Hotel Bentley in Downtown Alexandria at 6:00pm. It is only through our dedicated volunteers that we can continue to provide our veterans with these well-deserved honors. Without your help, these services may be lost.

If you would like more information, please send us an e-mail at honorguard254@gmail.com. We strive to respond each day. Thank you for service and may God bless this country and our veterans.

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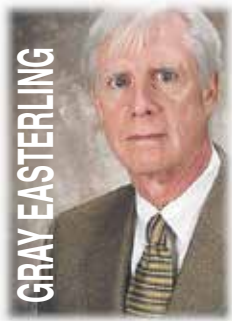
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Protecting Against Imposter Voice Scams

By Gray Easterling



Crooks are smart and will take your money the minute you lower your defenses. While this topic is not a typical financial advice column, it could save you from depleting cash assets for ransom demands.

One of the latest frauds is using AI to imitate voices of real people to convince the target individual to send money to “rescue” a loved one from some made-up, life-threatening ordeal, according to a recent Wall Street Journal article from the April 16th edition. For example, you could receive a call from someone sounding just like your wife where the so-called “abductor” gets on the phone demanding money for your spouse’s return. The author’s advice is to immediately hang up and call your wife right away. Here are some other tips that might help to protect your hard-earned cash. Scammers can use social media to identify victims. If your Facebook profile photo includes other family members like your spouse, children, or grandchildren, consider changing so that only you are pictured in your profile.

Also, keep your accounts and posts private, so strangers cannot learn the names of loved ones. Block unknown callers by letting the call go to voicemail. There are also settings on iPhones that allow users to silence calls from unknown numbers.

Family members should create an easy-to-remember and unique codeword to be used if anyone receives a suspicious call. When that weird call comes, ask your “person in trouble” for the code word. If it cannot be provided, hang up. When a scammer calls, do not believe caller ID. The crooks can spoof numbers to make them appear to be from a loved one. Somehow, they can call from local area codes so that it appears they are nearby when they may even be in a different country. Try to stay calm if you get that call. Taking deep breaths will help you think rationally. Massaging the area between your thumb and forefinger activates the vagus nerve, counteracting the panic. While on the call, try flipping to your messaging app and text the person referred to by the scammer. If you cannot reach the “victim,” try texting others who might know where he or she is. If you track your family member’s location, check it while you are on the phone. The information could blow up the story in short order.

Finally, if you do receive a bogus call referenced above, report it to the Federal Trade Commission and the FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center. I hope you never experience anything described in this article, but, if you do, maybe the suggestions will help you preserve and protect your liquidity.

Over the last few weeks, I have been reading “Surrounded by Grace,” by Bill Thomas. One of the chapters includes a reference to times in our life when we are stressed to the max and looking for a haven from the storm. “There are times when it seems like we just get through one crisis only to find that another part of our life is in turmoil.” When we find ourselves in situations like this, perhaps a passage from the Gospel of John might provide some comfort: “I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” Because Jesus had overcome the world, the disciples could also overcome, they need not drown in the waves of doubt, fear, or uncertainty. They overcome because Jesus overcame. So can you. God’s grace is as present in difficult times as it is when times are good. Let’s end on a happy note. A spectator approached the dugout of a youth baseball team, asking how the game was going. One of the players responded, “We are behind 18-0.” The spectator said, “Wow,

you must be disappointed and discouraged.” With a smile, the player responded, “Why should we be discouraged? We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet.” Hope springs eternal. May God walk with you each and every day, fueling you with the same hope and optimism of the dugout cheerleader.

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 Boulevard, 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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The Four Requirements of Health Savings Accounts

By Wesley Watkins



A Health Savings Account (HSA) is a tax-favored IRA-type of trust or custodial account to which an eligible individual, or someone such as an employer, may make contributions. The deposited money earns tax-free interest, and funds are not taxed when used to pay for qualified medical expenses.

There are four requirements that must be satisfied in order to be an eligible individual. The individual:

1. Must have coverage under a qualified High-Deductible Health Plan (HDHP);
2. Cannot be claimed as a tax dependent by anyone else;
3. Must not be enrolled in any part of Medicare;
4. Must not have disqualifying coverage.

Only individuals covered under a qualified HDHP are HSA-eligible. An individual without health coverage, for example, is not permitted to establish or contribute to an HSA.



Any individual who is eligible to be claimed as a dependent on another person's federal tax return is not eligible to establish or contribute to an HSA. This is true even if the other person does not claim the individual as a dependent.

Individuals who are entitled to Medicare are not eligible to establish or contribute to an HSA. For purposes of Medicare, "entitled" means the individual is actually covered under any part of Medicare, whether Part A, Part B, a Medicare Advantage plan (Part C), or Part D. Individuals who are eligible for Medicare, but are not enrolled, may establish and contribute to an HSA account. Most active employees aged 65 and older are eligible for Medicare. Some will enroll in Part A because it is free, but not other parts such as Part B or Part D that require a monthly premium payment. Individuals enrolled in Medicare are not HSA eligible. Note that, for some individuals, enrollment in Medicare Part A may be retroactive for as long as six months. For example, if a 67-year-old who is eligible for Part A without payment of premiums applies for Medicare Part A during a Medicare Special Enrollment

Period, the coverage will be retroactive for six months (e.g., the individual enrolls on July 1, 2025, Part A would begin on January 1, 2025). Medicare suggests that individuals who will be enrolling in Medicare stop their HSA contributions six months prior to applying for Medicare.

To be eligible, the individual must not be covered under any non-qualified health care plan (non-HDHP plan). Non-qualified health plans (non-HDHP plans) include coverage under a variety of types of plans from different sources. Some common plans that cause an individual to lose eligibility for an HSA are: Coverage under a spouse's health plan (unless that plan is also a qualified HDHP); coverage under a health flexible spending account (FSA) plan with no grace period; or coverage under a Health Reimbursement Arrangement.

Health Savings Accounts are wonderful tools that help save money. Anyone looking for an immediate, double-digit decrease in their healthcare spending should definitely consider a Health Savings Account. Don't pay taxes on health care when you don't have to.

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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Approaching Retirement with Disability

By Annie Lemoine Newton



ANNIE NEWTON

"I am almost 62 and I am ready to retire due to health issues..." Many times, we hear from an individual that they are approaching early retirement age and suffering from impairments that are making it difficult or impossible to continue working until full retirement age. The advice that we always give them is once they stop working and reach age 62, to concurrently file for early retirement benefits and disability benefits. A person's early retirement benefit amount is always less than the amount you would receive if you are found disabled and, of course, it is less than your full retirement amount.

However, if you need the income, it is a great idea to apply for the early retirement benefits in the interim because—as you may or may not know—the disability application process can be lengthy. Currently, it is taking our local offices 355 days to issue a decision on a disability claim, which is a long time to wait for any type of income. If you need any assistance on this process, please don't hesitate to call us!

The law firm of former Social Security Judge Peter J. Lemoine has offices in Cottonport, Alexandria, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette. Call (318) 876-3174 to set up a consultation or visit our website at www.lemoinelawfirm.com.



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Festival Season in the Centre de la Louisiane

By Wilbert Carmouche

It’s festival season and we are here to invite you to the celebration of the Year of Food 2025! Traditional festival foods and food focused festivals are not to be missed in Avoyelles Parish. And the lineup of events looks like this for the month of May!

Bring Mom to a Tea Party at Avoyelles Council on Aging’s Marksville Campus on Thursday, May 8th from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. Call (318) 253-9771 to reserve your “Tea Seats”!



Mansura, the Cochon de Lait Capitale of the World, will host the annual Cochon de Lait Festival on Friday and Saturday, May 9th and 10th. The Cochon de Lait 5k Run and 1 mile Run/Walk on May 10th is a great way to work off the calories before feasting. Registration is now open or register on site beginning at 7:00am prior to the 8:00am race time. Visit www.cochondelaitfestival.com or FB Cochon de Lait Festival to register online or for additional information.

The Town of Mansura will then host a 10:30am parade to kick off the Cochon de Lait Festival. The fest will mix great food, good times, and music with the famous Cochon de lait (French for roast pig). Vendor booths will be set up at the adjacent walking track along with children’s activities. Come by and experience a true Louisiana culinary tradition, Mansura style! You can now



pre-purchase your Cochon dinners for \$13.00 which includes Jambalaya, pork and a roll served on Saturday, May 10th. Serving will begin at 11:00am and end at 2:00pm. To pre-purchase, call Ursula at (318) 964-2140 or Corey (318) 359-5706.

Featured entertainment on Friday is Tommy G. & Stormy Weather from 7:00pm to 10:00pm. Saturday’s lineup is Semi-Charmed from 5:30pm to 7:30pm and concludes with Geno Delafosse and French Rockin’ Boogie from 8:00pm to 10:00pm.

Take Mom to Brunch & Paint at the Sarto Old Iron Bridge in Big Bend on Saturday, May 10th at 10:00am. Brittany and her team are sure to provide a great experience for you and mom as you enjoy brunch and come home with a painting. Call the Adam Ponthieu Museum at (318) 500-4036 to register or email BigBendMusuem1927@gmail.com.

Visit Paragon Casino Resort on Wednesday, May 14th from 10:00am to 2:00pm for the Health and Wellness Expo. Join them for the huge indoor health fair! This event for all ages features health screenings, education, latest trends, community resources, fitness, kids’ activities, food, drink, speakers, door prizes and much more.

It’s free and open to the public! Sponsorships and free booth spaces are available by calling (318) 253-2015.

Are you ready for Open Mic Night? Open Mic Night at Bailey’s on the Square is geared towards musicians who play and sing their favorite songs or original music, not to be mistaken for karaoke. Come on Thursday, May 15th and see over 10 artists each night, or on any third Thursday of each month. Open to all ages. No cover; always a vibe! Doors open at 6:30pm and the mic is turned on at 7:00pm.

The Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana will host its 27th Annual Pow Wow on Saturday, May 17th from 10:00am to 10:00pm and Sunday, May 18th from 10:00am to 4:00pm. This annual public event, held at the Chief Joseph Alice Pierite Pow Wow



Grounds on the Tunica-Biloxi Reservation in Marksville, welcomes various regional indigenous tribes to celebrate culture through vibrant craft displays, music performances, dance presentations and cultural exhibits. Featured performances and events include the Tunica-Biloxi Singers and Legend Keepers, Native American dance and drum (singing) contests and special performances The Grayhawk Band and native flutist, Larry Yazzie. The event will also feature food and craft vendors.

EXPLORE AVOYELLES



CALENDAR of EVENTS

Mother’s Day Tea Party
Avoyelles Council on Aging
Marksville
May 8, 2025 @ 1:00pm-3:00pm
318.253.9771

Cochon de Lait Festival
Downtown Mansura
May 9-10, 2025
www.cochondelait.com

Ladies’ Brunch & Paint
Sarto Old Iron Bridge
May 10, 2025
BigBendMuseum1927@gmail.com

Health and Wellness Expo
Paragon’s Mari Center
May 14, 2025 @ 10:00am-2:00pm
318.253.2015

Tunica Biloxi Pow-Wow
Tunica Biloxi Reservation
Marksville
May 17-18, 2025
www.tunicabiloxi.org

Roots & Boots
Paragon Casino Resort
May 24, 2025 @ 8:00pm
(Doors at 7:00pm)
www.paragoncasinoresort.com

Alligator Feeding Show
Paragon Casino Resort
May 31, 2025 @ 4:00pm
www.paragoncasinoresort.com

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Children, parents, and families are invited to a free open-to-the-public Youth Education Day ahead of the 27th Annual Tunica-Biloxi Pow Wow on Friday, May 16th from 9:30am to 1:00pm at the Chief Joseph Alcide Pierite Pow Wow Grounds on the Tunica-Biloxi reservation. Call Elisabeth Pierite-Mora at (318) 240-6432. The event includes

the stage on May 24th. Assigned seating tickets start at \$45.00. Doors to venue will open at 7:00pm. Tickets are available at www.paragoncasinoresort.com.

If you'll be in Avoyelles on Wednesday, May 28th and need your car seat safety checked, we've got you covered. Join First Guaranty Bank (FGB) and Louisiana State Troopers at FGB, located at 211 E. Tunica Drive in Marksville for a Car Seat Safety Check from 10:00am to 1:00pm. Your children's car seats will be inspected by a certified State Trooper to make sure they're installed correctly! Call 888.375.3093 for mor information.

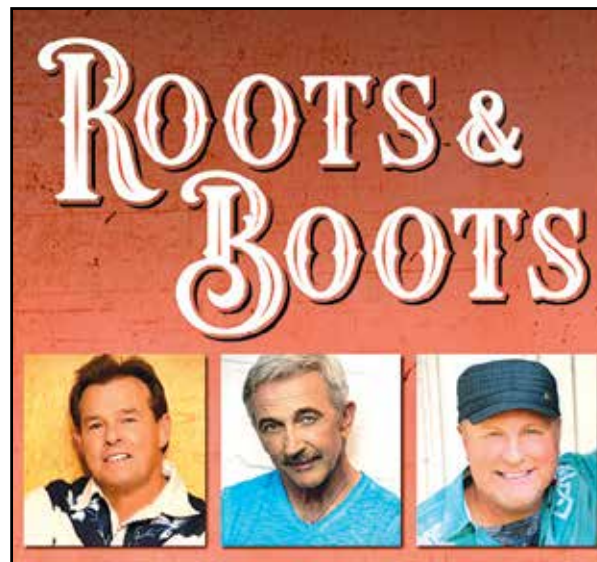
Paragon Casino Resort hosts its legendary Gator Feeding Show Saturday, May 31st at 4:00pm. Hotel guests, casino visitors and the public can enjoy a free, educational and entertaining 30-minute live-feeding with the live alligators in the "Gator Bayou" located inside the hotel's atrium. Photo opportunities with a baby alligator and a "holding" snake will take place after each show and will be free to the public.

pow-wow dance demonstrations, singing, storytelling, and craft demonstrations.

The Tunica-Biloxi Cultural and Educational Museum and Gift Shop will be open for tours on Friday, May 17th from 10:00am to 5:00pm and Saturday, May 18th from 10:00am to 4:00pm for your convenience.

For more information on the Pow Wow, visit www.tunicabiloxi.org

On the Mari Center Stage, Roots & Boots featuring Sammy Kershaw, Aaron Tippin, and Collin Raye on Saturday, May 24th begins at 8:00pm. This trio of legends defined country music in the '90s. You won't want to miss it when they bring their superstar powers to



Looking ahead to the beginning of June 2025, come to Bunie for the annual Louisiana Corn Festival on the weekend of June 12th through 14th, Keith Frank & The Soileau Zydeco Band on Saturday, June 14th, and Neal McCoy on Saturday, June 21st.

Reminder, 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, or Wilbert to plan your travels to www.travelavoyelles.com by calling (800) 833-4195 or emailing tourism@cricket.net, FB: TravelAvoyelles.

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Prioritizing Mental Health: Why Awareness Matters Now More Than Ever

By Christy Pennison, LPC-S



When you hear the words “mental health”, what comes to mind? For some, it brings up ideas of therapy offices and diagnoses. For others, it’s something that’s quietly tucked away—rarely talked about yet deeply felt.

The truth is, mental health is simply how we think, feel, and navigate life’s challenges. It affects every part of our lives—our relationships, our work, our ability to experience joy, and even our physical health. Yet, despite how essential it is, mental health has often been misunderstood or overlooked. Thankfully, that’s starting to change.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a time dedicated to bringing these conversations out into the open and reminding us all that mental health is just as important as physical health. And right now, that awareness couldn’t be more important.

Over the past few years, we’ve seen a growing recognition of mental health challenges, not just here in Central Louisiana, but across the country. More people are talking openly about struggles like anxiety, depression, and burnout. And while it might feel like mental health issues are suddenly “on the rise,” the reality is they’ve always been there. What’s different now is that people are finding the courage to seek support rather than suffer in silence.



Several factors have brought mental health into the forefront. The pandemic was one of them. Isolation, uncertainty, and loss touched all of us in some way. Even as life has returned to a “new normal,” the ripple effects linger. In addition, social media and 24-hour news cycles have added to daily stress and comparison in ways previous generations never experienced. It’s no wonder so many people are feeling overwhelmed.

But here’s the good news: just like physical health, mental health can be strengthened, supported, and cared for. Taking small, intentional steps can make a real difference. So how do you take care of your mental health?

First, give yourself permission to prioritize it. Taking care of your emotional well-being is not selfish—it’s essential. Stay connected. Relationships are vital for our mental health. Whether it’s family, friends, a faith community, or a support group, make time for real, meaningful connections. Practice self-awareness. Notice how you’re feeling—not to judge yourself, but to better understand your needs. Seek support when needed. Therapy is not just for “when things get bad.” It can be a powerful tool for growth, healing, and finding healthier ways to cope with life’s challenges. Engage in activities that fill your cup. Exercise, time outdoors, hobbies, prayer or meditation, creative outlets—all of these nourish your mind and body.

Keep an eye out for others. If you notice someone you love struggling, the best thing



you can do is be present. Listen without trying to “fix” them. Encourage them to seek help if needed. Sometimes the simple reminder that they are not alone is more powerful than any advice.

At Be Inspired Counseling & Consulting, we see every day how powerful it can be when someone reaches out for help—and how much strength it takes to do so. Healing is possible. Growth is possible. And hope is never out of reach.

This Mental Health Awareness Month, my hope for our community is simple: Let’s keep the conversation going. Let’s remind each other that it’s okay to not be okay — and that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Most importantly, let’s remember that behind every statistic is a real person, with real experiences and feelings, who deserves to feel heard, supported, seen, and inspired to live a full and meaningful life.

Take care of yourself. Check on your people. And never underestimate the power of one small step toward hope.

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Don't Forget to Collect the Evidence!

By Debbie Guy, LCSW



The next two months stir deep emotions and evoke mixed memories. Yes, Mother's and Father's Day are upon us. We get into word games of birth, adoptive, or "I was raised by..." Memories range from saintly mother to mommy dearest, from absent father to the best dad ever, along with those who rank us, our children—those sweet, spicy creatures that made us a family.

Some families are cookie cutters. They move through life like a well-oiled machine. They look alike, think alike, act alike and are all above average. Oh, the bliss! And then, there's the rest of us. Parents who kept disposal cameras (before the days of smart phones) on hand to "snap" the evidence or receipts as we now say. For example, we submit pictures for "This is Your Life" graduation celebration at church. After it plays, our son leans over whispering in a "mom failure" tone, "Why don't I have any pictures with the Easter Bunny?" I respond, "I tried," while I whip out our evidence showing him as a toddler huddled behind the log at the daycare Easter picnic, loudly refusing



to approach the six-foot Peter Cottontail who popped by. We left early. Or, when siblings scream, "I hate you!" we present the evidence of them kissing and hugging. Or, after a "pulling our hair out" day, we scroll through evidence of our sleeping dears to restore our hope and energy to face tomorrow.

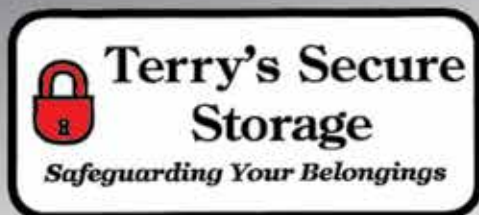
Families, whatever the form, are complex. Research is replete with data listing factors such as birth order, age of parents at each birth, temperaments, and innate abilities which affect parenting and family dynamics. Plus, all these interactions are interpreted differently by the parent and child. Whatever the role, mom, dad, or child, life's tough.

Gabor Maté sums it up best, "No two children have the same parents." In other words, parenting is a living, breathing organism. We are ever learning from successes and failures, responding to triggers, and adapting. The commercial contrasting the parents' hypervigilance with their first child versus their last is one hilarious!

While some days are smooth as clockwork, other days are like putting socks on a toddler's limp foot. This conundrum surfaced when visiting with a precious mom at a soccer match. I love honest discussions. She wrestles with balancing the family unit with her appreciation of each child's differences, fairly addressing their needs, and remaining composed when she hears the universal "Why doesn't he have to!?!?" whine waft through the house.

Well, how to respond? Try, "Sweetie, I hear you. Give yourself some grace, You're on the right track. And, yes, parenting isn't for wimps. Can I give you a hug?" Well, what to do? Just Be. Be their non-cookie cutter friend, their neutral, seasoned, imperfect somebody who's candid and has sense of humor. Be the insightful contributor, who offers options, or admits, "I don't know, but we'll ride out this storm together."

So, blessings on us evidence-collecting moms and dads. We got this! And we've got the pics to prove it!



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RSO's Summer Speakeasy Sweepstakes

Step back in time and into the Jazz Age for your chance to win \$10,000 at the Rapides Symphony's Summer Speakeasy Sweepstakes!

Join the Symphony for an unforgettable evening of music, glamour, and excitement on Thursday, June 19th at 6:00pm at the Community Center at England Airpark, located at 1718 Kegelman Boulevard in Alexandria. This year's event channels the spirit of the Roaring Twenties—complete with art deco flair, live music, and a \$10,000 grand prize for one lucky raffle winner. Each \$100 ticket includes a chance at the grand prize, admission for two people, and a wide selection of decade-inspired hors d'oeuvres.

Though you do not need to be present to win, Sweepstakes never fails to be a fun evening that you will surely want to attend. There will be several spectacular live auction items, as well as several silent auction items for you to bid on. Of course, you won't want to miss seeing who walks away with the \$10,000 grand prize at the end of this casual, fun summer evening!

Call the Symphony office at (318) 442-9709 to get your tickets. Sponsorship packages are also available for companies or individuals. With any luck, you'll be \$10,000 richer by the end of the evening; but you can't win if you don't get your ticket before they're sold out!



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Entertainment Focus

2025 Spectral Sisters Productions Ten-Minute Play Festival

By David J. Holcombe

It's time for the most unusual, eclectic, and original production of the year, the 2025 Spectral Sisters Productions Ten-Minute Play Festivals. Eight original plays by Louisiana writers were selected by outside judges for production in this year's festival. The theme for this year was "What Had Happened Was..." As usual, each author used their creative talents to write a unique work with eight different perspectives on the theme.



five theatre companies for a town of only 50,000 (130,000 in the surrounding parishes) and only 18% college graduates. Thanks to dedicated and supportive audiences who recognize the value and importance of original theatre, SSP continues to thrive.

Performances will take place May 29th, 30th and 31st beginning at 7:30pm on the Hearn Stage of the Kress Theatre (inside the Rapides Foundation Building). There is also a 2:30pm matinee on Sunday, June 1st. There is adult language and subjects, so parental discretion is advised. Cost is a mere \$10.00, a real bargain for a live performance of original works.

Come laugh and cry, moan and groan, admire and support your local playwrights, actors, directors, and stagehands. It's a wonderful way to build some social capital and enjoy yourselves at the same time.

For more information, visit spectralsisters.com.



This year's winners, in order of placement are (1) "An Appraisal" by Carlos Turner, (2) "Suicide" by David J. Holcombe, (3) "Hand Me that Crowbar!" by David Adams, (4) "Ouroboros" by Lewis Gauthier, (4 bis) "The Stoned Age" by Melissa Savage, (6) "That Remains to be Seen" by Terri Febuary, (7) "Professionals" by John Wilson, and (8) "Roses" by Frances Boudreaux. Every play will be directed by a local director and feature local actors, sometimes performing in more than one play. The subjects range from pure comedy to heartbreaking tragedy, but each only lasts ten minutes.

Spectral Sisters, founded in 2004 by Tammy Killian, has produced over 165 original plays over 21 years. It remains the only developmental theatre company in Louisiana (having outlived Southern Rep in New Orleans). In fact, Central Louisiana boasts



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Entertainment Focus

Art

Ongoing-May 10: 57th Annual Tom Peyton Memorial Arts Festival, 10:00am-4:00pm. First United Methodist Church Alexandria (2727 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm. The ten-day festival showcases more than 60 works by regional artists. Juror Lily Brooks selected the merit awards. Cost: Free.

Ongoing-June 21: George Rodrigue—The River is the Road, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria). 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". Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

May 10: 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

May 10: 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

May 13: 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

May 29: Renegade Tour at AMoA, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 6:00pm-8:00pm. Chief of Resource Management at Cane River

Creole National Historical Park in Natchitoches Parish, Dustin Fuqua, will lead a unique tour of George Rodrigue: The River is the Road after hours! Much like George Rodrigue, Dustin dedicates his life to preserving Cajun traditions, namely the production of Gumbo File. Renegade Tours are designed to engage audiences who may not think they like museums. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

May 31: Adult Printmaking Class, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 10:00am-4:00pm. Join Madilyn Anderson for a full day of printmaking beginning with concept drawings, participants will carve images to create original prints utilizing personal symbols, much like George Rodrigue with his Blue Dog. Cost: \$50.00. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

Music

May 9: Jazz on Jackson, First United Methodist Church Alexandria (2727 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm-8:00pm. Modern Jazz Movement will perform as part of the 57th Annual Tom Peyton Memorial Arts Festival. Cost: Free.

May 23: Riverwinds Trio Concert, Westside Regional Library (5416 Provine Place, Alexandria), 6:00pm. The Riverwinds Trio will perform a recital of enchanting chamber music composed or arranged for flute, oboe, and piano. The program will include the "Concerto for Oboe and Flute in G Minor" by Johann David Heinichen, "Menuet and Dance of the Blessed Spirits" from Orfeo ed Euridice by Christoph Willibald Gluck, "Trio-sérénade" by Anselm Vinée, "Deux Interludes" by Jacques Ibert, and "Miniatures" by William Grant Still. Cost: Free. Email:

louisianaflutestudio@gmail.com. [Facebook.com/RiverwindsTrio](https://www.facebook.com/RiverwindsTrio)

May 24: Roots & Boots, Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 9:00pm. Sammy Kershaw, Aaron Tippin, and Collin Raye form a trio of legends who defined country music in the '90s. Cost: \$45.00+. paragoncasinoresort.com

May 31: The Legend Lives On—Elvis Tribute, Laborde Earles Entertainment Center (5600 Coliseum Boulevard, Alexandria), 7:00pm. The King is coming back—for one night only—at The Legend Lives On: The World-Renowned Elvis Tribute with Moses Snow & Kraig Parker. Hear all the hits, see the moves, and relive the magic of Elvis Presley like never before. Charles Stone, Elvis's former tour producer, and Sam Thompson, Elvis's former bodyguard, sharing stories and memories about their time with Elvis. Then two of the world's leading Elvis tribute artists, Moses Snow and Kraig Parker, will leave you "All Shook Up" and screaming for more! Cost: \$29.00-\$69.00. Call: 318-442-9581. rpclive.org

Theatre

May 9-11: Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Lagniappe Theatre Events Center (7521 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria). One of the most enduring shows of all time, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat is a reimagining of the Biblical story of Joseph, his father Jacob, eleven brothers and the coat of many colors. Performances begin Friday and Saturday night at 7:00pm; Sunday matinee begins at 2:30pm. Cost: \$12.00+. Call: 318-487-8243. lagniappetheatre.com



Scan for a full listing of events at



Entertainment Focus

May 10: Tangled: A Ballet, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. Experience the magic of Tangled, an original ballet presented by Get to the Pointe Ballet Academy and choreographed by Sarah Ochs Ranson. This breathtaking production brings the beloved tale to life through stunning choreography, beautiful costumes, and enchanting music. Don't miss this unforgettable performance showcasing the incredible talent of award-winning ballerinas! Cost: \$30.00. gettothepointeballetacademy.com

May 12, 19, 26 & June 2: 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.

May 15: Film Screening—Jan Beauboeuf: The Creative Spirit, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria). Join AMoA for a screening of the winner of the Best Documentary Short at this year's Cinema on the Bayou film festival in Lafayette (directed by Graham Holt, cinematography by Jerry Clark, edited by Caleb Pate, and produced by Timmons Inc.) and celebration of Avoyelles artist Jan Beauboeuf. Seating is limited; please pre-register. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

May 29-June 1: Spectral Sisters 10 Minute Play Festival, Kress Theatre (1101 Fourth Street, Alexandria). Eight

original plays by Louisiana writers were selected for production using this year's theme, "What Had Happened Was..." Every play will be directed by a local director and feature local actors, sometimes performing in more than one play. The subjects range from pure comedy to heartbreaking tragedy, but each only lasts ten minutes. Performances begin Thursday through Saturday at 7:30pm; Sunday matinee begins at 2:30pm. Parental discretion is advised. Cost: \$10.00. spectralsisters.com

June 9-20: CPP Youth Summer Theatre Workshop, Kress Theatre (1101 Fourth Street, Alexandria), 1:30pm-4:30pm. Give your child the chance to shine on stage! CPP's Summer Theater Workshop is a fun and engaging program where young performers (ages 6-17) will explore acting, storytelling, and teamwork. Led by Jill Dupont, kids will build confidence, make new friends, and develop performance skills through games and rehearsals. This weekday workshop will end with a special showcase performance of "Cinderella-If the Shoe Fits" where friends and family can see their stars in action! Cost: \$125 per child. cpptheatre.com/workshops

Events

Ongoing-May: 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.

May 9-10: Cochon de Lait, 1822 Leglise Street, Mansura. The fest will mix great food, good times, and music with the famous Cochon de lait (French for roast pig). Vendor booths will be set up at the adjacent walking track along with children's activities. Come by and experience a true Louisiana culinary tradition, Mansura style! Cost: \$13.00 Cochon de Lait dinner. cochondelaitfestival.com

May 10: Mental Health & Wellness Festival, Pineville Riverfront, 9:00am-1:00pm. Join Six Feet Above on the Pineville Riverfront for our Third Annual Mental Health and Wellness Festival! May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This fun family event is dedicated to eliminating the stigma

surrounding mental health and providing a safe space to access resources and learn the important of self-care and self-awareness. Events include yoga, food trucks, music, inflatables, chair massages, craft tables, vendors and over 20 mental health resources from across the state. The day will culminate with a half mile community unity mental health walk at noon. Cost: Free.

May 10: 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

May 13, 20, 27 & June 3: Alexandria Farmer's Market, First United Methodist Church (2727 Jackson Street,

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Entertainment Focus

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.

May 14: Cenla Women's Connection Prayer Coffee, Westside Regional Library (5416 Provine Place, Alexandria), 10:00am. Libby Robertson is hosting this event. We will have refreshments, drinks, and always coffee. Cheryl George will lead us in a short devotion before we break into small groups for prayer time. Everyone welcome!

May 14: Paragon Health & Wellness Expo, Paragon Casino Resort (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 10am-2pm. This event for all ages features health screenings, education, latest trends, community resources, fitness, kids' activities, food, drink, speakers, door prizes & much more. Free 253-2015.

May 14: Child Safety Seat Check, Rapides Regional Medical Center Main Entrance (211 4th Street, Alexandria), 2:00pm-5:00pm. A trained child passenger safety educator will take a look at your car seats, make sure they are not under recall, make sure the seat is installed properly and show you how to install the car seat. The car seat check process takes between 15-25 minutes, depending on how many car seats are in the vehicle. The seat checks normally are held the second Wednesday of each month. Cost: Free.

May 17: Holi Fest 2025, Downtown Alexandria, 10:30am-2:00pm. Holi is a tradition which dates back millennia. In Alexandria, Holi is a 1/2-day event combining Indian and Cajun spirit. It is a vibrant celebration of Unity In Diversity as we come together as a community to support a great cause! This colorful event will benefit the Children's Advocacy Network, helping to heal and champion abused and neglected children throughout Central Louisiana. Join in the fun! Cost: \$45.00 4K Run/Walk; \$20.00 Plate Lunch; Colors Free. Call: 318-792-1147. <https://tinyurl.com/CenlaHoliFest>

May 17-18: 27th Annual Tunica Biloxi Pow Wow, Chief Joseph Alice Pierite Pow Wow Grounds. Pow Wow welcomes various regional indigenous tribes to celebrate culture through vibrant craft displays, music performances, dance presentations and cultural exhibits. Featured performances and events include the Tunica-Biloxi Singers and Legend Keepers, Native American dance and drum (singing) contests and special performances The Grayhawk Band and native flutist, Larry Yazzie. The event will also feature food and craft vendors. tunicabiloxi.org

May 18: Central Louisiana Orchid Society Meeting, St. James Episcopal Church EYC Building (1546 Albert Street, Alexandria), 2:30pm. Learn everything you need to know about orchids and how to grow them. Get hands on help with your plants! There is a monthly plant raffle, blooming orchid entry for Show and Tell plus refreshments. In addition, there are opportunities to attend American Orchid Society shows/sales throughout the year.

May 21: Cenla Women's Connection Luncheon, Alexandria Convention Center (2225 North MacArthur Drive,

Alexandria), 12:00pm. Pat Voss presents "My Oh, Sew Perfect Life" with a special musical feature by Evie Thompson. Enjoy this inspirational speaker, special feature, fellowship, and delicious meal. Invite a friend! Please RSVP by May 15th. Cost: \$25.00. Call: 318-447-4673.

May 22: Cenla Author's Club Meeting, Westside Regional Library (5416 Provine Place, Alexandria), 6:00pm-8:00pm. 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 will be Julie Kane. Julie is a poet, scholar, editor and was the Louisiana Poet Laureate for 2011-2013. Cost: Free. Call: 318-442-2483.

May 24: Rapides Retiring Teachers' Celebration, RPSB Media Center (502 Beauregard Street, Alexandria), 2:30pm-4:00pm. Each retiree will be invited to share special experiences and memories and receive a special certificate of appreciation. Photos will be taken of each retiree with their family and friends. Refreshments will be served. Cost: Free. Call: 318-447-2394.

May 31: 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.

June 7: 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.

June 7: 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.

Sports

May 13, 20, 27 & June 3: 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

May 24: No Tap Bowling Tournament, Four Seasons Bowling Center (3510 North Boulevard, Alexandria), 11:00am. Bowlers will not only enjoy a thrilling tournament but also contribute to a vital cause. Proceeds from this event will directly support individuals living with Sickle Cell Disease by funding programs such as hydration therapy, wellness support, education for newly diagnosed families, and access to essential hygiene and health resources. Cost: \$30.00 Call: 318-794-9042.

**All events subject to change.*

The Original Holi Fest 2025

By Amy Pillarisetti & Jeremiah Honea

Get ready for a vibrant celebration! The Cenla India Association, partnering with the Children's Advocacy Network, is thrilled to present the 11th Annual Holi Fest in Downtown Alexandria on Saturday, May 17th from 10:00am to 2:00pm.

Since 2012, this unique and free event has become an Alexandria tradition, growing from a small gathering of 50 to a lively crowd of 500 in 2024. Everyone, young and old, is invited to join in the fun—and the colors are on us!

The day kicks off with a 4K walk/jog/run, with all proceeds going to benefit the vital work of the Children's Advocacy Network. Their vision is to create a community dedicated to ending the cycle of abuse and neglect, ensuring every child has a safe and permanent home. The theme of love, hope and renewal inherent in Holi Fest align strongly with CAN's mission of helping heal and champion abused and neglected children throughout Central Louisiana.

The Cenla Indian Association celebrates unity in diversity and bringing communities together by sharing traditions and diverse social and cultural heritage. Holi, a festival with roots stretching back 3,000 years in Northern India, beautifully illustrates unity. In a shower of red, blue, yellow, green, and all shades imaginable, social barriers dissolve. Whether rich or poor, leader or follower, everyone becomes one in color. Across India, Nepal, and



beyond, this joyous festival marks the triumph of good over evil and the arrival of spring—truly living up to its name, the “Festival of Colors.” It's a vibrant celebration of fertility, color, and love.

Here in Alexandria, spring bursts into life as downtown becomes a canvas painted with a rainbow of hues. This



cherished festival brings out the child in everyone. It's a wonderful sight to see people of all ages joyfully covered in the colors of love, forgetting their differences. The Holi Fest embodies the spirit of unity and brotherhood, offering a chance to connect as equals.

Come downtown! The Holi Fest is free and open to all, with colors provided. Join friends for a colorful stroll, savor the flavors of India, and experience the rich cultural tapestry of our city—all while supporting the Children's Advocacy Network in their crucial mission to eradicate child abuse.

Beyond the fun, you'll be making a difference in the lives of children. Enjoy Indian cuisine, music, dance, henna tattoos, and of course, the playful throwing of colors! This family-friendly event is an absolute must-attend. Whether you join the 4K or simply come to play with colors for free, all proceeds from the event will support the Children's Advocacy Network. We eagerly anticipate seeing you downtown on May 17th as we come together to support our children, celebrate our diverse community, and embrace our

shared culture.

This Event will not be possible without our partnership with the City of Alexandria, the Alexandria/Pineville Convention and Visitors Bureau, Central Louisiana Community Foundation, Red River bank, and many other partners and sponsors. Thank you!

Namaste Y'all

HOLI FEST

MAY 17, 2025

DOWNTOWN ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria Louisiana

4K Walk/Jog/Run 10:00AM

Indian Cuisine Lunch (\$20/person) 11:30PM - 1:00 PM

Enjoy Indian Beat, Dance & Music During Lunch

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Info: amy.pillarisetti@gmail.com, communications@childrensadvocacy.net . CAN 318-445-5678 ext 3002

Entertainment Focus

Find Out “If The Shoe Fits” at CPP’s 2025 Summer Theatre Workshop



Give your child the chance to shine on stage! City Park Players’ Summer Theater Workshop is a fun and engaging program where young performers (ages 6-17) will explore acting, storytelling, and teamwork June 9th through 20th each Monday through Friday from 1:30pm to 4:30pm at Kress Theatre, located at 1102 3rd Street in Downtown Alexandria! Led by Jill Dupont, kids will build confidence, make new friends, and develop performance skills through games and rehearsals.

This workshop will end on Friday, June 20th at 5:00pm with a special showcase performance of “Cinderella - If the Shoe Fits” where friends and family can see

their stars in action! Workshop tuition is \$125 per child and spots are limited! Please note that no phones/electronic devices of any kind are permitted on campus during the workshop.

Find more information or register today at cpptheatre.com/workshops



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SATURDAY, MAY 17

10AM Gate Opens

10:30AM Tunica-Biloxi Singers & Legend Keepers
(Storytelling & Songs)

12PM Gourd Dancing

1PM Grand Entry

1 - 4PM Social Dancing, Dance & Drum Competition

5:30PM Choctaw Social Dancing - Jena Band of Choctaw Youth

7:15PM Grand Entry, Social Dancing, & Competition

SUNDAY, MAY 18

10AM Gate Opens

10:30AM Tunica-Biloxi Singers & Legend Keepers
(Storytelling & Songs)

11AM Gourd Dancing

12PM Grand Entry; Social Dancing; Competition Finals

4PM Dance & Drum Contest Awards



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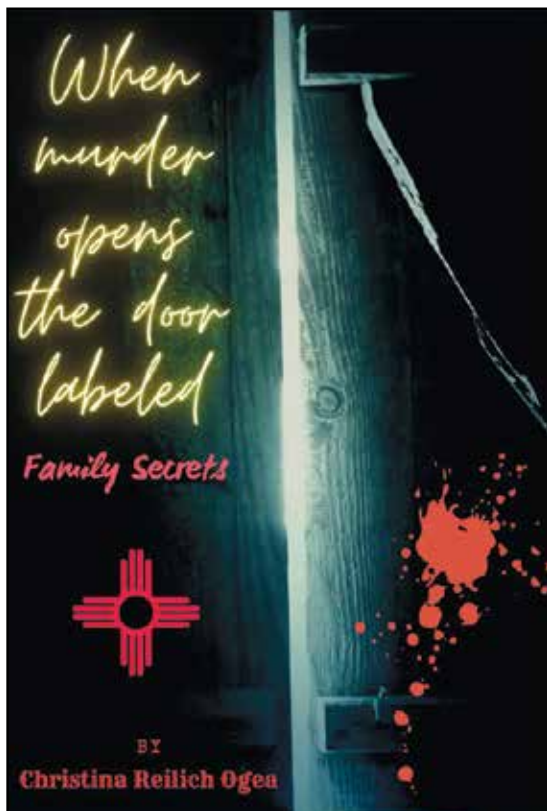
Author Christina Reilich Ogea

By Michael Wynne

I am proud to live in the community of Central Louisiana where I can meet and know and admire so many wonderful people, all very different, but all enjoyable. Will Rogers said it best, “I never met a man I didn’t like.” I agree with him. In our case today, the person I like is Christina Ogea, a marvelous author with a personal fascinating history.

The daughter of a Marine Corp “lifer” (as Christina puts it), Christina was born at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. As part of a strong military family, with two sisters who joined the military, Christina has lived more places than the vast majority of us ever will—interesting places including Guam, Cuba and a long stint in Spain. She embraced the military life, joining the Army as soon as she graduated high school in 1990. When asked why she joined, she said with a wink, that her father “strongly recommended it.”

During her six years in the Army, she trained as a nurse, rising to the level of BSN and rank of Lieutenant. Her work in the ER during the Gulf War, including working in the burn units with wounded pilots, left a lasting impression on her, so much so that she has continued her ER work even today at St. Francis Cabrini Hospital. She arrived in Alexandria in 2008 with her husband, a native Alexandrian, and has established herself as a valuable and greatly respected member of the Cenla community. She is also very proud of her two children and one grandchild.



When asked why she wanted to become an author, she said she was always a book reader as a child. “My mom used to joke that she would fall asleep at night while reading a book to me and I would complete the reading of the book to her.” By age ten, she realized that she wanted to write as a major outlet in her life. In high school, she wrote her first book in her room during the time that she was grounded by her mother. All she had was a typewriter with which she created a book about a teenage girl in foster care who ran away. Sadly, Christina burned the book, in a classic act of teenage defiance.

In 2024, while talking to her husband about their bucket lists, she told him that she wanted to

write a book. And he responded, “Well, just do it.” She remembered visiting her great aunt in New Mexico when she was young and had found that place to be the perfect

setting for what would eventually become her first book, “When Murder Opens the Door Labeled Family Secrets.” She became a member of the Cenla Author’s Club in the fall of 2024 which she said helped her better write this book. An author in the club encouraged Christina to “write what you know first.” What surprised and delighted Christina was how long it took to write her book, just four months!

Christina describes her book as follows: A wronged state psychiatric patient escapes to the unfamiliar world outside and turns to kidnapping his only friend, along with her niece and two other friends. Turmoil occurs through it all, based upon his poor planning, and a secret is revealed in the end. Christina’s next book follows the first book’s storyline as there is so much more to tell. Reviews have been great for her book and she is already establishing a fan club of sorts (I count myself a member). Her book is available on Amazon.

Christina is another wonderful member of the Cenla community and people like her need to be celebrated for their heroism, their creativity, and their positive contributions to what makes Cenla a great place to live!

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A Guide to Healthy Summer BBQs

By Jennifer Duhon, MS, RDN, LDN



JENNIFER DUHON, MS, RDN, LDN

Although it's only May, summer is right around the corner, making it the perfect time to start grilling! Whether you're a seasoned grill master or a newbie, ensuring food safety is crucial to keep everyone healthy. Let's dive into some tips to make your BBQ both safe and nutritious.

The USDA shares these 10 food safety tips to keep your barbecue free from foodborne illness:

1. Clean your grill. Scrub the grill clean before use. No access to a faucet? Carry bottled water, soap, and paper towels.
2. Defrost safely. Thaw frozen beef, poultry, or fish safely in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in a microwave oven. Cook immediately after thawing.
3. Avoid cross contamination. Separate raw meat and vegetables by using different cutting boards.
4. Keep it cool. Pack coolers with ice bags, gel packs or

frozen water bottles. Use an appliance thermometer to monitor that food stays chilled at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below.

5. Marinate safely. Marinating adds flavor but be sure to do it safely. Always marinate in the refrigerator, not on the counter. You should not use marinade that comes in contact with raw meat as a sauce. However, you can set some aside before marinating or boil for no less than five minutes to make it safe for consumption.

6. Check internal temperatures. Cook food to a safe minimum internal temperature by using a food thermometer. Whole cuts of meat should be cooked to 145 degrees

Fahrenheit with a three-minute rest time; fish to 145 degrees Fahrenheit; ground meats to 160 degrees Fahrenheit; egg dishes to 160 degrees Fahrenheit; and poultry (ground or whole) to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

7. Use food thermometers correctly on burgers. Insert the thermometer through the side of patty until the probe reaches the center.

8. Thoroughly cook frozen meat. Although frozen products may appear to be pre-cooked or browned, treat them as raw food and cook thoroughly. Products labeled as "Cook and Serve," "Ready to Cook," and



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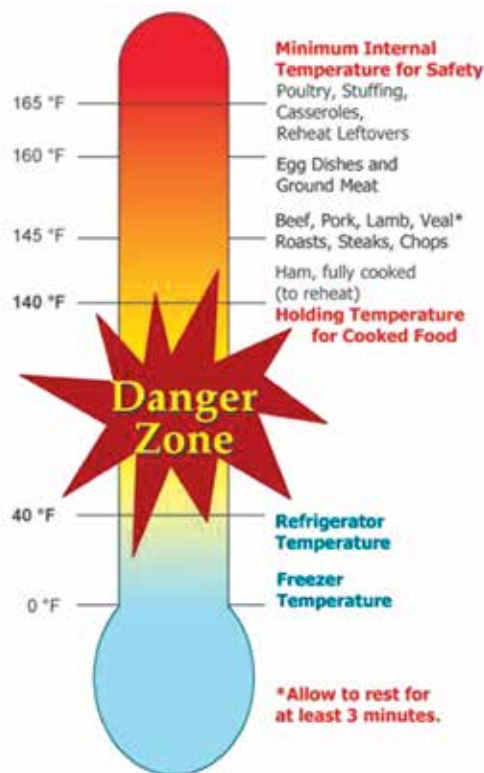
9. Beware of the “Danger Zone”. Bacteria multiply rapidly between 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit—a.k.a. the Danger Zone. The USDA recommends that perishable food be consumed or refrigerated within two hours (one hour in room or outdoor temperatures of 90 degrees Fahrenheit and above).

10. Store leftovers properly. Divide leftovers into smaller portions and place them in shallow containers in your refrigerator or cooler.

When grilling, follow these tips to ensure your meal is both delicious and nutritious. Choose lean meats by opting for lean cuts of meat like chicken breast, turkey burgers, or fish. These options are lower in saturated fat and calories, making your BBQ healthier. Add veggies to your grill. Grilled vegetables are delicious and nutritious. Try bell peppers, zucchini, mushrooms, and corn on the cob. They add color, flavor, and a variety of vitamins and minerals to your meal.

Swap out white buns for whole grain ones. Whole grains provide more fiber, which is great for digestion and keeps you feeling full longer. Likewise, instead of traditional sides like potato salad or coleslaw, try a quinoa salad or a mixed green salad. These options are lighter and packed with nutrients. Finally, hydrate wisely. Stay hydrated with water or homemade iced tea instead of sugary sodas. Add slices of lemon, lime, or cucumber to your water for a refreshing twist.

Grilling is a fantastic way to enjoy the summer weather and share delicious meals with friends and family. By following these food safety tips and incorporating nutritious choices, you can ensure your BBQs are both safe and healthy. So, grab your apron, fire up the grill, and enjoy the tasty, safe, and nutritious delights of summer grilling!



Vibrant Grilled Veggies

By Jennifer Duhon

2 Red Bell Peppers, Cut Into Halves
2 Yellow Bell Peppers, Cut Into Halves
2 Red Onions, Cut Into Halves
1 Eggplant, Cut Into Halves
2 Zucchini, Cut Into Halves
2 Bunches Asparagus, Ends Trimmed
7oz Button Mushrooms, Washed Well (Skewered)

Grilling/Roasting:

1/3 Cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 Teaspoon Each Salt and Pepper
2 Tablespoons Minced Garlic
1/4 Cup Chopped Parsley

Grilled Vegetable Marinade (Dressing):

1/3 Cup Lemon Juice
1/3 Cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil
2 Teaspoons White Sugar
1 Tablespoon Minced Garlic
1/2 Teaspoon Each Salt and Pepper
1/2 Teaspoons Each Dried Basil, Parsley, Oregano, Thyme
1 Teaspoons Chili Flakes



To make the marinade, place ingredients in a jar and shake well. Set aside for at least 10 minutes.

When preparing the vegetables, keep pieces large for easy handling on the BBQ (so you don't have to turn hundreds of pieces!) and so they don't fall through the grills. Cut bell peppers in half lengthwise, clean out seeds and walls. Cut again but leave into fairly large pieces. Keep onion root ends intact. Peel, cut in half, then cut into wedges through the root end.

Brush BBQ grills lightly with oil, then preheat to high. Place vegetables in a very large bowl or use a big tray. Drizzle with oil, sprinkle with salt, pepper, and garlic. Toss with hands. Skewer mushrooms. Place all veggies on BBQ and cook until tender crisp with charred edges. Remove into large bowl.

Cook times are as follows:

- Asparagus, zucchini—grill 2 minutes each side.
- Bell peppers, mushroom, onion—grill 3 minutes each side
- Eggplant—grill 4 minutes each side. Jab in middle to ensure each is soft but not soggy.

While vegetables are still hot, drizzle with dressing and toss. Set aside 10 minutes before serving, sprinkled with parsley.

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Pumpkin Nut Bread and Corn Creole

By Wilbert Carmouche

Festival season is upon us and we are eager to celebrate the Annual Tunica Biloxi Pow-Wow on May 17th and 18th at Chief Joseph Alcide Pierite Pow-Wow Grounds on the Tunica Biloxi Reservation in Marksville. Keeping with traditional foods of the area, I have selected a few Native-American recipes (with a French influence) for your pleasure. Ingredients are easily found in your pantry, local markets, and at farmers markets.

Pumpkin Nut Bread

by Ruby Carruth Bruchmiller

2/3 Cup Shortening
2 2/3 Cup Sugar
4 Eggs, Beaten



2 Cups Pumpkin
2/3 Cup Water
3 1/3 Cups Flour
2 Teaspoons Soda
1/2 Teaspoons Cloves
1 Teaspoon Cinnamon
1 1/2 Teaspoons Salt
2/3 Cups Dates, Chopped
2/3 Cup Chopped Pecans (Optional)
1/2 Teaspoon Baking Powder

Cream shortening and sugar. Add eggs, pumpkin, and water, mix well. Add dry ingredients to pumpkin mixture and mix well. Stir in nuts and dates. Bake in two greased bread loaf pans for 1 hour at 350 degrees Fahrenheit. If allergic to nuts, they are optional.

Corn Creole

by Mrs. Lamber Coco

3 Tablespoons Margarine
1 Large Onion
1 #2 Can Cream Corn
Cayenne Pepper and Salt, To Taste
2 Cups Milk
1 Small Green Pepper
5 Cloves Garlic
1 Beaten Egg
1/2 Cup Corn Meal

Chop onion and pepper; add garlic and cook in margarine until transparent. Add corn. Mix beaten egg, milk, corn meal, and seasonings and pour slowly into corn and onion mixture. Cook over low heat, stirring until mixture thickens. (Pimento may be added for color). Pour into greased casserole dish and bake about 45 minutes to 1 hour at 230 degrees Fahrenheit until firm.

Cookbooks are available at Avoyelles Commission of Tourism, tourism@cricket.net, or call us at (318) 964-2025. "La Cuisine des Avoyelles," a collection of recipes from the La Commission des Avoyelles sells for \$15.00 pickup or can be mailed at a cost of \$6.00 additional. Bon appetite mais amis!



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LSUA to Break Ground on New “Campus Edge” Project

By Adam Lord



LSUA has entered into a strategic partnership with Durand Construction, LLC, after securing approval from the Louisiana Board of Regents and LSU Board of Supervisors for a 50-year ground lease agreement to develop a new multi-unit apartment complex on the north edge of campus near the intersection of U.S. Highway 71 and Louisiana Highway 3170. This collaborative initiative addresses critical housing needs while supporting LSUA's ongoing efforts to attract and retain talented students and personnel. Access to housing is the most immediate need to support LSUA's rapid growth, as on-campus housing options have been 100% occupied with a triple-digit waitlist for nearly five years.

Designed to enhance campus life and community amenities, the complex will be privately managed but will prioritize LSUA students, faculty, and staff through favorable leasing terms. Construction will adhere to university-approved designs that fit within the institution's master plan, and all improvements will become university property at the lease's conclusion. The complex will feature 176 two-bedroom units, housing 352 occupants.

Plans built on data from an economic feasibility study by Brailsford and Dunlavey for developing the corner of LSUA's property place the apartment complex on the 3rd and 7th holes of the current Plantation Oaks Golf Course, accessible from Garry Tisdale Drive. As such, the last day to play golf on LSUA's golf course will be Sunday, June 1st.

By strategically partnering with the private sector, LSUA promotes sustainable campus development without direct financial expenditure. The project is expected to stimulate local economic activity, enhance regional amenities, and reinforce LSUA's commitment to fostering a thriving college community in Central Louisiana.

For more information, visit LSUA.edu.



LSUA to Break Ground on New Housing Development and Commercial Hub with Launch of “Campus Edge Project”

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Meet Jaycie O'Conner, a dedicated nursing major, standout LSUA softball player, and 2024 Mulder Scholar. From her first visit to campus as a middle school student, Jaycie felt the strong sense of community that would one day make LSUA her home. Now an active leader on campus and in the classroom, she shares how LSUA has shaped her journey, helped her grow, and inspired her to leave a meaningful legacy.

"I first discovered LSUA in seventh grade when I attended a robotics event on campus—a subject I was incredibly passionate about. From the moment I arrived, the staff welcomed me with open arms and

treated me like family. I instantly fell in love with LSUA! Now as a student, I cherish the welcoming environment and genuine care shown by both my fellow students and the faculty. LSUA has far exceeded my expectations, transforming what once seemed like an impossible dream into the best possible college experience.

"When I first moved in and met my roommates, I felt nervous about this new experience. But after just one evening together, I knew I had found lifelong friends and a true home! The smaller class sizes at LSUA have also helped me build strong connections with fellow students in my degree program. These relationships have been invaluable—we form study groups and help each other grasp difficult topics better.

"Campus life is the best life! There are so many events on campus that keep me busy. I am a member of the softball team as well as an honors student and ambassador. Through these organizations, I am motivated to excel in my studies and represent LSUA positively. The Mulder Scholarship has allowed me to participate in many on-campus activities as a student-athlete.



Without the scholarship, I would not have had the same opportunities to engage with the campus community and build connections. I have also made friendships with other Mulder Scholars and formed meaningful bonds with them.

"Every day, when I wake up, I am encouraged to accomplish my many goals and ultimately graduate. LSUA never fails to put students first—day in and day out, faculty, staff, and administrators prioritize our needs above all else. Throughout my first semester and a half here, I have connected with others and recognized that LSUA is truly home. By graduation, I hope to leave a lasting legacy at LSUA. I want other students to see that working hard and being involved in campus life can take you further than just staying buried in books."

CONGRATS TO OUR SPRING 2025 GRADUATES!



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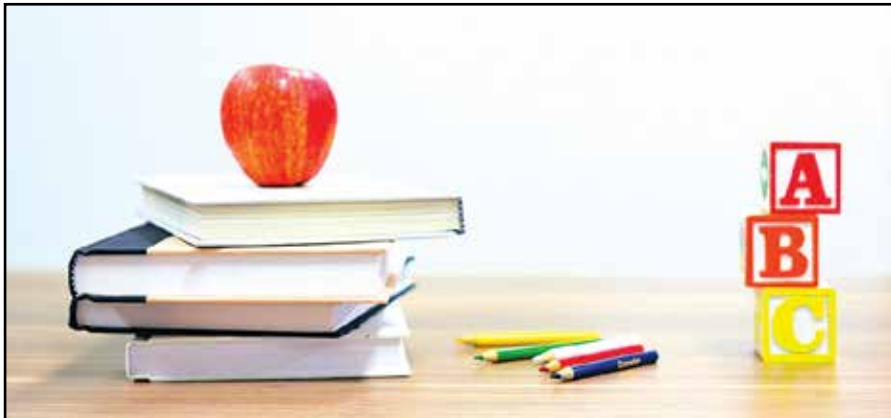
Rapides Retiring Teachers' Celebration



If your child has a favorite teacher retiring this year or your family member is retiring from education (in any capacity), please join us for a retirement celebration in honor of those who have given so much for so many years.

The Rapides Retired Teachers Association, the Cenla Retired Teachers Association, in conjunction with the Rapides Parish School Board, are happy to sponsor a retirement celebration on Friday, May 24th at the Rapides Parish School Board Media Center from 2:30pm to 4:00pm. Each retiree will be

invited to share special experiences and memories and receive a special certificate of appreciation. Photos will be taken of each retiree with their family and friends.



Special invited guests, as well as the families of retirees are welcome to celebrate with us. Refreshments will be served.

Please join us in honoring those who have dedicated their professional lives to the welfare and education of our children, grandchildren, and community. If you have any questions, please call (318) 447-2394.



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Saving The Historic LaCroix Log Cabin

By Michael Wynne



Historical treasures that are well worth preserving abound and surround us in Cenla every day; but sometimes we just “can’t see the forest because of the trees.”

In this case, it is literally true that the trees hide this unique treasure. In our very midst here in Central Louisiana, is a one-of-a-kind early pioneers’ log cabin, long forgotten and very much hidden away by nature’s overgrowth. Built only about 35 years after Kent House was built, itself the oldest building in north Louisiana, this valiant survivor truly represents the early migration of Americans coming from Europe and the east coast to settle the then-pure, unadulterated wilderness of early

America. This dwelling, that was already old when the Civil War took place, must have been how many of our ancestors had first lived in Cenla.

First things first: I cannot share the exact location of this edifice at this time due to complicated matters, but it is located near Tioga. The cabin, hand-hewn out of the native trees of the virgin forest, was the first non-native human inhabitation in this area, according to the state land records. There were no 18th century settlements in this area of the parish at this juncture of time, although there were several Spanish land grants originally given of this area. According to several sources, including comprehensive DOTD research, in the early 1830s, parcels of land were sold in increments of 40 acres each. John Aton (died 1860s), who appears in the 1830 Census of Rapides Parish, appears to have first taken ownership of the property and likely built this “dog trot” style cabin out of the surrounding woods.



A “dog trot” style house is a popular Southern style of architecture in which a central, open-ended passage or breezeway connects two living spaces under a common roof, often used as a method of ventilation and cooling. In this cabin, sadly, one-side of the dogtrot has burned leaving one large original room. This remaining large log room has now been encased in a more “modern,” 1890s structure in which the left, back and right sides have add-on rooms and currently positioned as the front of the house, a large front porch has been built. This, along with a protective roof, has sheltered

the ancient wooden beams from both the weather and wood insects.

Shortly after the Civil War, William LaCroix (1839-1911) took over the cabin. He was an important man in his time who left a lasting family and community legacy. He served in several positions in local government including building bridges (1869), road commissioner (1878), and Police Jury candidate (1878). Unusually, he raised sugarcane, which was described in 1890 being of “fine” quality. He died in his house as was described in his obituary (1911) as follows: “The deceased died suddenly while sitting in his armchair before the fire.” His wife, Elizabeth, and later son, Michael Edward “Ed” LaCroix (1889-1950), who later inherited the house, also both died in the cabin/house. The cabin/house and property are currently owned by Ed’s granddaughter.



The cabin/house was last lived in sometime in the 1990s. Since that time, with no upkeep, bad weather and vandals, it has suffered significantly. But the log cabin portion of the house, walls protected by clapboard on one side and plaster on the other, is actually in excellent shape, considering its age. The long and very thick timbers making up the ground support, walls, and part of the ceiling are amazing in their intricate “Lincoln Log” style cuts and connectivity.

The cabin/house is under threat now by its most dangerous enemy—man. Thieves have begun dismantling the 1890s portion of the house, heading towards the irreplaceable log cabin now. So who will now not just talk about saving it, but will step forward and actually do something and become a true preservation hero of Louisiana?



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