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Holiday Happenings in Cenla!



in this
ISSUE

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Holiday Happenings in Cenla!



The air is turning crisp and bringing a sense of festive cheer, direct from the North Pole! From now through the new year, Central Louisiana transforms into a wonderland of glittering lights, traditional celebrations, fantastic fireworks displays, and cheer-filled community events. Whether you're looking for dazzling holiday lights, festive Christmas parades, unique local shopping for holiday gifts, or a good ole Louisiana festival atmosphere, we've compiled a guide to help you navigate the season of holiday happenings in Cenla!

A LOUISIANA CHRISTMAS LIKE NO OTHER: THE MAGIC OF NATCHITOCHES

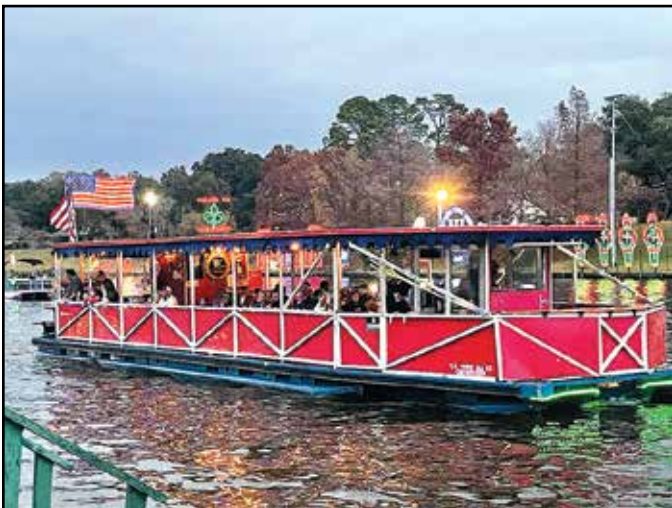


When the holiday season arrives, the city of Natchitoches transforms into a glowing postcard of Southern charm and Christmas cheer. Home to the famous Natchitoches Christmas Festival, the small town with a big spirit has been dazzling visitors for nearly a century.

Now celebrating its 99th Annual Christmas Festival, Natchitoches is widely recognized as one of the most enchanting holiday destinations in the country. Beginning in mid-November, the historic downtown and scenic Cane River

Lake sparkle under the glow of more than 300,000 twinkling lights and over 100 illuminated set pieces. Join in for the official start to the Natchitoches Christmas season with "Turn on the Holidays!" on Saturday, November 22nd, featuring after-hours shopping, live music, and culminating with a drone and fireworks show over Cane River Lake. The celebration continues all the way through early January, drawing families, couples, and travelers eager to experience the warmth of a classic Louisiana Christmas.

The Christmas Festival is the heart of the season. On festival day—Saturday, December 6th—fireworks burst above the riverbank while music fills the air and the scent of freshly fried Natchitoches meat pies drifts through the streets. Visitors can expect parades, live entertainment, and Saturday fireworks shows throughout the season. Highlights include the Mistletoe Market and the Fleur de Lis Craft Show, where local artisans and small businesses showcase handmade gifts, Louisiana



specialties, and festive décor. For even more family fun, Dark Woods Christmas offers a walk-through holiday attraction filled with dazzling lights, music, and immersive displays that capture the wonder of the season.

Throughout the season, admission is free Sunday through Saturday mornings. Downtown Riverbank admission is \$15.00 beginning each Saturday at 1:00pm (6:00am on Festival Day). Admission is free on Saturday, December 27th all day! Food vendors will be available on the Riverbank seven days a week. Starting this year, the Christmas Festival is 100% cashless. No cash will be accepted at ticket booths or by festival vendors.

Shopping in Natchitoches is an experience all its own. The city’s charming downtown is lined with more than 30 locally owned boutiques and specialty stores—no chains, just true Southern hospitality and one-of-a-kind finds. Visitors can browse for unique gifts at Kaffie-Frederick General Mercantile, the oldest general store in Louisiana, or explore Cane River Kitchenware, a haven for cooks and food lovers. Another standout is The Natchitoches Picnic Company, which offers beautifully curated baskets and picnic experiences—perfect for holiday gifting or a cozy afternoon by the riverbank.

For those seeking a slower pace, Natchitoches invites visitors to linger and explore. A scenic ride aboard the Cane River Queen provides a peaceful view of the glowing lights from the water, while a short drive leads to Melrose Plantation, where visitors can admire the celebrated work of Louisiana folk artist Clementine Hunter. The city’s historic inns and bed & breakfasts, many within walking distance of the festivities, provide cozy accommodations for guests who want to fully immerse themselves in the holiday atmosphere.

Whether it’s savoring a warm meat pie, shopping for handmade treasures, or watching fireworks reflect across the Cane River, the holidays in Natchitoches feel like stepping into a storybook. With its blend of history, hospitality, and holiday magic, it’s easy to see why this small Louisiana town continues to shine as one of the South’s most beloved Christmas destinations.

For the latest information and the complete entertainment schedule for this year’s Natchitoches Christmas Festival season, visit NatchitochesChristmas.com



THE WILDEST LIGHTS IN TOWN: HOLIDAY LIGHT SAFARI AT ALEXANDRIA ZOO!

Bundle up and get ready for a wildly wonderful holiday adventure—Holiday Light Safari at Alexandria Zoo, each Friday and Saturday evening from 5:30pm to 9:00pm starting Friday, November 28th through the end of the year, plus two additional nights, Monday, December 22nd and Tuesday, December 23rd in the lead-up to





Christmas! While you may spot a few night owls during Holiday Light Safari, most of our residents will be catching some zzz's while you stroll through a dazzling world of lights, where sparkling animal figures come to life and trees shimmer in every color of the season! Hop aboard the Holiday Train Ride for a journey through even more twinkling displays. And don't forget to stop by for a visit with Santa—share your wish list and capture that perfect holiday memory.

Take a sweet break at Atwood's Merry Creations for cookies and crafts, then grab a warm treat from the Palm Café and discover the

perfect stocking stuffer at the Zootique Gift Shop. Make memories that sparkle at the Alexandria Zoo's Holiday Light Safari because this season, the wildest lights in town are waiting for you!

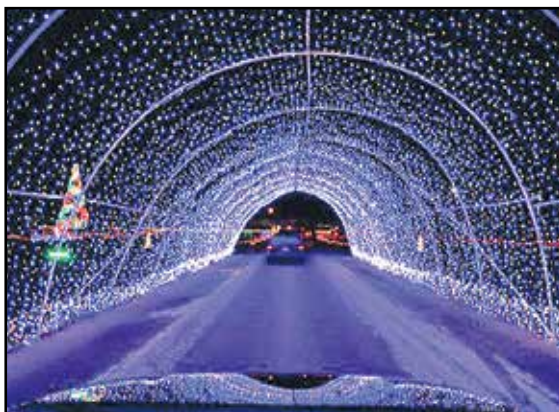
Holiday Light Safari is a separately-ticketed event. The zoo closes at 4:30pm (last admission 3:30pm) and re-opens as Holiday Light Safari at 5:30pm. FOTAZ Memberships and other Zoo Passes are not valid during Holiday Light Safari. In the event of inclement weather, the decision to cancel an evening of Holiday Light Safari will be announced via the Zoo's Facebook page.

Admission is \$12.00 for adults; \$10.00 for children ages 2 to 10; and free for infants under 2 years old. Find more information at thealexandriazoo.com/HolidayLightSafari.html

HAVE A BLUE, BLUE CHRISTMAS AT CYPRESS BEND'S WINTER WONDERLAND OF LIGHTS!

Take a drive through Cypress Bend Park Thursday through Sunday evenings from 5:00pm to 9:00pm starting November 28th to view one of Louisiana's most enchanting Christmas light displays. Santa and Mrs. Claus will visit Cypress Bend each Saturday, spreading holiday cheer. Enjoy snow flurries, fresh popped popcorn, and, of course, lots of lights!

This year, the Elvis display will showcase his pink Cadillac, a life-size Elvis with guitar, bright lights and "Blue, Blue Christmas" playing in the background. Under the rectangle pavilion, the Abominable Snowman stands about 9 feet tall with snow blowing around Santa's house. You can visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus to get a sweet candy cane and some popcorn. Under the octagon pavilion, you'll find Santa's elves hard at work in their workshop as well as a 25-foot Christmas tree with games to play and photo props for capturing the holiday memories. Drive through the rest of the park and see Elsa, Grinch, Sponge Bob, Snoopy, American Heroes and Disney Characters and so much more!



Admission is just \$10.00 per vehicle. Visit the @CypressBendPark on Facebook for the latest weather updates and schedule information.

TEN YEARS OF HOLIDAY MAGIC: ALEX WINTERFÊTE 2025

Downtown Alexandria is set to sparkle brighter than ever as Alex WinterFête celebrates its tenth anniversary this December. What began in 2015 as a bold new holiday tradition has grown into one of Louisiana's most anticipated annual events, a celebration of lights, laughter, and community—where people come together to connect and celebrate the season.

For three unforgettable days, the heart of downtown will transform into a winter wonderland filled with music, art, food, and festive fun for all ages. From families making memories to friends reuniting under the lights, WinterFête is where Louisiana comes together to celebrate the season.

Few sights say "holiday" quite like ice skating in the South. The outdoor rink has become one of WinterFête's signature experiences, inviting first-time skaters and seasoned pros alike to glide across the ice surrounded by cheerful music and twinkling lights. Not far away, the Fête Express takes passengers on a whimsical ride through the festival, a favorite for kids and nostalgic adults alike.



At Santa's Village, little ones can meet Santa and Mrs. Claus, whisper their wish lists, and snap a photo to remember it by. Just down the block, Jolly Junction keeps children busy with crafts, games, and hands-on holiday activities that spark creativity and joy all at once.

When night falls, the festival sky comes alive with the Fireworks Over the Red River, a breathtaking display that draws spectators from across the region. The reflections dance across the water as music and laughter echo through the streets, a perfect finale to a day of celebration.

Alex WinterFête is as much about community as it is about Christmas lights. The festival showcases Alexandria's creative spirit through Art Fête, where dozens of regional artists display and sell their original works in painting, sculpture, jewelry, and woodcraft. For those who love discovering hidden gems, Indie Fête highlights the independent art scene with handmade goods, live music, and plenty of creative surprises.



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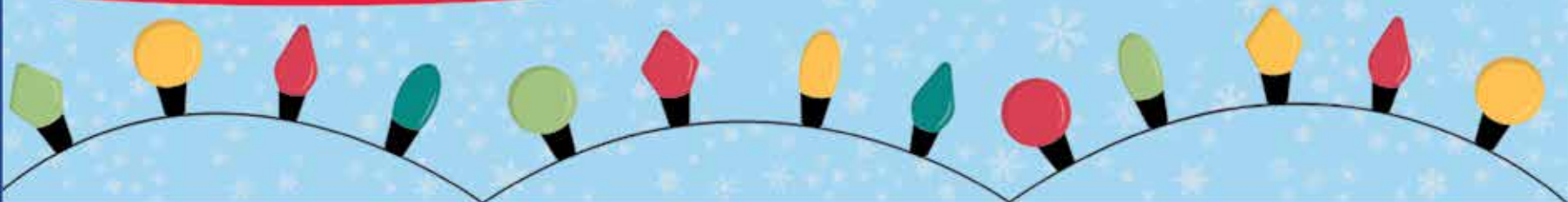


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The Alexandria Museum of Art’s Luminary Procession is a can’t-miss moment, featuring handcrafted, illuminated sculptures carried through the streets by local artists and community members. It is a shining example of how art, imagination, and collaboration can light up both the night and the people who gather to watch.

At the Multicultural Village, guests can explore Alexandria’s global heritage through international food, music, and dance. This year’s lineup includes new interactive exhibits, henna art, and the debut of the Multicultural Couture Showcase, a dazzling display of traditional and contemporary fashions from around the world.

For those looking to make a meaningful connection, Adopt-A-Fête Pet offers visitors the chance to find a new furry family member through the Alexandria Animal Shelter. It is a heartwarming reminder that generosity and love are at the heart of the holiday season.

Amazing food vendors and their offerings will fill downtown with the irresistible aromas of Cajun favorites, barbecue, and sweet treats. Whether it is a cup of hot chocolate loaded with toppings or a plate of something savory, the flavors of Louisiana bring warmth to even the chilliest evenings.

Alex WinterFête takes place in downtown Alexandria across several blocks near Third, Johnston, Desoto, and Murray Streets. Admission is free, with activities running throughout the weekend. Free parking and volunteer guides make exploring easy, and most attractions are accessible for all guests.

This December, celebrate ten years of magic, music, and togetherness at Alex WinterFête 2025, where the heart of the community shines brightest in the glow of the season.

Visit AlexWinterFete.com for schedules, maps, and event updates.

STEP BACK TO CHRISTMAS PAST WITH FUMC'S DRIVE-THRU NATIVITY

First United Methodist Church Alexandria’s Live Nativity 2025 returns from 5:30pm to 7:30pm on Sunday, December 7th as a drive-thru experience encircling its Jackson Street church facility. Vehicles will line up to enter the church campus on Jackson Street for the drive-thru and exit onto North City Park Boulevard. “We are excited to once again provide the community with a Live Nativity that honors the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” said Steve Blount, who chairs the Live Nativity steering committee.



The event began in 1999 as a children’s program celebrating the birth of the Christ child, with Bethlehem scenes in the parking lot, growing to encircle the church facility with adult members in scenes too plus live animals. The event is free and open to the public. Vehicles are advised to dim lights (if possible) to slowly enter the church property. “Please come and visit our Live Nativity with your family and friends,” Blount said. “We look forward to seeing everyone.” For more information, call the FUMC church office at (318) 443-5696.

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL, HOLIDAY STYLE!

No holiday season would be complete without the lively marching bands, colorful floats, and joyful riders parading through town. Cenla has plenty of opportunity to catch some holiday cheer this year!

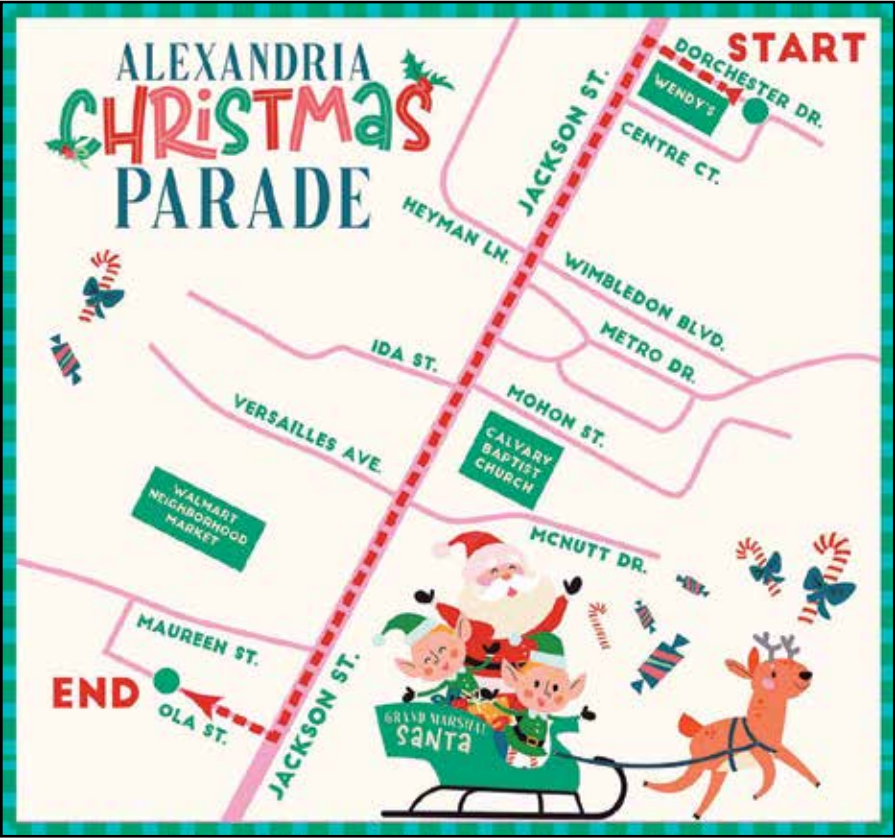
The City of Pineville’s Christmas parade will light up the night on Friday, December 12th at 7:00pm on Main Street, featuring great throws, festive costumes, and illuminated floats and riders. Be sure to bundle up and bring your best light-up attire to attract all the best throws!

The town of Many will host its annual Christmas Parade and Festival on Saturday, December 13th. Boasting a theme of “Magnolias & Mistletoe”, this year’s parade kicks off at 3:00pm on Main Street, culminating in the festival kick-off at 4:00pm at the fairgrounds.

The Alexandria Mardi Gras Association Parade will roll along its Jackson Street Extension route on Sunday, December 14th at 2:00pm. Enjoy an afternoon filled with holiday floats, magical musical performances, candy throws, and a special appearance by special parade Grand Marshal, Santa Claus!

'TIS THE SEASON TO GET OUT AND CELEBRATE!

From twinkling light displays and spectacular fireworks to ice skating and festive holiday parades, there is something for everyone to enjoy in the coming weeks. Don’t miss out on the magic. Mark your calendars, gather your loved ones, and completely immerse yourself in holiday cheer throughout the season in Cenla!



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Preparing for Winter in Louisiana Yards

By Molly Lyles



MOLLY LYLES

As the winter solstice approaches, we brace ourselves for the long, grueling cold of a Louisiana winter. The air grows sharp, the skies turn gray, and the wind whispers warnings through the cypress trees of bone chilling temperatures. It's a season so trepid and dangerous, not even the arctic wildlife dare venture. The frost creeps over the mossy swamp, stealing the warmth from our gardens, icing over our roads, and sending even the polar bears scrambling for gumbo and extra blankets. Schools shutter at the mere whisper of flurries. Pipes groan. Lawns turn to brittle straw. It's a time when even the bravest gardeners pause, clutching their pruning shears like swords against the icy unknown.

Alright, that was dramatic and if you're from here, you know how it really is. While our winters may not be as harrowing as the tale above, Louisiana gardeners still need to prepare for the occasional freeze and seasonal shifts that affect our lawns and landscapes.

In Louisiana, we grow warm-season grasses like St. Augustine, centipede, Bermuda, and zoysia. These grasses go dormant in winter, which means mowing is mostly off the table. The only exception? A light mow to keep winter weeds in check or to break down fallen leaves.

Here's your winter lawn checklist that our State Turf Specialist, Dr. Eric Deboer, has provided:

- No fertilizer: Save your time, money, and energy. Fertilizing now only feeds winter weeds.
- Weed control: Winter weeds like sticker weed (lawn burweed) are best treated now. Apply a pre-emergent in late fall and keep scouting for those inconspicuous low-growing plants and treat with the proper herbicide.
- Leaves: I selfishly want you to rake them up and leave them by the road so I can grab free mulch...but you should use them in your own landscape. Mulch is extremely important to protect our plants from the cold.

Winter is the perfect time to get ahead on spring garden prep:

- Soil test: Recommended every 2 to 3 years to check nutrient levels and pH.
- pH adjustment: Apply lime (for low pH) or



sulfur (for high pH) as needed.

- Equipment care: Consider giving your mower a spa day. change the oil, sharpen the blades, clean it up. Calibrate your spreaders and sprayers. And if you've got an electric mower, store the battery at 70% to 80% charge.

Louisiana landscapes often feature tropical plants that need extra love in winter. Here are some tips from our Landscape Specialist, Damon Abdi, at the Hammond Research Station:

- Don't cut ornamental grasses (like muhly grass) until just before spring. These provide important habitat for wildlife during colder months.
- Protect water features and irrigation lines: Be mindful of freezing temperatures. Frozen water expands and can damage pipes and prized garden features.
- Overwintering container plants: If you haven't had time to install your new plants, heel them in by barricading containers with mulch or soil for temporary insulation. Pushing pots together tightly can also help them insulate each other.



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A Season of Gathering: Making the Most of Your Pecan Harvest.

By Michael Polozola, II, PhD



As autumn settles across Louisiana, pecan trees begin their quiet transition from canopy to harvest. For homeowners and small-scale orchardists, November marks a season of gathering—when the fruits of summer’s growth fall to the ground, ready to be collected, cured, and enjoyed. Whether you have a single tree in the backyard or a small grove, pecan harvest is more than a chore; it’s a seasonal ritual rooted in tradition, stewardship, and the promise of good food.

Whether you’re preparing for holiday baking or simply hoping to preserve your crop, this time of year offers a chance to connect with the land and enjoy the rewards of patient care. With just a few simple steps, you can ensure your pecans are harvested at peak quality and handled in a way that preserves their flavor from orchard to table.

In Louisiana, pecan harvest often begins in late October and stretches into November. But knowing exactly when

to gather your crop can make the difference between flavorful, well-filled nuts and disappointing, underdeveloped ones.

Here are a few signs your pecans are ready to harvest:

- **Shuck Split:** The outer husk (shuck) begins to split naturally, revealing the brown shell inside. This is the clearest sign of maturity. If shucks remain tightly closed, the nuts are not yet ready.
- **Nut Drop:** Mature pecans will begin falling to the ground. While some early drop is normal, a sudden increase in fallen nuts—especially those with fully opened shucks—is a signal to begin gathering.
- **Shell Color and Kernel Fill:** Crack a few nuts and inspect the kernel. Mature pecans will have a well-filled interior with a golden-brown color. If the kernel is shriveled or pale, the nut may have dropped prematurely or failed to fill properly.
- **Tree Behavior:** Some trees shed nuts gradually, while others drop most of their crop in a short window. Watch your tree’s pattern closely—especially if you’re growing native or low-input selections, which may differ from commercial cultivars.



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Timely harvest not only preserves quality but also helps prevent losses to wildlife, or rot. Once nuts begin dropping, daily collection is ideal. Pecans left on wet ground for too long can absorb moisture and deteriorate quickly.

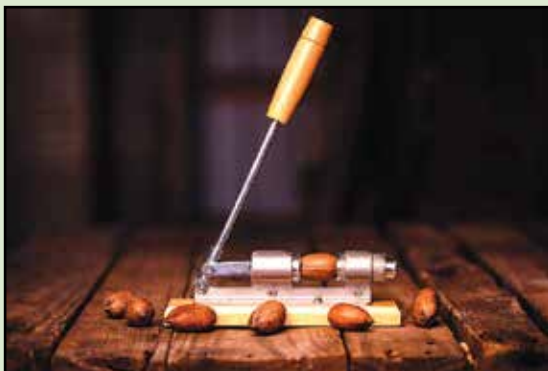
Use the right tools and techniques:

- Nut rollers and harvest rakes can make collection faster and easier, especially in larger yards.
- Mesh bags or ventilated buckets help prevent moisture buildup during transport.
- Avoid plastic bags unless nuts are fully dry, as trapped humidity can lead to spoilage.



Sort as you go:

- Discard nuts with cracked shells, visible mold, or signs of insect damage.
- Separate immature or unfilled nuts from mature ones. Immature pecans often drop with green, un-split shucks due to stress, disease, or poor pollination. These nuts typically have poorly developed kernels and are unlikely to cure well.



Keep nuts dry:

- Moisture is the enemy of quality. If gathering after rain, spread nuts out in a single layer indoors or in a covered area to dry before storage.
- Avoid piling freshly gathered pecans in deep containers, which can trap heat and moisture.

Watch for wildlife competition. Squirrels, crows, and other animals can quickly reduce your harvest. Frequent gathering helps minimize losses and ensures you get the best nuts before they're carried off or damaged.

By staying ahead of the drop and using simple tools, you can collect a clean, high-quality crop with minimal waste. Proper drying and curing are essential steps in preserving the flavor, texture, and shelf life of homegrown pecans. Freshly harvested nuts contain moisture that, if not removed, can lead to mold, off-flavors, or spoilage during storage.

Only cure pecans that have fully filled kernels and dry, brown shells. Immature or damaged nuts are unlikely to cure properly and may compromise the quality of your stored crop. Spread pecans in a single layer on a screen tray, mesh rack, or breathable surface in a well-ventilated area. Avoid direct sunlight, which can cause uneven drying or shell cracking. Indoors or under a covered porch works well, especially if humidity is low.

Most pecans require 10 to 14 days to cure under good conditions. During this time, the kernel continues to dry and develop its full flavor. Stir or rotate the nuts occasionally to promote even drying. Crack a few nuts after a week to inspect the kernel. A properly cured pecan will have a firm texture, golden-brown color, and a clean snap when broken. If the kernel feels rubbery or looks pale, continue drying.

Do not store pecans in sealed containers until they are fully cured. Trapped moisture can lead to mold growth and spoilage. Once cured, pecans can be stored in breathable bags or moved to cold storage for long-term preservation.

Once pecans are properly dried and cured, the next step is cracking and shelling. This process can be time-consuming, but a few simple tools and techniques can

make it more efficient and enjoyable. Hand-crank shellers and lever-style crackers are widely available and well-suited for small batches. These tools apply controlled pressure to break the shell without crushing the kernel. For best results, crack pecans after they've cured for at least two weeks—this allows the shell to separate more cleanly from the kernel.

For larger harvests, small-scale mechanical shellers can save time and reduce hand fatigue. Some local farm supply stores or community groups offer pecan cracking services during the season. These machines can process several pounds at a time and often include blowers or sorters to help separate shells from kernels.

After cracking, take time to sort the kernels. Remove any pieces with dark discoloration, shriveling, or bitter taste—these may be signs of poor fill, stink bug damage, or kernel decay. Clean kernels of shell fragments and test a few for flavor before storing or using in recipes.

Proper storage is essential to preserve the flavor, texture, and nutritional value of pecans after harvest. Once nuts are dried and cured, they should be stored in conditions that minimize exposure to heat, moisture, and pests.

Short-Term Storage (up to a few weeks):

- Keep pecans in a cool, dry place with good air circulation.
- Use breathable containers such as mesh bags, paper sacks, or cardboard boxes.
- Avoid storing in sealed plastic unless nuts are fully dried, as trapped humidity can lead to mold.



Long-Term Storage:

- For best quality, shelled pecans should be stored in airtight containers and kept in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Unshelled pecans can also be frozen, though they take up more space and may be harder to inspect for quality.
- Freezing preserves flavor and prevents rancidity, especially in high-oil cultivars.

Shelf Life:

- At room temperature, shelled pecans may last 2 to 3 months. In the refrigerator, they can last up to 9 months, and in the freezer, up to 2 years.
- Always label containers with the harvest date to help track freshness.

Pecan harvest is one of the most rewarding times in the home orchard calendar. Whether you're gathering a few buckets from a backyard tree or managing a small grove, the process connects you to the rhythm of the season and the legacy of Louisiana's native nut crop. With a little attention to timing, handling, and storage, your pecans can offer excellent flavor and shelf life—ready for holiday baking, gifting, or simply enjoying by the handful.

Get Into the Holiday Spirit at Trotters

By Sarah Drell



As a proud graduate of Louisiana State University of Alexandria with a degree in Mass Communication, I've always had a passion for sharing stories, whether through radio, television, or print. Now, as a sales associate at Trotters, I'm thrilled to connect with our wonderful customers and help make their visions come to life. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing the smiles of satisfied shoppers and knowing that our hard work contributes to cherished memories in the Cenla community.

Trotters has been a staple in Central Louisiana for decades, a place where quality, style, and personal service come together. Founded by the Trotter family, the store has grown from a small local business into one of Cenla's most trusted names in retail. Over the years, Trotters has remained committed to providing an exceptional shopping experience, offering a wide selection of furniture and decor that suits every style and occasion. What makes Trotters special is its heart, the personal touch, the friendly faces, and the genuine care that goes into every customer interaction.

As the holiday season approaches, Trotters truly shines. The store transforms into a winter wonderland, filled with festive décor, cozy fashions, and the perfect gifts for everyone on your list. From timeless state-of-the-art appliances to unique home items, there's something magical about shopping local during Christmas, and at

Trotters, that magic comes alive. Our team takes great pride in curating seasonal collections that capture the warmth and joy of the holidays.

Beyond the merchandise, Trotters embraces the spirit of giving that defines this time of year. We believe in supporting our community, celebrating traditions, and spreading cheer to every person who walks through our doors. When you're looking for a meaningful gift for someone special, Trotters is here to make your season bright.



This Christmas, we invite you to experience the Trotters tradition, where style meets hometown hospitality, and every visit feels like coming home.

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Gardening Gifts That Keep Giving

By Melinda Myers

Gift the gardeners in your life with tools that are sure to make them smile as they put them to work throughout the coming years. No matter your budget, you are sure to find the perfect gift for your favorite gardener.

Help gardeners track the weather and rainfall in their backyard. You can find decorative and functional low- and high-tech thermometers in a wide range of prices. Consider giving them a rain gauge to help monitor rainfall so they know when and how much to water.

For the indoor gardener, paint a pot, preferably one with drainage holes, that they can use to display their favorite plant. If your budget allows, add potting mix and a plant or gift certificate so they can select a new or favorite plant from the garden center. Include a pair of snips to help them trim, groom, and keep their indoor plants looking their best.

Purchase a fun watering can or decorate one with decoupage. This is a fun gift for kids and adults to make for family and teachers. Just select a plastic or metal watering can, gather pictures, and secure and seal them to the watering can with a



suitable material found at craft stores.

Dress up your favorite gardener's gear with colorful tools like the British Meadow Pruner & Holster Set endorsed by the Royal Horticultural Society. The pruners have a comfort grip and are perfect for cutting small branches and stems and the floral holster will keep them handy when gardening. This makes a great gift for gardeners that appreciate aesthetics as well as quality tools.

And what gardener doesn't need a good bypass hand pruner with two sharp blades to make clean cuts? Look for one with a large 3/4" cutting capacity if your gardener does extensive pruning. Select one with narrow, comfortable, nonslip grips like those on the ClassicCUT Bypass Pruner for those with small- to medium-sized hands. Stuff one in their stocking, combine it with a new garden book, or wrap it up as it makes a great gift on its own.

Don't forget the youngsters on your list. Research shows children exposed to the outdoors and gardening are more focused, do better in school, and have less severe ADHD symptoms. Girls raised in a landscaped environment are more confident and less subject to peer pressure. By



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encouraging them to garden, you might be helping them acquire a lifelong skill and get help planning, planting, and tending the garden.

Giving them their own kid-sized garden gear can make gardening more fun and easier as they garden by your side or in their own garden plot or container. Look for tools designed to fit children’s hands like Corona’s kids 3-piece garden tool set that has everything a young gardener needs to dig, explore, plant and tend their garden. A kid-sized wheelbarrow is just the right size for hauling plants, soil, and mulch.



Don’t let the hustle of the holiday season put a damper on your gift giving. Keep in mind this act of kindness generates happiness in ourselves and others.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the Midwest Gardener’s Handbook, 2nd Edition and Small Space Gardening. She hosts The Great Courses “How to Grow Anything” instant video series and the nationally syndicated Melinda’s Garden Moment radio program. Myers is a columnist and



contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and was commissioned for her expertise to write this article. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.

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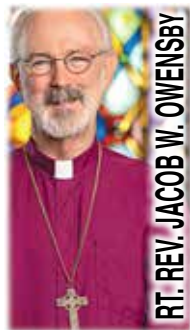
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How Love Transforms

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



RT. REV. JACOB W. OWENSBY

After worship one Sunday, a man stalked up to me. His jaw was set, his brow furrowed. I braced myself. “You can’t tell us to love our enemies!” he exclaimed. “We have to defend ourselves!” The rector saw that I was at a loss, so he came to my rescue. He replied, “The bishop was quoting Jesus. That’s from the Sermon on the Mount.” My critic already knew this. It didn’t matter.

According to Christianity Today editor, Russell Moore, sermons about turning the other cheek and loving enemies don’t land well these days. Pastors across the country report unapologetic, even angry, pushback. Look, hesitation is understandable. Jesus is asking a lot. Loving our enemies and turning the other cheek are impossibly tall orders. We need divine help to walk the way of Jesus. That’s why, our response to the baptismal covenant is: “I will, with God’s help.” It’s not the same as: “I got this.”

The pushback Moore describes isn’t an expression of humility. It’s a hard “No.” A refusal. A distressing number of Christians are dismissing these teachings as weak, naïve, and out of touch. Moore is a conservative; and it’s noteworthy that he agrees with progressives like John Pavlovitz and Diana Butler Bass that this phenomenon represents more than political polarization. It reveals a spiritual crisis. Let me explain.

Desire is what animates human beings. Spirituality is the pathway we habitually take to satisfy our chief desire. So, whether we admit it or not, everybody has a spirituality. However, not all spiritualities are equal. Depending upon the desire that’s animating us, a spirituality can be lifegiving or it can be destructive. So, you see, we are witnessing more than a clash of ideologies. We’re seeing the divergence of two sharply different spiritual pathways.

Jesus teaches us to yield to a holy longing: to love. Love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as if you shared a common circulatory system. Created in the image of divine love itself, we’re called to walk what Bishop Michael Curry calls “the Way of Love.” Or, to borrow from Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr, this is the “Way of the True Self”—the self that reflects God’s love.

But love isn’t the only force at work in us. Jesus warned of dark passions like fear, resentment, anger, and the urge to dominate. Jesus said: “It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come.” He wasn’t saying that our hearts are rotten. He was naming the pull toward what Merton and Rohr call the False Self—the ego-centered life. The False Self is driven by self-will and self-protection. It craves success, privilege, and control.

Columnist William A. Galston argues that, today, many people are held captive by these dark passions. Jesus’ parable of the rich farmer shows where that road ends. A

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do whatever it takes—no matter the cost—to make the first last and the last first. And you and I are not called to be mere spectators of the cross; passive admirers of what Jesus did. We are called to be participants. To die to the False Self. To resist the worldly obsession with success, privilege, influence, and status.

In the resurrection, Jesus shows that dying is, paradoxically, the way to life—not just our personal life, but the life of the world. Bishop Curry puts it this way: “When love is the way—unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive love—then no child will go to bed hungry...poverty will become history...we will lay down our swords and shields to study war no more.”

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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LAWFF Inaugural Raffle to Support Conservation Efforts

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Foundation (LAWFF), in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), announced the launch of its inaugural raffle Thursday evening during its annual A Wild Night Fundraising Event. Supporting ongoing LDWF conservation efforts, the raffle offers outdoor enthusiasts and conservation supporters the chance to win a brand-new Chevy Silverado from your Super Chevy Dealers, valued at \$60,000.

Tickets are available for purchase now through Thursday, January 8, 2026 for just \$20.00 per ticket. The winner will be drawn Friday, January 9th. All proceeds will support LDWF's mission to preserve

and enhance Louisiana's diverse wildlife and fisheries through vital initiatives including habitat restoration, public hunting and fishing area improvements, species monitoring programs, and community outreach programs aimed at sustaining Louisiana's fisheries and wildlife heritage.

Individual tickets are for sale at org/la-conservation-raffle. There is no purchase limit. Visit the official rules page to view the complete rules of the LAWFF 2025 Conservation Raffle. Those who wish to receive raffle updates can sign up for email notifications at lawff.org. Open to legal residents of the U.S. who are 18 years of age or older. Void where prohibited. Contest ends 1/8/26. Visit the official rules page to view the complete rules of the LAWFF 2025 Conservation Raffle.

LAWFF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and the official fundraising partner of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, dedicated to advancing wildlife habitat conservation, promoting sustainable fisheries, and preserving Louisiana's outdoor legacy. Funds raised help support LDWF's regulatory, scientific, and stewardship efforts across the state.

[illegible]

How Do You Give Back to Cenla?

Every day across Central Louisiana, someone is showing up for a neighbor in need. A volunteer serves hot meals to the hungry. Families donate clothes for children entering foster care. A nonprofit offers

safety to victims of domestic abuse. A community pantry stocks hygiene items and food for those in need. These acts of kindness happen quietly, day after day, because of the incredible nonprofits that work tirelessly to care for our community. While their hearts are big, their needs are often even bigger.

For 26 years, the Central Louisiana Community Foundation has worked to connect generosity with purpose, linking those who want to give with the organizations who need it most. And now, we're taking that mission one step further.

You may remember Give Cenla, our previous giving day. When our annual campaign would end, local nonprofits continued working, serving, and relying on our support. That's why we're excited to introduce Share Cenla, a new online platform designed to make giving simple, meaningful, and accessible to everyone—all year long!

Through Share Cenla, you can discover the many nonprofits serving our region

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Starting November 18th, visit sharecenla.org to explore the ways you can uplift your neighbors in need. You can:

- Make one-time or recurring donations
- Sign up for volunteer opportunities
- Fulfill Amazon wish lists
- Explore local fundraising events

The best part? Everyone can make an impact—from high school students earning volunteer hours, to young professionals pledging \$20.00 a month, to seasoned philanthropists funding entire wish lists. There's truly a place for everyone to give back in their own way.

This season, let's come together to support the nonprofits that give so much of themselves to Cenla. Because when we all share a little, our community gains a lot.

Ready. Set. Share Cenla. Launching 11.18.25.

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Thankful for Health

By Cornel D. Leblanc, D.C.



Thanksgiving is almost here, and it is time to stop and think about all the blessings in our own lives. Between the long hours of standing in the kitchen, sitting for long periods, hosting family gatherings, or just grabbing some groceries from the store, it can be easy to forget one factor—taking care of yourself. That is why this Thanksgiving, when you are focused on being with family and friends and giving thanks, it is important to save time to focus on your health. At Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center, we can take care of all your spinal and health care needs.

Getting adjusted regularly can help optimize your nervous system, keeping it functioning at its fullest potential by improving sleep, lowering stress levels, decreasing tension, and realigning for better posture. Many people may experience feeling lighter, calmer, and have better energy following an adjustment, which would be the best condition to be in for enjoying warm family gatherings.

It also happens this time of the year that chronic injuries and disc-related problems, sciatica, or stenosis, tend to rear their ugly head and it is nice to know that you have a safe and

successful alternative non-surgical alternative. Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center, we offer the latest in Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression therapy. The non-surgical spinal decompression table uses traction that softly stretches the spine, allowing for pressure to be taken off the spine. Our table specifically targets and isolates the individual disc involved and uses negative pressure to bring the disc back inside while rehydrating the disc. This causes pressure to be taken off the disc and nerve. As your spine gently decompresses from a series of treatments, your body begins

to heal and realign naturally, reducing pressure, easing, and helping you move more with greater comfort and freedom.

Decompression therapy is like giving your spine a well-earned break after all the stress and pain that has endured. Together with chiropractic care, it can help you move comfortably again free of the constant pain that you have been suffering with.

This Thanksgiving, as you stop and give thanks with your family for all the many blessings, friends, and for health, do not forget to thank your body by stopping by and making an appointment today at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center by calling (318) 561-6250. This could be the life-changing event that restores your life back again!



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Ocular Migraine is a Visual Phenomenon

By Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.



An “ocular migraine” is the medical term used when a person experiences a visual aura. An aura is a perceptual disturbance where the person sees flickering lights, zig-zag lights, spots, and sometimes a dimming of vision. This visual disturbance is usually short in duration and, many times, precedes a migraine. Ocular migraines usually occur in both eyes simultaneously, and this is what differentiates them from a more serious condition such as retinal detachment, where flashes of light are seen out of one eye only.

Ocular migraines are difficult to predict. The triggering cause is not completely understood, but seems to be caused by migraine activity in the visual cortex of the brain. While these symptoms are usually short in duration, the person who suffers from ocular migraines should stop any activity which requires good vision (i.e. driving, sports, etc.) until the eye returns to normal. Sometimes, this type of migraine provides a warning that a painful migraine headache is coming soon, and alerts the person to take migraine medication. Consult your eye doctor if you have unusual visual symptoms to ensure it is not something more serious.

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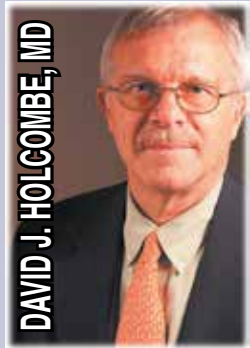


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Tylenol and Pregnancy?

By David J. Holcombe, MD, MSA, FACP



Recent pronouncements from the Department of Health and Human Services declared, without evidence, that Tylenol (acetaminophen) caused autism and should not be taken during pregnancy. A 2.4 million children study in Sweden from 1995 to 2019 established that there is no link between Tylenol intake by pregnant mothers and autism rates in their children. In fact, no credible study has ever established a link between Tylenol and autism. Causing fear in a vulnerable population (pregnant women) serves no useful purpose, but generates anxiety and draws attention to those making such declarations.

Acetaminophen is a non-narcotic, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication that has been around for decades. It helps with headaches and minor muscle and joint pains and has been used safely in pregnant women for years. You can overdose on acetaminophen, something established decades ago when Swiss watchmakers took excessive doses (over 3 grams a day) because of their meticulous, eye-straining work. Doctors established that such very high doses can cause liver damage and now there are obvious warnings to this effect on package inserts.



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Pregnant women must be extra cautious with all medications, since some cause significant risks to the unborn child. OB-GYNs and other doctors scrupulously check before giving any medication to a pregnant woman. Medications receive a risk classification, with some clearly marked as dangerous to pregnant women. Who can forget the terrible cases of fetal malformations caused by thalidomide (used from 1957 to 1962) as a sleep medication and subsequently removed from the market?

The same caution holds true for vaccinations. Live viral vaccines (MMR and varicella) are forbidden during pregnancy. Other vaccines, such as influenza, hepatitis B, Tdap and COVID, however, can all be safely given to pregnant woman with proven benefits when they are indicated.

Every medication choice entails a risk-benefit ratio analysis (i.e. do the benefits from the medication exceed any risks to the patient or fetus). That threshold is very high in pregnant woman. That being said, Tylenol remains safe and effective in pregnancy (if not overdosed).

Removing Tylenol (acetaminophen) as a choice for pregnant women leaves very few alternatives for minor headaches, aches, and pains. Pregnant women should avoid other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (such as ibuprofen, naproxen, or even Aspirin) due to increased dangers of bleeding. Narcotics should be avoided, if possible, due to side effects and the potential for addiction. That leaves no medical options for pregnant woman except to “grin and bear it,” which fails to recognize their needs and makes light of their distress.

That brings us to the fact that autism remains a huge and growing problem in the U.S. and in other countries. There appears to be an increase in the rate of new cases, but that is complicated by increased awareness and the broadening of autism spectrum diagnoses. Many more cases are identified due to a better understanding of the diversity of autism’s many manifestations.

That being said, blaming Tylenol in the absence of any clear scientific evidence only creates confusion and anxiety in the public. The whole point of scientific

research is to dispel incorrect assumptions by study and testing. The Swedish study (like other studies that dispelled the link between childhood vaccination and autism) should not be ignored.

Finding inaccurate or misleading causes to real problems does not advance knowledge. Cutting back on research funding only compounds the problems. Attention-grabbing publicity does not help resolve real health issues; it only compounds them by confusing the public. Pregnant woman can safely continue to use modest doses of acetaminophen. Always consult your doctor in case of doubt and never take medications (even over-the-counter ones) not recommended in pregnancy.



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Radiation Therapy for Osteoarthritis

By Lawrence Menache, MD



Radiation treatment has been in use to treat malignant cancer for a long time. What many do not know is that it is also used to treat benign conditions like keloids or to prevent abnormal bone formation in traumatic hip replacements. The use of radiation for osteoarthritis has been in much more common use in Europe and is finally gaining acceptance in this country.

Osteoarthritis is one of the most common joint diseases, affecting millions of people worldwide. It occurs when the protective cartilage that cushions the ends of bones wears down over time, leading to pain, stiffness, and decreased movement. It is usually treated with medication, physical therapy, and joint injections.

Radiation therapy for osteoarthritis uses very low doses of radiation to reduce inflammation and pain in the affected joints. Unlike the high doses used to destroy cancer cells, this therapy uses a much smaller, targeted amount. The radiation is directed precisely to the painful area, such as the knee, hip, shoulder, hands, or parts of the spine. The treatment is painless, non-invasive, and usually completed in six sessions which last about 10 minutes each. Patients lie comfortably while a machine carefully delivers the radiation to the joint. Side effects are rare because the radiation dose is so low and precisely targeted. Patients can return to normal activities right after each session.

The main benefit of radiation therapy for osteoarthritis is pain relief. Studies have

shown that many patients experience a significant reduction in joint pain and swelling after treatment. This can lead to improved mobility and a better quality of life. For some, the benefits can last for months or even years. It can also be used alongside other treatments like physical therapy or injections.



Indications include:

1. Chronic pain for more than 3 to 6 months or recurring flare ups;
2. Failure of therapies mentioned above;
3. Patients unable to undergo surgery;
4. It is ideally reserved for those older than 60 but is given to younger patients on a case-by-case basis.

In short, radiation therapy offers a promising alternative for people living with chronic osteoarthritis pain. It provides relief without surgery, helps restore mobility, and allows patients to enjoy daily activities again. As more medical centers adopt this approach, radiation therapy may become an important part of modern arthritis care—bringing hope and comfort to those who have struggled with joint pain for too long.

Lawrence P. Menache M.D.
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Louisiana Blue Launches MyLABlue

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana (Louisiana Blue) commercial health plan members now have an easier, digital way to stay on top of their healthcare coverage with MyLABlue, powered by Epic's MyChart.

With MyLABlue, eligible members can access essential tools to see their health plan coverage and services, putting benefits just a click away. Members must register for MyLABlue the first time they use it. Sign up at lablue.com or through the MyLABlue app. For added convenience, members can link MyLABlue to their MyChart account.

"We're excited to offer a simpler, more connected experience for our members," said Paula Shepherd, executive vice president, Health Plan Operations and Technology. "MyLABlue makes it easier for them to manage their care anytime, anywhere."

Using MyLABlue, members who have coverage through employers or individually can:

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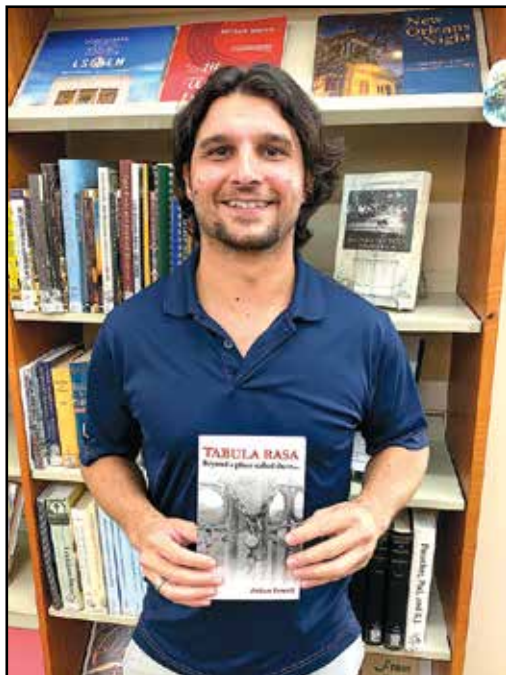
"Our new platform demonstrates our ongoing commitment to innovation and excellence in customer service by providing more digital solutions for our members," Shepherd said. "MyLABlue puts members' healthcare information at their fingertips, simplifies processes and tracking, and improves their connection with us and their providers."

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Author Zoltan Powell

By Michael Wynne



In my many years of interviewing a wide variety of authors, I find that, while each author does have a personal and unique story, not every story is worth public reading (and that probably includes me!). But just every once in a while, I meet a new and burgeoning author whose story is so riveting, so moving, and so important that their words just jump right off the page and affect me, as they would most likely affect you, also. Zoltan Powell of Cenla is one such person.

Zoltan was born in an orphanage in Romania. “The conditions were really horrendous compared to American standards,” shared Zoltan. “You ate out of a dumpster when you were hungry. You never

had your own bed. The beds were soiled with feces and the stench of urine. We would bathe only twice a week and we, about 500 kids, would share the same bath water. When it was time to get dressed, the clothes were thrown in the center of the room and we would have to forage for something to wear. Sometimes (boys) would have to wear a dress or receive two left shoes to wear.”

All of this was because of a governmental decree. “I was born of a decree enacted by Nicolae Causecu, the second and last Communist leader of Romania,” says Zoltan, “During his tenure, he enacted a law called the ‘Decree 770’. This decree was to reverse the low fertility rate of Romania and increase the population. I am the result of this decree.”

Now, an average person might sink into the lower depths of humanity after living such a tragic early life, but not Zoltan. His resilience has allowed him to transform his downtrodden life experiences into his efforts now to make the world a better place to live.

Adopted by a couple from Oklahoma, some less than perfect conditions led to

Zoltan to being sent to boarding school at Red River Academy in Lecompte. Zoltan would achieve emancipation from the couple on his way to a degree in Integrated Studies, combining “the four pillars of our social structure—health, business, law and technology,” he notes. True to the old adage, he took life’s lemons and made lemonade. He has created his own important business, the “Tabula Rasa Immersion.” Tabula Rasa translates to “clean slate.” His life’s “clean slate” goal now is to help to better foster care systems in the U.S.



When asked what helped him steer his life towards the better, Zoltan said, “The opportunity to go to college was one of the greatest things in my life. But the greatest thing was actually obtaining a degree with the rough background that I had.”

Zoltan has now written and published a most remarkable book on his life’s journey, “Tabula Rasa; Beyond a Place Called There...” He wanted to share and enlighten the world of his story and the story of what many orphans have had to go through. “It is about the way I was born, the reason I was born. Orphanages are an unspoken subject in the U.S., often like addiction and religious topics. They are more pushed to the background. I want to bring a light to the foster care system and orphanages for the next generation to better understand.”

Zoltan is well on the road to accomplishing his goals. “The books proceeds go to the foster care system around the U.S. I have partnered with Tim Tebow Orphan Care Foundation, the Tupelo Children’s Mansion and the Children’s Advocacy Network in Cenla,” he explains.

“Tabula Rasa” is a must-read and is available on Amazon or from your favorite bookseller.

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Glass Act Recycling Receives Keep Louisiana Beautiful Healthy Communities Grant



Keep Louisiana Beautiful (KLB), a state program which works with local non-profits and governments to support local communities through programs and resources for litter prevention, education, removal, enforcement, recycling, waste reduction and sustainability initiatives, has

chosen Glass Act Recycling to receive a Healthy Communities Grant to support their litter prevention and waste management practices. Frances Boudreaux, Board President, announced that Keep Louisiana Beautiful has awarded the \$10,000 grant to help create and execute an expansion of Glass Act Recycling's existing program by acquiring essential components of an AFS mini glass crusher. "This grant award represents an active partnership with KLB that will help us uphold our responsibility to do the right thing for the environment and community regarding fulfilling our mission to reduce the amount of glass going to our landfills and repurposing it into useful products," Boudreaux said.



KLB Executive Director, Susan Russell explains that the Healthy Communities Grant is designed to provide funding for local projects and programs bringing about

behavioral changes needed to improve the appearance of communities in Louisiana. "Projects focus on litter removal, litter prevention education and practices, waste management and reduction, recycling, reusing, and refusing, litter enforcement and other related efforts. KLB seeks projects that have diverse community support, volunteer involvement, collaboration with stakeholders and benefit the community at large."

Made possible with funding from the State of Louisiana and the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, 20 Healthy Community Grants totaling over \$174,000 were awarded to eligible organizations, including Louisiana parishes, municipalities, state agencies, governmental entities, political subdivisions, schools, colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, and KLB affiliates. Boudreaux added, "Glass Act Recycling will use our grant to further our commitment to keeping food grade glass out of our landfills by the acquisition of the AFS mini crusher components."

Keep Louisiana Beautiful (KLB), is a state program under the Office of the Lieutenant Governor and the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism that promotes a personal, corporate, and community responsibility for a clean and beautiful Louisiana. KLB supports local communities through programs and resources for litter education, prevention, removal, enforcement, beautification, recycling, waste reduction, and sustainability initiatives. KLB is affiliated with the national organization, Keep America Beautiful, and is supported by a robust statewide network of Community Affiliates and University Affiliates. Learn more at KeepLouisianaBeautiful.org



Welcome

TRINITY HAYES

BOM Bank extends a warm welcome to
Trinity Hayes!

She lives in Coushatta, LA, and attends NSU as an Accounting major. After graduation, she plans to earn her CPA and "let the Lord lead me to where I'll go next."

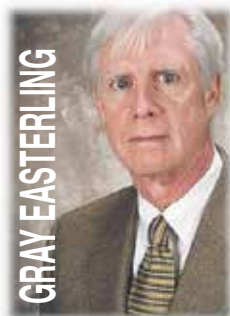
Her hobbies include playing piano, spending time with friends and family, playing board games/card games, playing video games, and serving her church as a strong Baptist believer. A fun fact about Trinity is that she is very involved in her church and loves spreading the love of God!

Welcome, Trinity!



You Are Not Alone

By Gray Easterling



You have worked hard for a long time to accumulate assets for a comfortable retirement. As you approach that stage in your life, it is normal to have some concerns about your financial future. Some of these fears were discussed in a recent Wall Street Journal article. As you might suspect, the fear of going broke is front and center. Can you enjoy the same lifestyle while retired as you had while working? You want to travel and enjoy life but have trouble booking the tickets and rooms because you are not sure if you have saved enough to warrant this expenditure. One solution might be to engage your financial advisor with the task of projecting your income and expenses over time to determine how they could affect your investment portfolio. The end results are only as good as the information used to make the calculations, but it is a start and could provide some peace of mind. Communication with your advisor and family is very important and the better communication, the less stress is created.



Another potential bump in the road is the perception that, now that you are retired, you can respond generously to charitable fundraising events and family celebrations. Retirement is earned, not a gift, and the assets supporting your retirement will have to last for an unknown length of time. Your charities and family need to know that you will be gracious with your giving, but not foolish.

"I don't want to be unfair to my children." How do you write your will so that your kids don't get into a war with each other when you are gone? Equal division is one option, but what if you helped one child with tuition or a home purchase, another with a car loan, and another with an expensive wedding? Maybe equal doesn't work so well in these situations. Communication does. Perhaps a family meeting early in the process will prevent hard feelings later.

You have probably noticed the recent stock market returns on certain tech and AI stocks and may want to try to shift your investments to include a few of the big names. Talk to your advisor. I predict that you will be advised to carve out a piece of your portfolio for a wish list and to maintain your well diversified funds for the long term. Again, communication is key.

A more intangible challenge with retirement is redefining who you are. For 30, 40, or 50 years, your work was a large part of your identity. Leaving your business

is losing a piece of yourself. If you have not already retired, start working on re-inventing your persona. How do you best become the new "you"? What is going to motivate you to get up and go each and every day for the rest of your life? Just a few examples of bumps in the road that you might experience.

Finally, I want to share a lesson from 2 Timothy: "In the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully." Nothing I can add to this. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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. All investing involves risk including loss of principal. No strategy assures success or protects against loss. Financial Solutions Group is located at 128 Versailles Blvd, Alexandria, LA 71303. We can be reached at (318) 448-3201. Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor, Member FINRA/SIPC.

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Small Business Consulting: Reliable Guidance, Tailored Solutions

By Wesley Watkins



As a small business, you need the best of both worlds--the strength of a global company with the hands-on experience of a local team that knows your challenges, inside and out. Our dedicated consultants bring deep industry knowledge and innovated benefit strategies and solutions tailored to you. With Gallagher, you get a true partner who helps you navigate your benefits and HR decisions while also prioritizing your employees' well-being, so you can focus on what matters most.

By the numbers: 46% of small businesses said their HR teams have very little or no capacity; 74% of small businesses agree that addressing affordability is the number one benefits strategy priority in 2025; only 7% of small businesses have a multi-year approach for benefits planning. Partner with small business consultants to build a better benefits and HR strategy with holistic capabilities. At Gallagher, we have over 17,000 small business clients served by over 300 dedicated small business service team members.

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- Individual health insurance plans
- Compliance guidance

Financial Planning

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- Executive benefits, including key person life and disability
- Pooled employer plans
- Business succession planning
- Individual financial planning

Talent Management

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2026 Change to Retirement Catch-Up Contribution Rule

By Lori Decker



LORI DECKER

The year is already rapidly coming to a close, making it peak season for assessing (and, in many cases, reassessing) contribution options related to retirement savings accounts. A major factor worth considering heading into the new year are changes to the SECURE 2.0 Act's catch-up contribution rule. The changes begin on January 1, 2026, and could have a significant impact on individuals 50 years of age and older who earned more than \$145,000 in 2025—in Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) wages and adjusted for inflation.

If you are part of this group of investors, read on to learn about what catch-up contributions are and what the new rules mean for your retirement savings.

What is a catch-up contribution? If you're age 50 or older and have any variety of qualifying retirement savings accounts—including 401(k)s, 403(b)s, 457(b)s—you have the option of contributing additional pre-tax funds beyond the standard contribution limits set by the Internal Revenue Service. These catch-up contributions are designed to help people nearing retirement give their investments an extra boost, which is especially beneficial for individuals who weren't able to contribute as much during their younger years. Catch-up contributions give soon-to-be-retirees an opportunity to accelerate their savings to match their expected income needs in retirement.

How did Secure 2.0 Act impact investors? Passed in December 2022, the SECURE 2.0 Act was created to encourage greater use of retirement plans that allow Americans to prepare for their golden years. The legislation included a variety of tax credits and other provisions, such as opportunities for long-term and part-time employees to participate and save more for retirement. The act increased the age at which individuals must begin making required minimum distributions (RMDs) to accommodate employees who stay in the workforce longer. The catch-up contribution limit for participants aged 60 to 63 was raised in 2025 to \$11,250 under this legislation, dubbed a "super catch-up" contribution. This allows individuals within this age group to contribute well above the standard catch-up amount and take advantage of their peak earning years.

So, what is the new catch-up contribution rule? Beginning in the new year, individuals with employer-sponsored 401(k), 403(b), and 457(b) government retirement plans who are 50 years of age or older and who earned more than \$145,000 in FICA wages adjusted for inflation the previous taxable year, must put their catch-up contributions into a designated Roth account after taxes. Simply put, this means any catch-up or super catch-up contributions for these high-income earners will be subject to tax deductions. This change does not impact a participant's standard contributions to their employer-sponsored retirement savings, which will continue to be able to be contributed pre-tax, and will not impact individuals who made less than \$145,000 in FICA wages the prior year.

How can I prepare for this change? For individuals nearing retirement, it's important to regularly reassess your contributions and make sure they're aligned with upcoming regulatory changes, shifts in late-career professional plans, and your personal income needs and financial goals. This shift to the catch-up contribution

rule presents new strategic opportunities for high-income earners. A financial advisor can help navigate these decisions and diversify investments to set you up for success in retirement.

Lori Decker, CMFC is a Financial Advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC in Alexandria, LA. She specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 18 years. www.ameripriseadvisors.com/Lori.Decker/ Withdrawals from a Roth account are tax-free as long as investors leave the money in the account for at least 5 years and are 59 1/2 or older when they take distributions or meet another qualifying event such as death or disability. Ameriprise Financial, Inc. and its affiliates do not offer tax or legal advice. Consumers should consult with their tax advisor or attorney regarding their specific situation. Ameriprise Financial cannot guarantee future financial results. Investment products are not insured by the FDIC, NCUA or any federal agency, are not deposits or obligations of, or guaranteed by any financial institution, and involve investment risks including possible loss of principal and fluctuation in value. Securities offered by Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. Member FINRA and SIPC.



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2026 COLA: What It Means for Social Security Recipients

By Annie Lemoine Newton

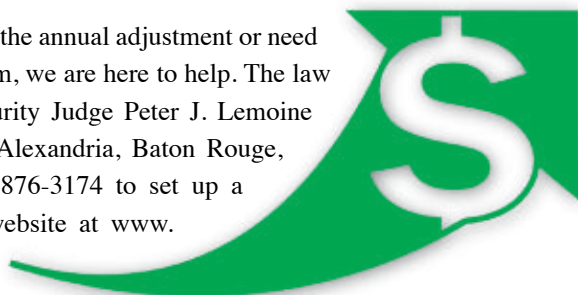


ANNIE NEWTON

In October 2025, the Social Security Administration announced that in January 2026, monthly benefits for retirees, disabled workers, and survivors will increase by 2.8 percent.

That adjustment translates into an approximate boost of \$56.00 per month for the average retired worker's benefit. This will raise the average monthly payment from about \$2,015 to roughly \$2,071. For an aged couple both receiving benefits, the increase is estimated from about \$3,120 to \$3,208.

If you have questions about the annual adjustment or need help filling a disability claim, we are here to help. 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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PUBLISHED ARTICLES: "The Worn-Out Worker Rule Revisited", "Significant
Work-Related Limitations of Function under SS 12.05C", "Questionable
Retirement and the Small Business Owner", "Crisis of Confidence: The
Inadequacies of Vocational Evidence Presented at Social Security Hearings",
"An Unsolved Mess: Analyzing the Social Security Administration's
Methodology for Identifying Occupations and Job Numbers".

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Congratulations
ALEXIS PHILLIPS

We're excited to congratulate Alexis Phillips on her one-year anniversary!

Alexis is a Teller II at our downtown location in Natchitoches. Alexis was raised in Tioga, Louisiana, and graduated from University View Academy in 2020. When she's not assisting customers with a smile, she enjoys reading, shopping, traveling, and spending time with her friends and family. She's also a proud pet mom to three dogs—Forrest, Timber, and Marley—and one cat named Stella!

We're thrilled to have Alexis on the team!



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Griffin Antiques Celebrates Five Years



At Griffin's Antiques and Main Street Market, we house 70 vendors spread among two stories, offering unique gifts, antique furniture, handcrafted merchandise, and fine jewelry you won't see anywhere else. You won't leave hungry, either—dine-in or to go! We have a restaurant, specialty coffee shop, and bakery in-house with deliciously loaded breakfast and lunch menus, available from 7:00am to 5:30pm each Monday through Saturday. We serve a variety of homemade biscuits, croissants, pastries, and cinnamon rolls. To compliment your breakfast, our all-day specialty coffee shop offers coffees, lattes, frappes, milkshakes, and much more! Our lunch menu begins at 10:00am, serving red beans and rice, gumbo (seasonally), and a variety of sandwiches—chicken salad, brisket, muffalattas—loaded baked potatoes, fresh salads, wraps, and our newly added chicken shawarma or beef gyro wraps!

Don't forget to save room for something sweet! Our bakery can satisfy any sweet tooth with our beloved homemade pies—by the slice or whole—with 19 different varieties to choose from! We serve old fashioned shakes, ice cream by the scoop, floats, frosts, sundaes, banana splits, strawberry shortcakes, and pie shakes! You can even pick up a full meal to go with our homemade frozen meals for a hassle-free dinner!

Take a short walk down Main Street where you can visit Hoover's Five & Dime and be a kid in a candy store all over again with old fashioned toys, candy,



First, I'd like to welcome you to our hometown of Bunkie! Of course, like many of you, we grew up in this small town which held many of our childhood memories. In March of 2020, we were given the opportunity to purchase the locally nostalgic Griffin's building that sits on the corner of Main Street. The building was constructed in 1902 and has housed many different businesses in its past. Firstly, being a mercantile storefront, then Western Auto, soon after becoming a clothing store, and lastly, a successful antique store that we know as Griffin's Antiques.

This enchantingly pink two-story building has brought so much adventure and aided in furthering the vision towards revitalizing this little town we all know and love. Now, after 20 years under new ownership, Griffin's not only has kept its title, but has had a facelift—adding flair and additional amenities for our local community and visitors alike.



housewares, and more! Further down the street you'll find the Palace Farmer's Market, where you can browse fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, seafood, chicken and pork cracklins, and much more!

After shopping and dining, visit Griffin's full-service gas station directly across the street that will take you back in time as our kind attendant fills up your tank, checks your tires, and washes your windshield!

Griffin's Antiques & Main Street Market are celebrating five years in business as of October 2025. We want to invite everyone to come visit our charming town to eat, shop, fill up, and take home some good old-fashioned memories!

Bunkie is A-Buz for the Holidays

By Robert Smith

The tingle of less tropical temperatures is in the air and the scent of cinnamon, spruce, and spices can only mean one thing—the seasons of gratitude and giving are at hand!

We look forward with anticipation to the fanfare and festivities with family, friends, and falalalala's! The official Bunkie Buz Open House and Holiday Ho-Ho-Ho-Down will begin the evening of Thursday, November 20th between the hours of 5:00pm and 8:00pm! Mark your calendars and plan to join us as our guests, and we shall ply you with snacks, specials, sparkles, and surprises all along the Bunkie Buz Biz-ness District.

We have just enough time to spruce up, polish the apple, and even time to light up the mini park (across from the Palace Farmers Market and Saxon Studio) on Main Street. We will be well lit in any case; a perfect opportunity to get to know your Bunkie Buz Family!



are thrilled and amazed how our Bunkie is becoming so well known! Thank you also to our beautiful Buz Cuz Cherie, for chaperoning and providing the camera work! You can enjoy all the pics on our Facebook page. You, too, can participate by posting us your pics of where Lil Bunkie visits, whether local or in the farthest reaches. We will be delighted to post them. Where will Lil Bunkie be next?

We will soon unveil the newest iteration of our official (and trademarked) Lil Bunkie Monkey! Our mascot, international trekster, and ambassador has grown a bit in girth of smile, tender of texture, and length of tail, but retains the same friendly face, and certified

cute countenance as before!

Coming soon to the Bunkie Buz Tourism Infeaux Center, located within the Saxon Studio at 108 SW Main Street.

The presence of the Bunkie Buz continues to grow! Your support is appreciated! You hear about us and can sponsor us on The Bunkie Buz Live Radio Show on 92.5FM Classic Hits KVPI on Tuesdays at 5:00p, and you can find us on Facebook (search: "The Bunkie Buz"). Friend us and share us.

Come grow with us! Bring your family and friends! Visit and vacation! We love to show you around, introduce you to the Buz family. We even love to show off our Bunkie Buz family! Take a window walkabout and make the Bunkie Buz District your home for the holidays. Come catch the Buz!



Speaking of the Bunkie Buz Family, our lovely Anne Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald's Antiques & Gifts and founding member of the Bunkie Buz has now retired! After much consideration, our Anne has decided to devote herself to family and non-business-related activities. It has been our joy to have our long and rich friendship with Anne develop into the mutual businesses of both antiques and tourism for Bunkie, Avoyelles Parish, and all points beyond. We, of the Bunkie Buz Family, tender our love, prayers, and gratitude for all that she has contributed over the years! Thank you, Anne, from the bottom of our little pea-pick'n hearts! Utmost love in Christ, from your Buz family.

We also celebrate the 30 year partnership between Rocky's Tails & Shells Seafood & Steak Bar & Grill and Greg Kojis, which began with their mutual and successful endeavor to provide copious crawfish cooking to residents of Bunkie. Even when Rocky's moved to their new digs (present location) they continued to buz with success! Rocky's is proof positive that the Buz in Bunkie is not a recent phenomenon; such successful and tasty history should be celebrated! Congratulations and kudos to Rocky's and Greg from you Bunkie Buz family.

As to other comings and goings within the Buz district, our trekster and Bunkie ambassador, Lil Bunkie, has been caught on camera spreading the Bunkie Buz on a whirlwind European vacation, visiting Portugal, Spain, England, France, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. From Michelangelo's David to Stonehenge and the Alps, we





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Jade Vercher
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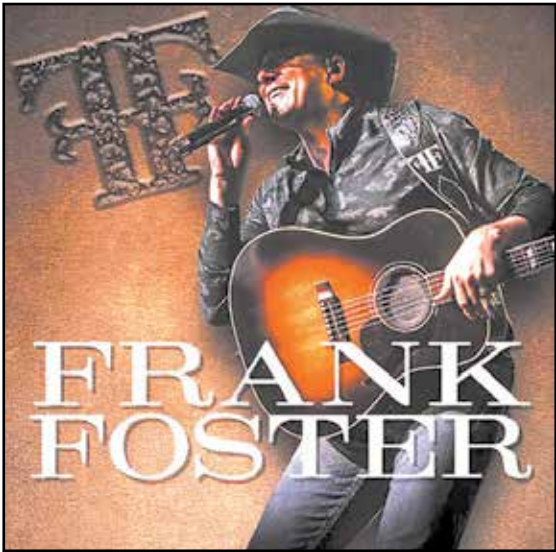
Fall Gatherings in Avoyelles Parish!

By Wilbert Carmouche



Cooler mornings make that second cup of coffee on the patio even sweeter, bringing back memories of slower days and frequent family gatherings. Today, we capture that same spirit when we come together at local events, fairs, and festivals to visit, laugh, and pass a good time. November brings plenty of chances to reconnect before the granddaddy of gatherings—Thanksgiving. Christmas is on the horizon, but we’ll save talk of that joyful season for next month. Here’s what’s happening around Avoyelles this month—come celebrate with us!

Paragon proudly announces Frank Foster in Concert on Friday, November 7th at 8:00pm for a 21+ audience. Frank Foster, born in Cypress Bottom, is an American country music singer-songwriter. Foster has released eight independent albums and is a fan favorite. Visit www.paragoncasinoresort.com/entertainment for ticket information.



November’s golden sunset reminds us more than just the turning of seasons—it’s time to pause and give thanks to those who served. Across our towns and communities, we gather for Veterans Day observances to honor the brave men and women whose sacrifice allows us to live freely and peacefully. Their stories echo through generations, reminding us that freedom is never free. As we stand together in gratitude, we proudly say, “Because they served, we live in freedom.”

Fifth Ward Veterans Memorial Observance will be held Saturday, November 8th at 9:00am. The Veterans Day Ceremony in Moreauville will be held on Sunday, November 9th at 2:00pm. The Veterans Day Program at Paragon Casino Resort is set for Tuesday, November 11th at 10:00am. The Bordelonville VFD Veterans Day Ceremony will be held at 11:00am the same day. A Veteran’s Day Tribute will be held at the Cottonport Veterans Memorial on Saturday, November 22nd at 6:00pm.

Open Hands Sharing God’s Love would like to invite everyone who to this year’s fundraiser at the Moreauville Fire Station on Saturday, November 8th at 9:30am. Open Hands Sharing God’s Love is a Christian, nonprofit organization striving to meet the needs of individuals facing misfortunes beyond their control. For more information, call James Guillot at (318) 729-3951.

Join us for the Annual Christmas on the Island event sponsored by the Fifth Ward Community Center, located at 152 Schoolhouse Road in Fifth Ward. Doors will be

open on Saturday, November 15th from 9:00am to 2:00pm. Just \$1.00 admission for your shopping pleasure. Christmas on the Island will have hundreds of unique items available for sale from some of the top vendors in Avoyelles Parish and Central Louisiana. Also open on the campus is the FWCC Flea Market for the shoppers!

If it’s blues music you are looking for, look no further than Paragon Casino Resort as they bring to the stage, “Boos & Blues II” on Saturday, November 15th at 7:30pm. Get ready for an electric night of Swingout, Nouveau Zydeco, and Southern Soul when “Line Dance King of the World” Cupid, Chris Ardoin, and Marcellus the Singer take the Mári Showroom stage, presented by DJ Troy-D! Visit www.paragoncasinoresort.com for ticket information.

The Southern Style Cruisers Car Show will exhibit their pride and joy on November 21st and 22nd at Paragon Casino Resort during their fall “Show and Shine”. Facebook Cruisin’ Southern Style or email Southernstylecruisers@gmail.com for car show more information.

The Marksville Chamber of Commerce is hosting their 19th Annual Christmas Extravaganza on Saturday, November 22nd at Paragon Casino Resort Mari

EXPLORE AVOYELLES

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Frank Foster in Concert Paragon Casino Resort November 7, 2025 @ 8:00pm 21+ www.paragoncasinoresort.com	Veterans Day Tribute Cottonport Veterans Memorial November 11, 2025 @ 6:00pm 318.201.9321	Christmas Extravaganza Paragon's Mari Center November 22, 2025 @ 8am www.marksvillechamber.org
Veterans Day Observance Fifth Ward Veterans Memorial November 8, 2025 @ 9:00am FB Fifth Ward/Moncla KC Council 9418	Veterans Day Bordelonville VFD November 11, 2025 @ 11:00am 318.359.1851	Cruisin' Southern Style 25' Paragon Casino Resort November 21-22, 2025 318.419.0419
Open Hands Fundraiser Moreauville Fire Station November 8, 2025 @ 9:30am to Noon 318.729.3951	Christmas on the Island Fifth Ward Community Center November 15, 2025 @ 9am FB: Fifth Ward Community Center	Holiday Market Hessmer Gymnasium November 29, 2025 @ 9:00am 318.717.0774
Veterans Day Ceremony Village of Moreauville November 9, 2025 @ 2:00pm 318.447.1076	Boots & Blues II Paragon Casino Resort November 15, 2025 @ 7:30pm www.paragoncasinoresort.com	Alligator Feeding Show Paragon Casino Resort November 29, 2025 @ 4:00pm www.paragoncasinoresort.com

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Showroom. Extravaganza doors open to the public at 8:00am sharp. Admission to the Extravaganza is \$5.00 per adult, under 12 years enter for free. If you have any questions regarding the extravaganza, contact Morgan at (318) 253-8599.

Join us in Hessmer at the Former Hessmer High Gym, located at 4153 E School Street in Hessmer, for the third annual Holiday Christmas Market on Saturday, November 29th from 9:00am until 3:00pm. This free admission event will offer crafts, food, jewelry, home décor, clothes and many other offerings in the strategically appointed booths. Vendor information and other details are available by calling (318) 717-0774.

Downtown Bunkie is the street to be on Thursday, November 20th from 5:00pm to 8:00pm. Come for the drinks and door prizes; stay for the shopping and restaurant specials. All local businesses participate, creating an unforgettable evening. Call Bunkie Chamber of Commerce for more information at (318) 346-2575 or drop by The Bunkie Buz tourist information location!

On Saturday, November 22nd, come join us for our annual TBIPAC BBQ Throwdown featuring our Spring's Elite 10 winners! Come see 10 of the best BBQ cooks in the South and help judge their People's Choice Boston Butt Challenge! Also,



for just \$10.00, you can stay and enjoy our beer and bourbon garden, live music, and much more! Call Spencer Galland at (318) 305-6945 or email: sgalland@tunica.org for additional information. Avoyelles closes out the month of November as we gear up for the December activities with the Alligator Feeding Show at Paragon's Hotel Atrium on Saturday, November 29th at 4:00pm. Bring the family and enjoy the show!

Let us all remember that Thanksgiving is a time of gratitude to God, our Creator and Provider, whose guidance and care go before us, and whose love is with us forever. Thanksgiving is a time to reflect on the changes, to remember that we, too, grow and change from one season of life to another. Let us remember the true meaning of Thanksgiving. As we see the beauty of autumn, let us acknowledge the many blessings which are ours, let us think of our families and friends, and let us give thanks in our hearts. As we transition to the season of Advent, let us pray for peace.

Visit www.travelavoyelles.com, or search Facebook for Wilbert Carmouche or TravelAvoyelles for all your Avoyelles Parish travel needs. Come visit Mary, Murial, Nelda, Bayli, or myself at 8592 Highway 1, Suite 3, Mansura, LA 71350, call us at (800) 833-4195, or email tourism@cricket.net.



Holiday Giftings!

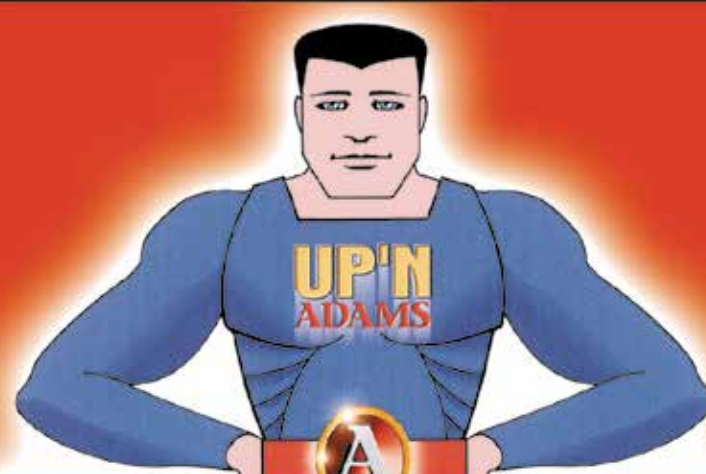
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EDUCATION FOCUS

On The Rise: How LSUA Is Redefining the Future of Higher Education



At a time when many universities across the nation are struggling with declining enrollment, financial instability, and campus closures, Louisiana State University of Alexandria (LSUA) continues to stand apart as a model of growth, stability, and strength within Louisiana's higher education landscape.

Over the past five years, LSUA has quietly built a reputation as one of the most resilient and forward-moving universities in the state. Enrollment has surged by 125% since 2020 and by 252% since 2015, with more than 8,000 students now enrolled. Equally notable is the number of degrees awarded, which continues to reach new records with more than 1,300 graduates in the last academic year alone.

LSUA's success is anchored in both stability and purpose. While many institutions have been forced to cut programs and staff, LSUA continues to invest, adding more than 115 full-time positions in the last two years and injecting \$4.75 million in new salaries into the regional economy. Since 2020, the university has secured \$131 million in new public and private funding, achieving a 26% increase in net position and ensuring a strong financial foundation for years to come.



A significant driver of this momentum is LSUA's growing online education network, which now serves students in all 64 parishes, all 50 states, and 25 countries. These flexible programs fulfill the needs of both traditional students and adult learners who are balancing work, family, and education.

For families seeking stability and opportunity, LSUA's story is one of confidence. As the most affordable four-year university in Louisiana, and part of the world-renowned LSU System, LSUA offers degrees backed by the weight and value of the LSU name. Graduates leave prepared for meaningful careers, further study, and lifelong success without the burden of excessive debt.

In an era of uncertainty across higher education, LSUA continues to look forward, invest boldly, and build a future defined by excellence, accessibility, and growth.

LSUA[®]

IS ON THE RISE

\$50M

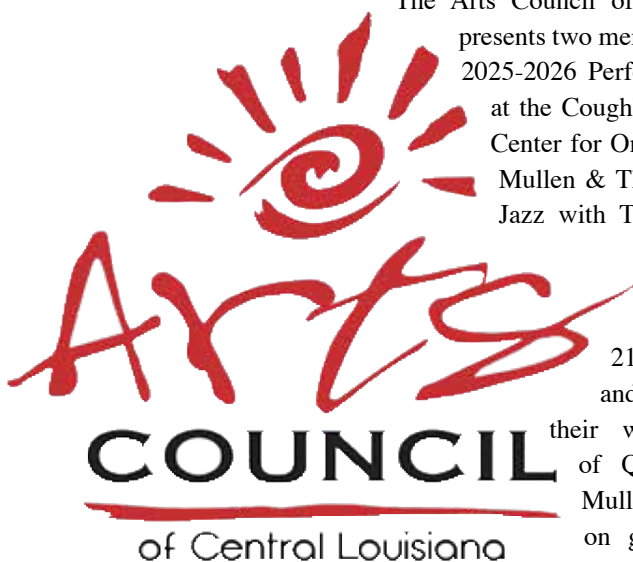
INVESTED THIS YEAR

WWW.LSUA.EDU



Entertainment Focus

Hot Rock and Cool Jazz in Downtown Alexandria



The Arts Council of Central Louisiana (ACCL) presents two memorable events as part of their 2025-2026 Performing Arts Series! Join us at the Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center for One Night of Queen with Gary Mullen & The Works as well as A-Town Jazz with Tiffany Pollack and her Jazz Quintet!

First, on Friday, November 21st at 7:30pm, Gary Mullen and The Works will perform their world-renowned One Night of Queen live concert. Gary Mullen on vocals, David Brockett on guitar, Malcolm Gentles on keyboards, Jon Halliwell on drums and Alan McGeoch on bass guitar will

have you dancing in the aisles during their show, while the band pays tribute to the stage theatrics, showmanship, and music of arguably the greatest rock band of all time: Queen. In 2000, Gary Mullen won the Granada TV program, "Stars in Their Eyes," with his performance as Queen's lead singer, the late, great Freddie Mercury. Mullen's embodiment of Freddie Mercury resulted in him gaining 864,838 votes in the show's Live Grand Final. The number of fans who voted for Mullen was more than double that of the runner-up, thus setting the all-time record number of votes in the history of the program. For over two decades, Gary Mullen & The Works have performed to audiences around the world, playing more than 2,500 live shows to audiences in over 20 countries—performing and selling out many of the same venues that Queen have, all around the world. As of 2023, they are the most successful tribute band in France, playing to over 250,000 people!

Then on Friday, December 12th at 6:00pm, join us for the return of our signature event: A-Town Jazz featuring Tiffany Pollack! What started 15 years ago at the Coughlin Saunders performing arts lobby eventually found its home at the Hurst loft where it was an immensely popular holiday event until Covid. Now back, this distinguished evening, a long-standing tradition for patrons of the arts, promises an unforgettable experience designed to celebrate the arts, deepen community fellowship, and officially commence the festive holiday season.

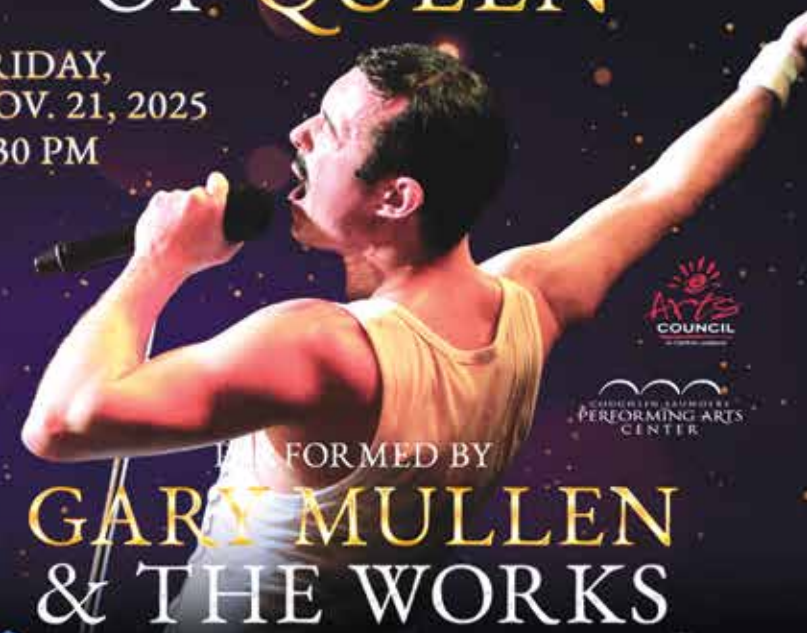
You will be immersed in a captivating evening highlighted by the live performance of esteemed New Orleans jazz vocalist Tiffany Pollack and her Jazz Quintet, set in the festive and inviting Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center Lobby. Enjoy the evening with a specially curated menu of heavy hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar, as well as an opportunity to share the holiday spirit with fellow art lovers. Sponsor tables and single tickets are available!

For more information visit louisiana-arts.org, or call (318) 484-4474 and get your tickets today!

COMING SOON!
ARTS COUNCIL OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA PRESENTS

ONE NIGHT OF QUEEN

FRIDAY,
NOV. 21, 2025
7:30 PM



PERFORMED BY
GARY MULLEN & THE WORKS

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GET YOUR TICKETS AT LOUISIANA-ARTS.ORG OR CALL 318-484-4474



A-Town Jazz

with **TIFFANY POLLACK**

SAVE THE DATE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025
6:00 PM

WITH SUPPORT BY OUR GOLD SPONSORS:  

SPONSOR TABLES & SINGLE TICKETS:
LOUISIANA-ARTS.ORG OR CALL 318-484-4474

Entertainment Focus

Art

Ongoing-February 14: Saratoga Collection: Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria). Donated to the museum by Marcel L. Wisznia and curated by Terrence Sanders-Smith, the Saratoga Collection features works created by artists living and working in the city in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The works in the collection are reflective of contemporary trends in art of the time and show some insight into the significance of this historic disaster on the art and culture of the city of New Orleans. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

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

November 8: AMoA Curator Tour, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 11:00am-12:30pm. An exclusive tour with Terrence Sanders-Smith, who will regale patrons with the story of the Saratoga Collection and his deep personal connection with its works and artists. Adam Falik is a writer of fiction, drama, and cultural criticism. He wrote the artist synopses included in this exhibition and its corresponding catalog. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

November 8: Art Together - Fuzzy Figures, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 1:00pm-4:00pm. Inspired by the work of artist, Alex Podesta from the Saratoga Collection, participants will create their own miniature fuzzy figures, using mixed media. Bring the family or bring a friend and create a Layouyou! This class is best for ages 6 and up. Cost: AMoA Members Free (up to 4); \$20.00 non-members (up to 4). Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

November 11: AMoA Creative Roundtable, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 5:30pm-7:00pm. Are you an artist or creative in Central Louisiana? Are you looking for a place to come and talk to other creatives? Join 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! Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

November 16: Urban Sketching Art Meetup, Buhlow Lake (Pineville), 12:30pm. The Urban Sketching art ministry is going on a picnic! In November, our sketching is on the lake on the airport side of Buhlow. Supplies will be provided as needed. All are welcome. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-5696.

November 22: Festive Watercolors with Jerry Havens, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 1:00pm-4:00pm. Just in time for the holiday season, join local watercolor artist Jerry Havens as he guides the class through the creation of his signature gnomes. Please pre-register. Cost: \$35.00. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

December 6: River Oaks Christmas Porch Sale, River Oaks Square Arts Center (1330 Second Street, Alexandria), 9:00am-3:00pm. Original works of art just in time for the gift giving season! River Oaks' Annual Porch Sale steadily grows to feature new artists from across the region. River Oaks is also home to a sales gallery which features exclusive works by the Louisiana Crafts Guild. This seasonal sale continues to be a major shopping event for artists, members and patrons. Over twenty artists are featured with sales stations as well as additional works from artists across the South! Cost: Free. Call: 318-473-2670. riveroaksartscenter.com

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Entertainment Focus

Music

November 7: Frank Foster in Concert, Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 8:00pm. Don't miss Louisiana native and "blue-collar country" favorite Frank Foster when he brings his unique blend of traditional country, Southern rock grit and outlaw country attitude to the Mári Showroom stage. Must be 21+. \$30.00+. paragoncasinoresort.com/entertainment

November 15: Boos & Blues II, Paragon Casino Resort Mari Showroom (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 7:30pm. Get ready for an electric night of Swingout, Nouveau Zydeco, and Southern Soul when "Line Dance King of the World" Cupid, Chris Ardoin, and Marcellus the Singer take the Mári Showroom stage, presented by DJ Troy-D! Cost: \$35.00+. paragoncasinoresort.com/entertainment

November 21: One Night of Queen, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 7:30pm. For over 20 years Gary Mullen and The Works have been performing their world-renowned One Night of Queen live concert. Gary Mullen & The Works will have you dancing in the aisles during their show, while the band pays tribute to the stage theatrics, showmanship, and music of arguably the greatest rock band of all time: Queen. Cost: \$40.00+. Call: 318-484-4474. louisiana-arts.org

December 7: A Worldwide Yuletide, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 2:30pm. The LSUA Empty Space players will be our travel guide to various locales and traditions. Familiar Christmas music from Britain, Ukraine, France, Germany, and Russia will be heard among pieces from other winter holidays, including Hannukah and Chinese New Years. The NSU Steel Drum Band will bring a Caribbean flair to the show. Our American traditions will be celebrated by Natchitoches-based vocalist D'Nissa Hester, who will join the orchestra, culminating with an audience sing-along, and hopefully a special visitor from the North Pole! Cost: \$25.00 Adult; \$15.00

(Seniors 65+); \$10.00 Students; \$50.00 Family (2 adults + 4 children). Call: 318-442-9709. rapidessymphony.org

Theatre

November 10, 17, 24 & December 1: 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.

November 14-16: Disney's "Descendants: The Musical," Lagniappe Theatre Event Center (7521 Coliseum Boulevard, Alexandria). Get sucked into the flip side of "happily ever after" and get your hands clapping until you can't stop chanting, "Bad is the New Good!" With incredible music, awesome dance numbers, huge laughs, and a story of choice and redemption, this is a show that is great for the whole family. Call: 318-487-8243. lagniappetheatre.com

Events

Ongoing-November: 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.

November 7, 14, 21: Mah Jongg at FUMC, First United Methodist Church of Alexandria (2727 Jackson St, Alexandria), 1:00pm-3:00pm. Join in for open play Mah Jongg. Please bring your 2025 National Mah Jongg League, Inc card if you have one. Cost: Free.

November 8: Jaguar Cub Debut, Alexandria Zoo (3016 Masonic Drive, Alexandria), 9:00am-5:00pm. Enjoy a day of wild excitement as the Alexandria Zoo proudly presents its newest star! Join us for the public debut of our adorable jaguar cub! Beginning at 11 AM indulge in a complimentary slice of celebratory cake, courtesy of Atwood's Bakery (while supplies last). Mom, Philly, and her cub will be able to move freely between their indoor and outdoor areas. Because the family has free choice to move around their habitat, we cannot guarantee a view of the cub. Cost: Regular Zoo Admission; FOTAZ Members Free (w/ ID). thealexandriazoo.com

November 8: 32nd Annual Sugar Day Festival, Kent Plantation House (3601 Bayou Rapides Road, Alexandria), 9:00am-4:00pm. Our reproduction 1840s sugar mill will be fired up, and we'll be making some delicious syrup and sugar! There will be live period music, tours of Kent House, plenty of demonstrations of old-time trades including blacksmithing,

corn grinding, wood carving and more. There will also be local vendors selling handmade food and arts & crafts items, plus plenty of interesting children's activities including a petting zoo! You do not want to miss this fun, family-friendly festival! Cost: \$5.00 (Ages 4+). Call: 318-487-5998. kenthouse.org

November 8: AMoA Stitching Circle, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 11:00am-3:00pm. 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

November 10: Professional Women's Network of Cenla (PWN), Brocato's (5515 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria), 12:00pm-1:00pm. PWN will hold its monthly lunch meeting. No reservation needed. Lunch available for purchase prior to meeting. Cost: Free. Call Anh Stubbs: 318-451-7722.

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f @CenlaFocus – NOVEMBER 2025 PAGE 45

Entertainment Focus

November 11: Safe Sitter Class, RRCMC Education Center (211 Fourth Street, Alexandria), 8:30am-4:00pm. This is a class designed to teach boys and girls, aged 11-14 years old, how to be safe babysitters. It is a fun way for babysitters to learn important topics such as how to handle emergencies, how to entertain kids, CPR/choking rescue for children and infants, basic child care skills, babysitting business skills, and how to keep themselves safe while babysitting. Space is limited; please pre-register. Cost: \$45.00. 318-769-4440.

November 11, 18, 25 & December 2: Alexandria Farmer's Market, First United Methodist Church (2727 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 3:00pm-6:00pm. The Alexandria Farmers Market is a weekly gathering that connects the community of Alexandria with the farmers, ranchers, and agricultural artisans of Central Louisiana. This connection strives to improve the physical, social, and economic well-being of the region by providing access to fresh, healthy, local food for residents, fostering community relationships, and serving as a business incubator for growers and producers. Cost: Free. Call: 318-441-3407.

November 12: Cenla Women's Connection Luncheon, Alexandria Convention Center (2225 North MacArthur Drive, Alexandria), 12:00pm. Come early and shop our Silent Auction featuring Gifts, Baskets & More! Our special guest speaker Sue Bohlin will present "How to Handle the Things You Hate but Cannot Change". Also joining is Annie Collins with Glass Act Recycling. Cost: \$25.00. Call: 318-447-4673.

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

November 12: LSUA Cavanaugh Lecture Series, LSUA's Coughlin Auditorium (Grady Britt Drive, Alexandria), 6:00pm. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Robert Olen Butler, author of sixteen novels including *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*, has earned national acclaim and honors such as the F. Scott Fitzgerald Award for Outstanding Achievement in American Literature, two National Magazine Awards in Fiction, and multiple Pushcart Prizes. His work has been published in *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *GQ*. Cost: Free.

November 13: Diabetes Management Class, Rapides Women's and Children's Hospital Cascade Room (501 Medical Center Dr, Alexandria), 5:30pm-7:00pm. This program is designed for adults with newly diagnosed diabetes and for people needing a refresher course in diabetes management. This is a basic diabetes program; therefore, no physician referral is required. The program content follows the American Diabetes Association guidelines and uses a variety of teaching methods to enhance learning. Topics

include meal planning, monitoring blood sugar, medications, complications, and learning to deal with a chronic disease. The course is taught by a Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian. Space is limited; please pre-register. Cost: Free. Call: 318-769-4440.

November 16: 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.

November 19: FriendsGiving Supper, First United Methodist Church (2727 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 5:00pm. Celebrate the season with a warm community FriendsGiving Supper featuring roasted turkey and dressing, gravy, sweet potato casserole, green beans, salad, rolls, and dessert. Reservations required by November 16th. Cost: \$18.00 Max per Family, \$6.00 Adults, \$3 Children (ages 4-12), ages 3 & under Free 318-443-5696.

November 20: 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 LEH Award-Winner Jason Berry, author of many works including "Render Unto Rome; The Secret Life of Money in the Catholic Church" and "City of a Million Dreams; A History of New Orleans at Year 300," and many other works. Cost: Free. Call: 318-442-2483.

November 20: 2nd Annual CLHC "Home For Christmas", Hotel Bentley (200 Desoto Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm. The evening will include live music by H.B. Smith and Auctioneer Lance Harris who will engage the audience to bid on stunning Christmas trees that will be

fully lighted and adorned with ornate decorations. The audience will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite tree. Cost: \$25.00. Call: 318-443-0500.

November 22: 19th Annual Christmas Extravaganza, Paragon Casino Resort (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 8:00am. Shop for all your holiday needs, support local vendors, and grab the shirt everyone will be talking about, available exclusively at the Extravaganza. Cost: \$5.00. marksvillechamber.org

November 22-January 6: 99th Annual Natchitoches Christmas Festival, Historic Downtown Natchitoches Riverfront. This year marks the 99th season of sparkle. Enjoy the famous Christmas lights, fireworks every Saturday, and events for residents and visitors to enjoy creating memories that last a lifetime. Turn on the Holidays on November 22nd with the official start to the Christmas season featuring live music, fireworks and a drone show! Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame inductee and WNBA All-Star, Vickie Johnson, will be the grand marshal for the Festival of Lights Parade on December 6th. This year's festival is entirely cashless. Cost: Free (Sundays-Fridays); \$15.00 (Saturdays after 1:00pm). natchitocheschristmas.com

November 29: Thanksgiving Guided Tour, Forts Randolph and Buhlow State Historic Site (135 Riverfront Street, Pineville), 10:00am-11:00am. Relax after all the turkey with a quick guided tour through our museum and walking trail. Demonstrations of soldier's kit and musketry included! Cost: \$10.00.

November 29: 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.

November 30: Pineville Christmas in the Pines, Riverfront Street in Pineville,



Scan for a full listing of events at



Entertainment Focus

3:00pm-6:00pm. Pineville Christmas in the Pines is an evening packed with holiday cheer. We'll have live music to set the festive mood, unique vendors perfect for finding that special gift, and a dazzling fireworks display! The grand finale? Our annual Christmas tree lighting! Cost: Free.

December 2: Christmas on the Quad, LSUA (8100 Highway 71 South, Alexandria), 5:00pm. Join LSUA for its annual Christmas on the Quad! The community is invited to come to this annual event that includes snow, Christmas photos, letters to Santa, fireworks, food, and the big man himself, Santa Clause and Tank, the LSUA mascot. Cost: Free. LSUA.edu

December 5-7: AlexWinterFete, Downtown Alexandria. Glide across the outdoor skating rink, marvel at the dazzling fireworks over the Red River, and explore Jolly Junction, a magical children's area filled with activities. Enjoy the thrill of live performances,

including stilt walkers, fire breathers, and live music. Don't forget to browse the downtown shopping vendors and savor the delicious food that Fêtes are famous for. The celebration kicks off with the traditional lighting of the tree during Holiday Magic and Santa's arrival at Santa's Village. Cost: Free. alexwinterfete.com

December 6: 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.

December 6: FOTAZ Breakfast with Santa, Alexandria Zoo (3016 Masonic Drive, Alexandria), 8:00am-10:00am. Celebrate the holiday season at this

exclusive, FOTAZ Members-Only festive morning with a light continental breakfast, free train ride, special keeper chats, visit with Santa, and fun, holiday-themed activities! RSVP at the Zoo website. Not a FOTAZ member yet? There's still time! Join at the Zoo or online! Must be a current FOTAZ member at the time of the event to attend. Only those individuals included in your membership may attend. Membership cards and photo IDs will be checked at the entrance gate. Cost: Free FOTAZ Members (w/ ID). thealexandriazoo.com

December 6: 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

November 8: 3rd Annual Strides for Diabetes Awareness, England Airpark Community Center (1718 Keglman Blvd, Alexandria), 8:00am-10:00am. Proceeds from this 5K and Family Fun Run help with diabetes research and to support the summer camp for diabetic children and youth at the Louisiana Lions Camp in Anacoco. <https://shorturl.at/8g34Q>

November 11, 18, 25 & December 2: 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

**All events subject to change.*

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A Worldwide Yuletide

By Joshua Zona



Santa won't be the only one traveling around the world this December! The entire Rapides Symphony, along with special guests the LSUA Empty Space Players, vocalist D'Nissa Hester, and the Northwestern State University Steel Drum Band, will be joining him in our holiday concert "A Worldwide Yuletide" on Sunday afternoon, December 7th.

The LSUA Empty Space players will be our travel guide to the various locales and traditions. Familiar Christmas music from Britain, Ukraine, France, Germany, and Russia will be heard among pieces from other winter holidays, including Hannukah and Chinese New Years. The NSU Steel Drum Band will bring a Caribbean flair to the show.

Our American traditions will be celebrated by Natchitoches-based vocalist D'Nissa Hester, who will join the orchestra, culminating with an audience sing-along, and hopefully a special visitor from the North Pole!



This is a concert the whole family will enjoy, and is often a sell-out, so get your tickets today at RapidesSymphony.org. The concert begins at 2:30pm at the Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center. We hope to see you all there!



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14th through 16th. Lagniappe Theatre wants to get you sucked into the flip side of “happily ever after” and get your hands clapping until you can’t stop chanting, “Bad is the New Good!”

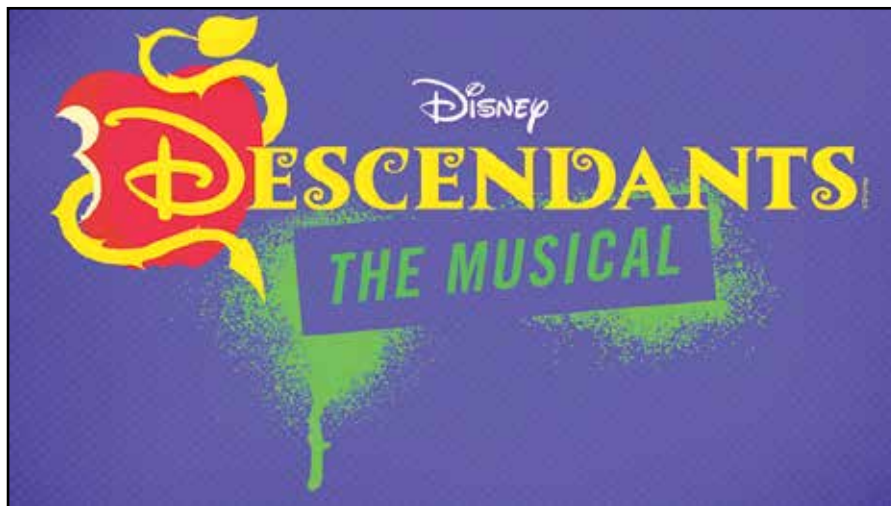
Based on the Disney’s 2015 smash movie, “Descendants” follows our unlikely heroes Mal, daughter of Maleficent; Jay, son of Jafar; Evie, daughter of the Evil Queen Grimhilde; and Carlos, son of Cruella De Vil as they get ripped from their crime ridden lives on the Isle of the Lost to attend the illustrious Auradon Prep in the Happily Ever After Kingdom. Prince Ben, son of King Beast and Belle, wishes to mend the past by connecting the two worlds again, but Mal’s mother, Maleficent, has other plans of taking over the entire fairytale kingdom for herself. What will happen? Well...you will just have to come see the show to find out!

With incredible music, awesome dance numbers, huge laughs, and a story of choice and redemption,

It’s time to get villainous and get your evil on with Lagniappe Theatre Company’s new show, Disney’s “Descendants: the Musical,” showing November

this is a show that is great for the whole family. Showing at the Lagniappe Theatre Event Center, located at 7521 Coliseum Boulevard in Alexandria, “Descendants” showcases some of the most incredible young talent the area has to offer. This is one show you don’t want to miss!

Tickets can be found at LagniappeTheatre.com or just scan the QR code on this page. Come see Lagniappe Theatre’s production of Disney’s “Descendants” and bring in the holidays with a little fun and wickedness!



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From Miniatures to Masterpieces: River Oaks Showcases Art, Outreach, and Inspiration

November brings together a stunning mix of national and local artistry to River Oaks Square Arts Center. Each gallery will tell its own story of imagination and inspiration, uniting artists, students, and patrons in celebration of the power of art.

“November at River Oaks is always one of our most inspiring months,” says Rachael Dauzat, Executive Director. “This year is especially meaningful as we celebrate the 10th year of our national 5x5x5 competition, while also highlighting the extraordinary impact of our outreach programming. Each exhibition reflects our mission to nurture creativity at every level—from professional artists to those discovering the joy of expression for the first time.”

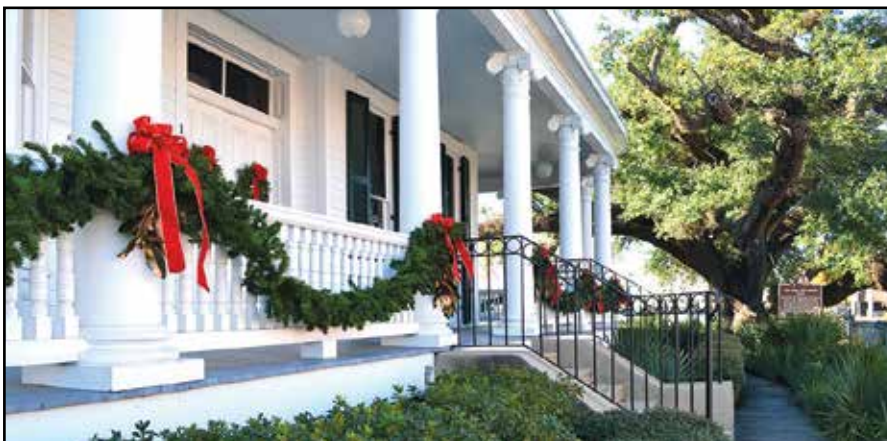
In the Bolton-Davis Gallery, the 10th annual 5x5x5 National Miniature Competition has become a cornerstone of River Oaks’ exhibition calendar. The challenge to artists is to create powerful, intricate works that measure no more than five inches in any direction. This show continues to captivate both artists and collectors alike, proving that size is no limitation to creativity.

Guest Juror Ross Jahnke brings decades of experience and expertise to this milestone exhibition. A painter and printmaker, Jahnke focuses on oil painting and printmaking, particularly woodcut and silkscreen prints. His career as both an artist and educator spans over three decades at Nicholls State University, where he serves as Full Professor and Chair of the Department of Art.

Jahnke’s accompanying exhibition, “Mechanical Sympathy,” explores themes of control, intuition, and transition. “This work represents several points of transition, with an as yet unclear direction. The only conscious intent was to relinquish more control to the wood and the tools,” Jahnke explains. The works merge technical mastery with an embrace of unpredictability, revealing how even in structure, there is room for spontaneity and emotion.

In the Galerie des Amis, Laura Gates offers a contemplative journey through her solo exhibition, “Earth and Sky: Grounding Presence/Infinite Potential”. Gates, a seasoned landscape painter, captures the profound interplay between humanity, nature, and the cosmos. Her work has appeared in numerous regional and national juried exhibitions and publications. This exhibition reflects Gates’ lifelong fascination with place and perspective. Through painterly explorations of light, color, and atmosphere, she seeks to connect viewers to the balance between the tangible and the ethereal—the solidity of the earth and the infinite wonder of the sky.

For 2025, River Oaks’ Art for All Outreach Exhibition in the Stokes-Harris Gallery follows the theme “HeART Takes Flight,” inspired by the community heart sculpture



unveiled earlier this year. The outreach program, which serves individuals with special needs and underserved populations, uses art as a vehicle for empowerment and inclusion. Each piece created in the outreach program embodies the spirit of freedom, inspiration, and possibility—demonstrating how creativity can uplift both individuals and communities.

At the heart of the Outreach Program is Lindsay B. Moore, Ceramics Outreach Instructor at River Oaks. For over five years, Moore has shared her talents and patience with hundreds of students, teaching basic art and ceramics techniques while encouraging self-expression and confidence. Under her guidance, River Oaks has conducted over 800 outreach sessions since 2010, expanding access to the arts for all. The Outreach Projects for 2025 are made possible through sponsorships by Louisiana Project Grant as administered by the Arts Council of Central Louisiana, RoyOMartin Foundation, Bill Hess Memorial Fund, The Rotary Club of Alexandria, Alexandria Rotary Club and The Rotary Foundation, Louisiana Division of the Arts, and CLECO.

The exhibitions will open with a reception and awards ceremony on Thursday, November 13th from 5:00pm to 7:00pm, with Guest Juror Remarks and Awards presented at 6:00pm.

The holiday season is just around the corner and with it comes one of River Oaks’ most beloved traditions—the Annual Christmas Porch Sale on Saturday, December 6th, from 9:00am to 3:00pm. The event features original works from over 100 regional artists and fine craftsmen. The sale coincides with AlexWinterFête, offering the perfect opportunity to shop local, enjoy live music, and savor Diamond Grill’s signature gumbo from 11:30am to 1:00pm. It’s the ideal kickoff to the holiday season and a chance to find one-of-a-kind gifts while supporting the arts.

We would like to take a moment to express our gratitude to the organizations that tirelessly support River Oaks throughout the year: Louisiana Feed Your Soul, The Diamond Grill, Hotel Bentley, Explore Alexandria/Pineville, The City of Alexandria, Red River Bank, GAEDA, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, in cooperation with the Louisiana State Arts Council, as administered by the Arts Council of Central Louisiana. Funding has also been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

For more information on exhibitions, classes, and upcoming events, contact River Oaks at (318) 473-2670, visit RiverOaksArtsCenter.com, or follow River Oaks Arts Center on Facebook for the latest updates.

Charissa Owens–The Love of Living Through Art



Inspired by the colors and textures in the world around her, Louisiana artist Charissa Owens creates abstract expressionist works that capture the peaceful beauty of everyday life. She credits her home state for providing an incredible and diverse palette of lush greens, soft marsh grasses, weathered architecture, and radiant southern light all find their way into her art.

Creativity has been a driving force in Charissa's life from the beginning. Encouraged by family members who worked with their hands all the way from cooking to welding to architectural design, she learned early on to explore material, form, and imagination. Some of her fondest memories include sitting on her uncle's drafting table, drawing flowers as he designed homes. Her love of art continued into high school and led her to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design.

Charissa spent many years balancing roles as a wife, mother of three, and full-time art educator in Rapides Parish. During this time, she continued to carve out moments

to create, often late nights, weekends, and any sliver of quiet she could find. In 2020, her practice evolved into a professional career that has since blossomed across the South and beyond.

Her work is known for its soft muted palettes, layering delicate hues, tones, tints, and shades to evoke elegance, peace, and serenity. She moves intuitively between mixed media and watercolor, incorporating sculptural textures, unexpected tools, and a keen eye for pattern. Spontaneity and observation guide her. She often finds composition in the simplest things: shadows on a wall, ripples in water, petals on the ground.



Charissa has most recently exhibited at Marburger in Round Top, Texas, and her work has been featured in publications like Traditional Home, Southern Lady, and Victoria Magazine. She works with interior designers throughout the nation and her work can be found in many interior stores across the south like Paloma & Co. in Houston.

Every brushstroke reflects her mission: to honor the wonder of life and share that joy of what she sees with others.

See more of her work on Instagram and Facebook @charissaowensart.

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The Brothels of Alexandria

By Michael Wynne

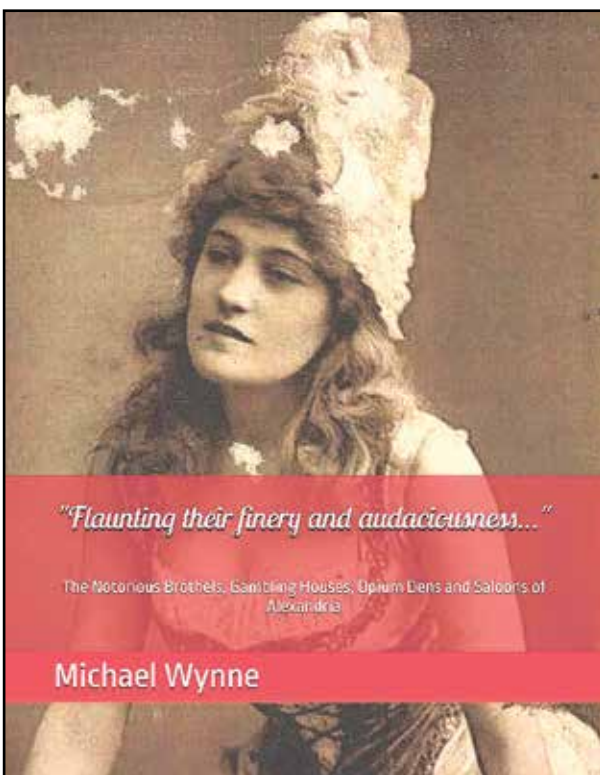


Did you know that seedy gambling joints and raucous saloons at one time proliferated in Alexandria? Did you know that, at one time, the city also housed an opium den? Did you know that we had so many brothels here in Alexandria that they comprised the city's number one business, enough to compete with the infamous "Storyville" of New Orleans? And, most importantly, that all of these brothels were all perfectly legal and licensed for profit by the city? This long-forgotten, sordid chapter in our Central Louisiana history has been largely ignored, until now. The fascinating hidden story of this part of Alexandria's history is the focus of my book: "The Notorious Brothels, Gambling Houses, Opium Dens and Saloons of Alexandria."

Prostitution, commonly referred to as the world's oldest profession, was present in Alexandria, in one form or another, long before Alexandria ever existed and will be here long after we are gone. What makes this story interesting is how prostitution was treated in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Prior to 1901, prostitution, was, for all intents and purposes, unofficially legal throughout Central Louisiana. This paid "hobby" was primarily for the benefit of men and was only frowned upon by the many non-voting women and wives. I found no accounts or records of any arrests and prosecutions of the prostitutes here (the "madams" or her "inmates," as the working prostitutes in a brothel were called). As early as 1820, William Drumgoole advertised his "Columbian Exchange" on Front Street (a site now below the levee) as a place of "comfort" and "entertainment" just for men.

In 1898, all of that changed, starting in New Orleans. City Councilman Sidney Story (for whom "Storyville" is named) proposed to take all of the brothels in New Orleans and place them in one restricted district where "anything goes." The city of New Orleans would license the brothels, saloons, and gambling houses as new income for the city. The Alexandria City Council then watched this project and after seeing the financial success that followed, instituted a similar program in 1901.



Eventually, the income from licensing these "dens of comfort" would constitute up to a third of the city's income!

This district thrived in Alexandria. Folks of all ages went—and went often—for fun and frolic. Massive, elegant, multi-story houses were built, some with as many as 10 bathrooms. The prostitutes could literally do anything in this restricted district. But, they were not allowed in the rest of town, not even to ride bicycles! The district was called "Welchville" after the Alexandria mayor who promoted the creation of the district. It was later discovered that he owned interest in some of the brothels and was profiting off of them. He soon had to leave town.

The district ended in 1917 due to a mandate by the U. S. War Department. Not only were many men of Alexandria contracting and spreading venereal diseases, but so were the soldiers training at Camp Beauregard. Four soldiers had to be stationed around-the-clock at the entrance of the restricted district to keep the soldiers out! At the same time, the state's only VD hospital had to be built in Alexandria.

If you'd like to hear more about Alexandria's long-gone "restricted district", including its location, it is all covered in my book, including fascinating biographies of the working "inmates." It is available at Amazon or through your favorite bookseller.

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2nd Annual Home for Christmas Fundraising Event

On Thursday, November 20th, the Central Louisiana Homeless Coalition (CLHC) will host the 2nd annual "Home For Christmas" event which is designed to benefit the many programs and services the CLHC provides to homeless persons and to promote and educate the community about the increasing number of unhoused persons in Central Louisiana. This year's event will be held at the historic Hotel Bentley in Downtown Alexandria and will showcase fully decorated Christmas trees donated by local businesses and organizations.

"Every night, hundreds of individuals and families in our community go to sleep without a roof over their heads. All are human beings with stories, dreams—and the right to safety and dignity," stated Kitty Wynn, the CLHC Executive Director. CLHC is open and accessible to any person experiencing homelessness each weekday throughout the year. Individuals who come to the center receive basic services, including clothing, blankets, hygiene products, shower and laundry facilities, computer and internet access,



phone access and charging, and a mailing address.

This signature event will begin at 6:00pm and will include live music by H.B. Smith and Auctioneer Lance Harris who will engage the audience to bid on stunning Christmas trees that will be fully lighted and adorned with ornate decorations. The audience will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite tree for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prizes as the People's Choice Awards. This year's event will also include a silent auction that will include numerous Christmas and other unique items such as jewelry and sports packages.

Tickets are available for \$25.00 per person and can be purchased by calling the CLHC at (318) 443-0500 or by stopping by the office located at 1515 Jackson Street in Alexandria. "The community is invited to support and join in for an evening of fun, music, and delicious food," stated Mrs. Wynn. "Together, we can continue to bring hope and practical assistance to those experiencing homelessness in Central Louisiana."

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Thankful to Grateful

By Debbie Guy, LCSW



On Facebook, November starts the “Today, I’m thankful for...” challenge. “Thank you!” A kind, endearing phrase we teach our toddlers. We hold out a cookie. They reach. We prompt, “What do you say?” When we hear a sweet, “ta-ta,” they get the cookie. Later, any and every action, such as, “I got the stain out of your favorite shirt,” better be followed by a, “Thank you, mom!”

Thank-you’s are immediate and build emotional capital.

A mannerly social norm response. They are a recognition of an action, whether it’s holding a door, helping with a last-minute project, or dropping off a carton of homemade ice cream to a friend.

What about that other word: grateful? Aren’t they interchangeable? Well, not really. Gratitude is a deep, cultivated, knows-no-season, transformative way of life. It is the opposite of toxic positivity that denies struggles and painful setbacks with shallow platitudes. Gratitude is an active process of looking for the good.

Gratitude is wisdom. It is life experience built over time. It’s recalling those thankful encounters which, as we age, morph into grateful memories. Studies show that an attitude of gratitude results in positive physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits as well as leads to a life of satisfaction. So, how do we get there? By taking it one day at a time. First, let’s get a notebook; it doesn’t have to be fancy. Then, log a simple morning thank you like, at our age, “Whew,

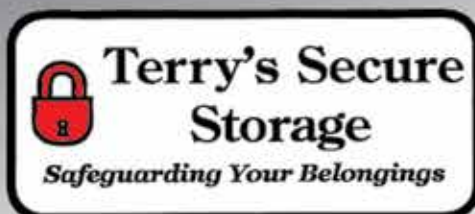
we woke up!” End the day with another entry. Evenings are tough, especially after a hard day when nothing went as planned. Or, write a memory of a glitch with a happy ending. Lastly, reflect and record if we were someone’s “thank you” today. Were we patient with the little ole lady writing a check? Did we let someone merge in traffic? Or, compliment the janitor? All the things that bring a smile.

So how does this play out as a family? We also log the simple thank you’s, near-misses, those grateful funny stories. Here’s one of ours. It recently popped up on Facebook:



“Today I’m thankful that I can adjust the temperature in my house. Until the boys were in high school, we had an old furnace (put in when house built in ‘50s) and floor vents. I would make the family shiver until after the Pecan Festival to turn on the heat because the lower utility bill would give us extra money for Christmas. The day would arrive. Mike would go to the basement—he would yell through the vents when he wanted us to move the thermostat. Excitement filled the air. It was always an anxious moment because we never knew if it would work. The boys and I would sing our ‘please start’ song and do the ‘furnace dance.’ When it clicked on and we heard the rush of air, we would laugh, yell, and dance some more. Kinda miss those days.” Thirty-five years later...we’re grateful.

So, blessings on us cultivators of gratitude. Let’s dig deep and uncover our “thankful then, grateful now” stories to add to our new ones. A wonderful harvest lies ahead!



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The Art of Pondering: Slowing Down to Find What Matters Most

By Christy Pennison, LPC-S



Last month, I had the honor of joining entrepreneurs from across Louisiana at the Edward Lowe Foundation headquarters, and I've been doing a lot of pondering since. It was one of those experiences that pulls you out of your everyday routine and gives you the space to slow down, step back, and see things from a new perspective.

If you're not familiar with Ed Lowe, he's the man who created one of the first kitty litters—what we now know as Tidy Cat. But what I love most about his story isn't the invention itself, it's his heart behind it. He spent much of his life thinking deeply about purpose, impact, and the kind of legacy he wanted to leave behind. Before he passed away, he used his success to create the Edward Lowe Foundation, which is a place designed to support entrepreneurs and small business owners. He understood that people who take risks to build something from nothing are the ones who help communities grow stronger.

Through a partnership with Louisiana Economic Development, I had the opportunity to spend several days learning, connecting, and reflecting alongside other individuals from across the state. As I've looked back on that experience, two things have stayed with me the most: the power of community and the power of reflection.

One of the first things I noticed during our time together was how quickly connection formed among people who, just hours before, had been complete strangers. We all came from different industries and backgrounds, but there was instant understanding. Conversations flowed easily. Ideas were shared openly. Encouragement was offered without hesitation.

It reminded me just how much we all need spaces like that—places where we feel seen, understood, and supported. Whether you're building a business, raising a family, pursuing a dream, providing for your loved ones, or navigating a hard season, we all long for connection. We need people who remind us that we're not alone in our struggles, that our goals are worth pursuing, and that our journey is often stronger when we walk it together.

The other thing that deeply impacted me was the power of reflection, or as they called it during the retreat, pondering.

Pondering is more than just thinking about something. It's intentionally slowing down and creating space for deeper awareness to rise to the surface. It's approaching your thoughts with curiosity instead of judgment and giving them time to unfold. One of the most meaningful parts of the retreat was a simple exercise: no talking, no phones, no distractions. Just a few thoughtful prompts, a pen and paper, and the beauty of nature around us.

At first, it felt a little strange to sit in silence. We're so used to constant noise, input, and motion that stillness can feel uncomfortable. But as the minutes passed, something shifted. Thoughts that had felt jumbled started to make sense. Priorities that had been fuzzy became clearer. Ideas that had been sitting just beneath the surface finally had room to breathe.



That time reminded me that, sometimes, the clarity we're searching for doesn't come from pushing harder or doing more. It comes from pausing, and stepping back long enough to actually hear ourselves think.

The good news is that pondering doesn't have to happen on a retreat to be powerful. It's something we can all practice in our everyday lives. Maybe it's fifteen minutes on the porch in the morning before the day gets going, or a walk outside without your phone, or a few quiet moments with a notebook and some honest questions. It's about creating space, however small, to listen to yourself without rushing, fixing, or judging.

Growth doesn't always happen in the busy seasons. More often, it happens in the quiet, when we slow down, connect deeply, and give ourselves the space to listen.

So maybe the invitation for all of us is this: take a little time this week to ponder. Step away from the noise, even if it's just for a few minutes. Go outside, take a deep breath, and sit with your thoughts. You might be surprised by what rises to the surface, and by the clarity you already have within you.

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Why You Can Drive in the Rain

Dr. Jerry Sanson, PhD



DR. JERRY SANSON

Pretend for a moment that you are driving through the countryside enjoying the beautiful scenery when you encounter a sudden downpour of rain. What happens next? Depending on the make and model of your vehicle, one of two options occur. Either you manually turn on your windshield wipers or they might start working automatically, clearing your windshield so you can continue to drive safely. The reason why that happens stems from the brain of a woman whose name you are unlikely to know. Did anyone guess Mary Anderson?

Mary Anderson was born on Burton Hill Plantation in Greene County, Alabama in 1866, while the country was still trying to heal from the divisions caused by the Civil War. Her parents, John C. and Rebecca Anderson, had another daughter, Fannie, and the sisters remained close all their lives.

Mary showed her enterprising spirit shortly after the family's move to the boomtown of Birmingham in 1889, where she became a real estate developer and built the Fairmont Apartments, where she would live, off and on, for the rest of

her life. Mary received a large inheritance from a relative around 1900 and decided that she would use the money to finance a trip to New York City in 1902. She rode a streetcar one day during her time in the city, and that ride changed the way you and I drive today.



The December day was cold and snow mixed with sleet made the driver's job difficult. He sometime put his head out of the window into the miserable weather in order to see his way and sometimes got out of the car to wipe moisture off the windshield with his hands. Even though motor vehicles were invented during the late nineteenth century, no manufacturer made provisions for cleaning windshields during inclement weather. Some early automobiles did not even have a windshield to clean! Those that included a windshield did not provide any way to clean it, except by hand. Drivers accepted this condition and coped with it as best they could.

Mary applied herself to this problem after she returned to Birmingham and devised a solution by envisioning a windshield squeegee blade operated by the driver from inside the vehicle that would clear the glass. She described her invention as "a squeegee blade with a spindle to one end that passed through a hole in the top corner of the windscreen frame



Welcome
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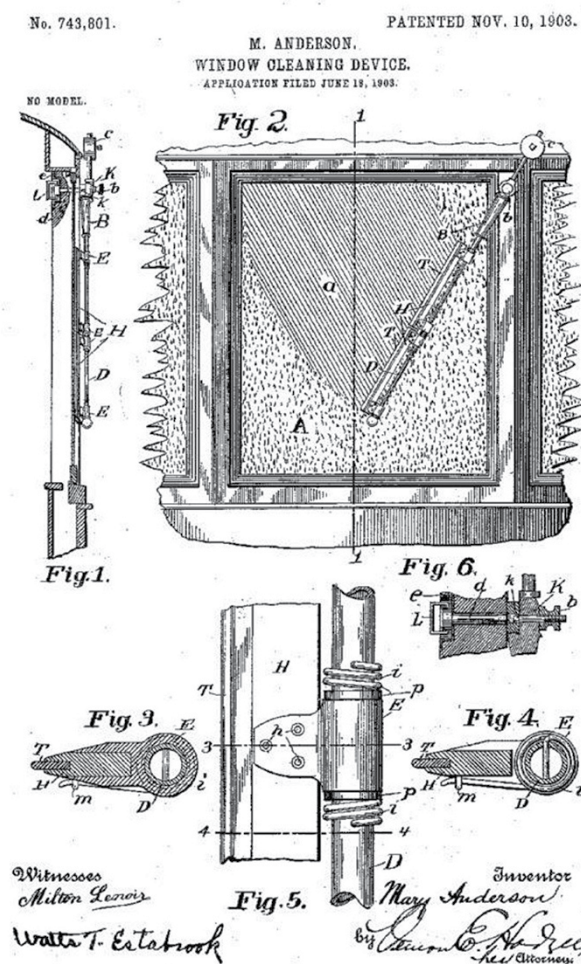
Jessica has lived in Dry Prong all her life and attended Georgetown High School. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family doing things such as hunting, traveling, and watching her kids play sports. A fun fact about Jessica is that she loves everything Halloween! Perhaps her favorite part of the season is dressing her family up in themed costumes and doing fun Halloween makeup with her daughter.



and was attached to a handle on the inside” on her patent application when she sent it to the Patent Office in June 1903. Her window cleaning device was more effective than others previously proposed because she included a counterweight that ensured that the rubber blade of the squeegee remained in contact with the windshield. She received U.S. Patent No. 743,801 on November 10, 1903.

She then encountered the difficult part of the invention process that she could never overcome. She needed a manufacturing company to make her product or to buy her patent and make and market it for itself. Unfortunately for her hopes, motor vehicles were not popular in the United States in 1903, and she could not find a company willing to take a chance on windshield wipers. Some manufacturers feared that low sales volume would never allow them to recoup their investment, while others feared that the action of moving the wiper and the distraction of the wiper in motion would cause accidents. Some modern sources maintain that companies did not buy her invention because she was an independent woman.

The rejection letter she received from the Canadian manufacturing firm of Dinning and Eckestein in June 1905 illustrates her problem precisely: “We regret to state we do not consider it to be of such commercial value as would warrant our undertaking its sale.” Her patent expired in 1920 without her ever finding a



company willing to market her invention. Cadillac, however, made windshield wipers standard equipment on its vehicles in 1922, and the market for windshield wipers expanded dramatically. Mary Anderson never made a dime from her invention, but then neither did Charlotte Bridgewood who patented the “electric automatic wiper system” in 1917 that used an electric motor to power rollers that cleaned windshields. These two women created the modern windshield wiper but neither received monetary rewards for their work.

By the time windshield wipers became standard equipment on vehicles, Mary Anderson was back to her old job of managing the Fairmont Apartments. Mary continued to manage the apartments until her death at age 87 in 1953 while vacationing at her summer home in Monteagle, Tennessee. Her funeral was conducted at her church of many years, South Highland Presbyterian, in Birmingham. She is buried at Elmwood Cemetery in the city. She never married and had no children.

Even though Mary Anderson received no money and little credit for her invention, she finally received some measure of fame in 2011 when she was posthumously inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. Rini Paiva, executive vice president of the Hall of Fame, said at her induction ceremony, “[Mary Anderson] was persistent, she was forward-thinking, and she had the drive to follow up on an idea.”

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Egg & Sausage Breakfast Casserole, Corn Pudding, and Sweet Potato Casserole

By Wilbert Carmouche

As the leaves turn and gently drift to the ground, the season of comfort and gratitude begins to stir. Fall brings with it the craving for hearty, soul-warming dishes—the kind that make Thanksgiving tables feel complete. Here are a couple of my favorite recipes to satisfy both heart and appetite.



Egg & Sausage Breakfast Casserole
in memory of James J. Bordelon
by Bobbie Bordelon

1 Lb. Sausage, Cooked and Drained
6 Eggs, Slightly Beaten
2 Cups Milk
1 Teaspoon Salt
1 Teaspoon Dry Mustard (Optional)
2 Cups Croutons
1 Cup Grated Cheddar Cheese
3 Tablespoons Chopped Onions
Mix ingredients and let stand overnight in a 11x7x1 1/2-inch dish. Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 45 to 50 minutes.
Serves 6.

Corn Pudding
by Ben Lemoine

1 Can Cream Corn
1 Can Whole Kernel Corn
2 Eggs
8 ounces Sour Cream
1 Tablespoons Sugar
1 Box Jiffy Corn Muffin Mix



Combine sweet potatoes, sugar, evaporated milk, 1/2 cup of melted margarine, eggs, cinnamon and nutmeg. Beat until smooth. Pour into greased casserole dish. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes at 400 degrees Fahrenheit. In a separate bowl, combine pecans, brown sugar, and 1/4 cup of margarine. Put on top of sweet potato mixture. Then add marshmallows on top. Reduce heat to 350 degrees Fahrenheit and bake for an additional 15 minutes.

Avoyelles Parish cookbooks are available for sale in the gift shop inside the ACT Office, located at 8592 Highway 1, Suite 3, Mansura, LA 71350. These recipes were selected from “Bordelonville Volunteer Fire Department Cookbook,” a collection of Recipes by the Bordelonville Volunteer Firemen. The cost is 10.00 plus \$6.00 for postage and handling. Call (800) 833-4195 or email us at tourism@krocket.net for details. Happy Thanksgiving my friends, may there be many feet under your table!

Mix corn, eggs, sour cream, and sugar well. Add cornmeal. Bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Sweet Potato Casserole
by Trey Gaspard

2 Cups Mashed Sweet Potatoes
3/4 Cup Sugar
1/2 Cup Evaporated Milk
1/2 Cup Melted Margarine
2 Eggs
Dash of Cinnamon and Nutmeg
1/2 Cup Chopped Pecans
1/2 Cup Light Brown Sugar
1/4 Cup Melted Margarine
Small Bag of Miniature Marshmallows





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Rich Joyce



Shannon Kojis Fender, Jill Guidry



Murphy Rachal



Cameron Deville



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PROMOTIONS & EVENTS

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FRI, NOV 7
DOORS: 8PM
SHOWTIME: 9PM
AGE 21+
TICKETS START AT \$30
AFTER PARTY: 11PM-1AM

BOOTS & BLUES II



DJ TROY-D

DJ TROY-D PRESENTS
**CUPID, CHRIS ARDOIN
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SAT, NOV 15
DOORS: 7PM • SHOWTIME: 7:30PM
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CHEF'S KITCHEN ESSENTIALS

SUN - TUES, NOV 2-25 • 12-10PM

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NOV 1 - DEC 31

SMIRNOFF FRIDAYS

FRIDAYS IN NOV • 5-9PM

100 GUESTS WILL WIN \$100 - 400

SATURDAYS IN NOV

3:30 - 8PM | EVERY 30 MIN

BIG BAD BINGO

FRIDAY, NOV 28

EARN 1 PT = \$9.99 MEAL CREDIT!

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Select restaurants, not on specials, 1/person/day.

Thanksgiving Specials

THUR, NOV 27

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11:30AM-10PM

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TUE, NOV 11, 10AM

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- **WEDNESDAYS** - Bingo With Progressive Jackpot, 6PM
- **THURSDAYS** - Bingo With Progressive Jackpot, 6PM • Senior Days • Age 50+ Promotion
- **FRIDAYS** - 2-for-1 Seafood Buffet
- **SATURDAYS** - 2-for-1 Steak & Seafood Buffet
- **SUNDAYS** - Buffet Breakfast, 8-10:30AM, Buffet Brunch, 11AM-3PM
- **SUPER BINGO** - Nov 5 & Nov 27, 6PM

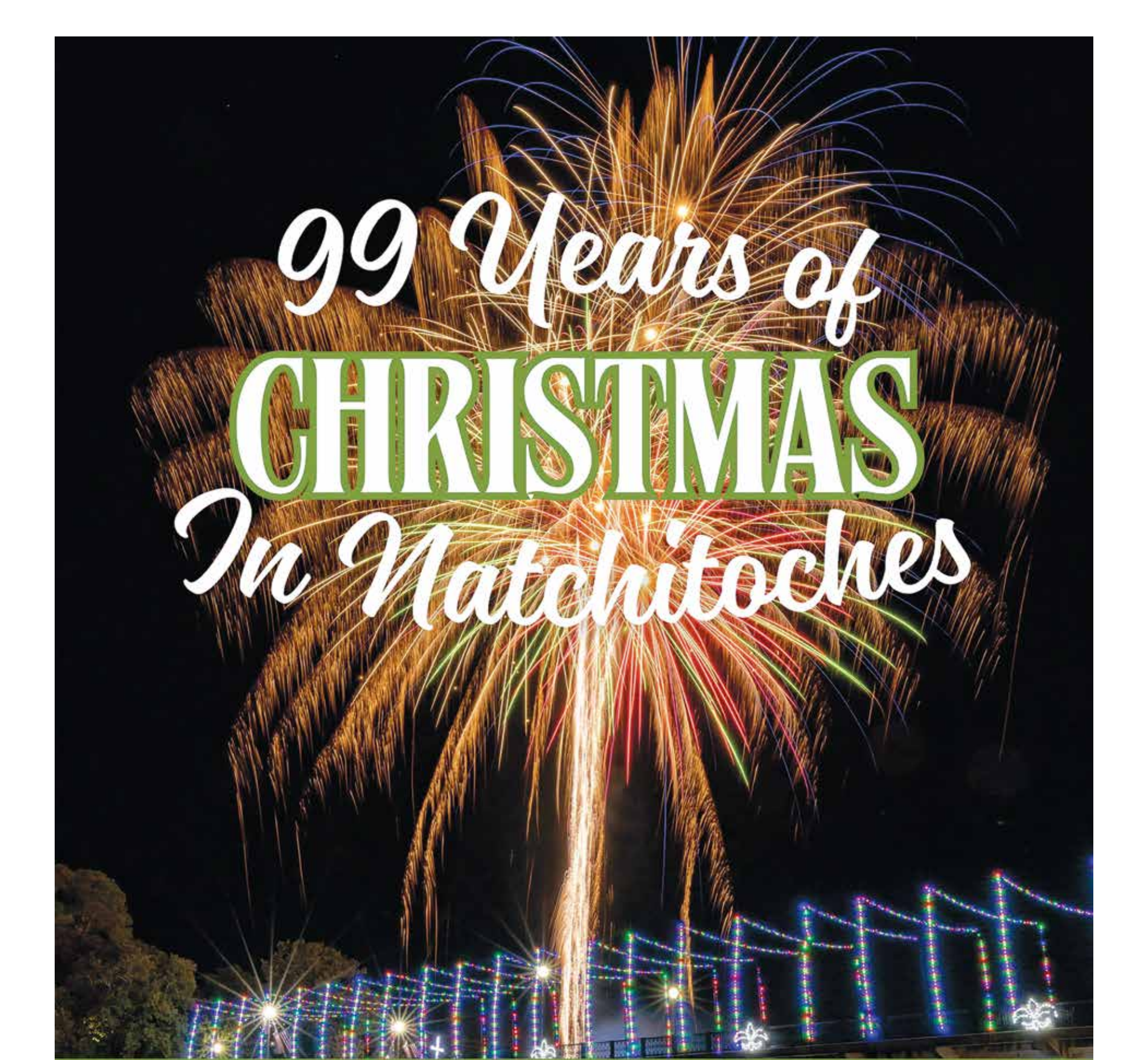
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