

Cenla FOCUS

The Community Lifestyle/Business Profile Journal of CenLA

Volume 29 • Issue 1
January 2026

PRICELESS
TAKE ONE



Cenla's

WINTER GARDENING

Guide

in this
ISSUE



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Senior
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Beauty
Pageant



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EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT: Lorie Robinson

WEB PRESS: Baton Rouge Press

DISTRIBUTION: Steve Piercy, Paul Manemann

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FOUNDED IN 1998 BY WILLARD A. HARP, SR.

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Cenla's WINTER GARDENING *Guide*

By Dr. Michael Polozola & Molly Lyles

As we move into January and February, the cooler weather in Central Louisiana allows us an opportunity to focus on maintaining and preparing our gardens and landscapes for the months ahead. While lower temperatures can be beneficial in some ways, they also bring certain challenges that require special care and attention. Our Gardening Guide provides some helpful tips for managing your vegetable garden, lawn, fruit trees, and landscape beds during the colder months.

IN THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

If you're growing a winter garden, I always recommend having frost cloth on hand to protect more vulnerable crops. Many cool-season vegetables and herbs can tolerate freezing temperatures, but small seedlings or tender plants may be more susceptible to damage. If freezing temperatures are expected, covering your tender plants with frost cloth (Reemay) can provide a layer of protection.

Strawberry plants are a good example of a crop that can handle below-freezing temperatures, but the flowers themselves are much more sensitive. If your strawberry plants are blooming, make sure to cover them during cold nights when temperatures fall below freezing to avoid losing your crop.

Different vegetables have varying degrees of cold tolerance and knowing which

plants can withstand the cold will help you protect your garden effectively. Here's a breakdown of some cold-hardy plants:

Plants that can withstand 28 degrees Fahrenheit to 32 degrees Fahrenheit: Beets, carrots, cauliflower, lettuce, onion, garlic, chives, parsley, peas, radish, spinach, and Swiss chard. These plants are relatively hardy and can survive a light freeze.

Plants that can withstand 24 degrees Fahrenheit to 28 degrees Fahrenheit: Broccoli, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, turnips, and Brussels sprouts. These vegetables can handle moderate freezes, and in fact, many of them become sweeter after being exposed to light frost.

January is still a good time to plant many cool season vegetables. Make sure to check out the Louisiana Vegetable Planting Guide on the LSU AgCenter website to see what you can continue growing around this time of year.



IN THE LAWN

Winter weeds can be a nuisance in lawns during this time of year. To manage them, you can either apply a broadleaf weed killer, following the label instructions carefully, or you can remove weeds by hand. Regular weed control will help maintain the overall health of your lawn and prevent competition for nutrients.





IN LANDSCAPE BEDS

Winter weeds can also be a problem in landscape beds. One of the most effective ways to keep them under control is by applying mulch at a 2-to-4-inch depth. Mulch serves as an excellent weed barrier, helping to keep the ground insulated, retain moisture, and improve soil health. Some of the options include pine straw, leaves, or pine bark.

This is also the perfect time to plant chilled bulbs like tulips. It's important to note that our winters are generally not cold enough for these bulbs to bloom properly. To ensure good bloom development, bulbs should be refrigerated for 6 to 8 weeks before planting them in the garden. Many garden centers sell these bulbs at discount during this time of year, but if they haven't been refrigerated, they may not bloom properly.

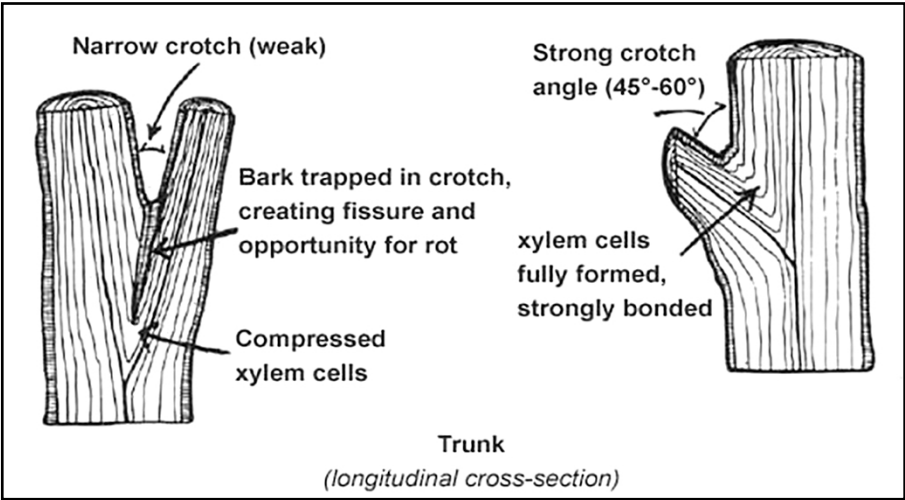


FOR TREES AND SHRUBS

Winter is an ideal time to relocate or plant new trees and shrubs, because the cooler temperatures reduce stress on the plants while they establish their roots. When relocating these plants, be sure to dig a root ball that extends at least a foot or more from the trunk to ensure you're getting enough roots for successful replanting. After transplanting, give them plenty of water to encourage strong root growth.

FOR FRUIT TREES

For tender fruit trees, such as citrus, cover them when temperatures are expected to dip into the mid-20s or lower. You can wrap the trees with canvas or fabric and extend the cover all the way to the ground to help protect them from freezing temperatures. You can also place the cover during the day to trap radiant heat coming up from the soil, providing added warmth during the night.



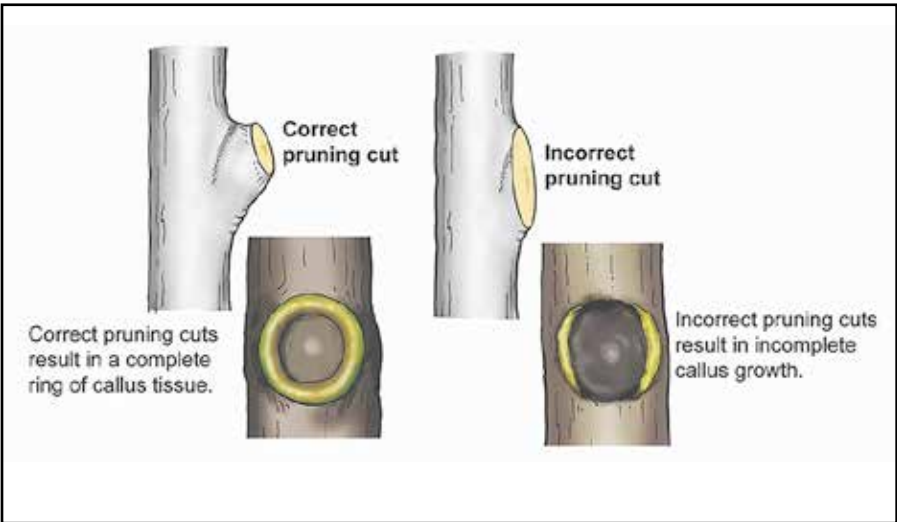
Winter is the perfect time to give your fruit trees a little attention. When trees are dormant—usually in January and February in Louisiana—they're less stressed by pruning cuts, and you can clearly see the structure without leaves in the way. Pruning during this season sets the stage for healthier growth, stronger limbs, and better fruit production when spring arrives. It also helps reduce disease pressure by removing dead or damaged wood before warm, humid weather returns.

Think of pruning as preventive care: a few thoughtful cuts now can save you from broken branches, poor yields, and pest problems later. Whether you're tending pecans, blueberries, muscadines, or mayhaws, winter is your window of opportunity.

The dormant season—typically January through February in Central Louisiana—is the best time to prune most fruit trees. During this period, trees are not actively growing, which means cuts heal more efficiently and you avoid stimulating tender new growth that could be damaged by late frosts.

Before you start, gather the right tools:

- Hand pruners for small branches and precise cuts.
- Loppers for medium-sized limbs.



ABCDs of Pruning Trees

A is for Apical

- Apical means apex or tip – Most trees are pruned to encourage the classic A-shape tree.

B is for Bad

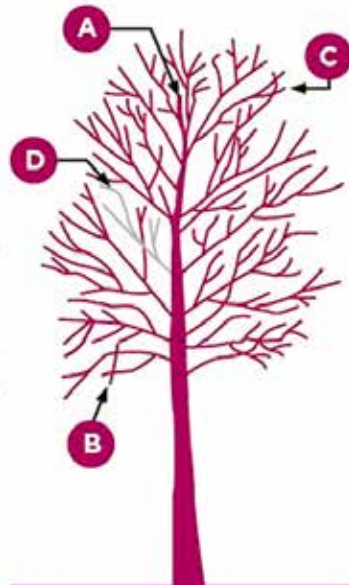
- Remove weak branches that might pose a hazard if they were to fall.

C is for Competing

- Remove branches that impede the growth of other branches or cause clearance issues.

D is for Dead

- Dead branches go first. Any time of the year.

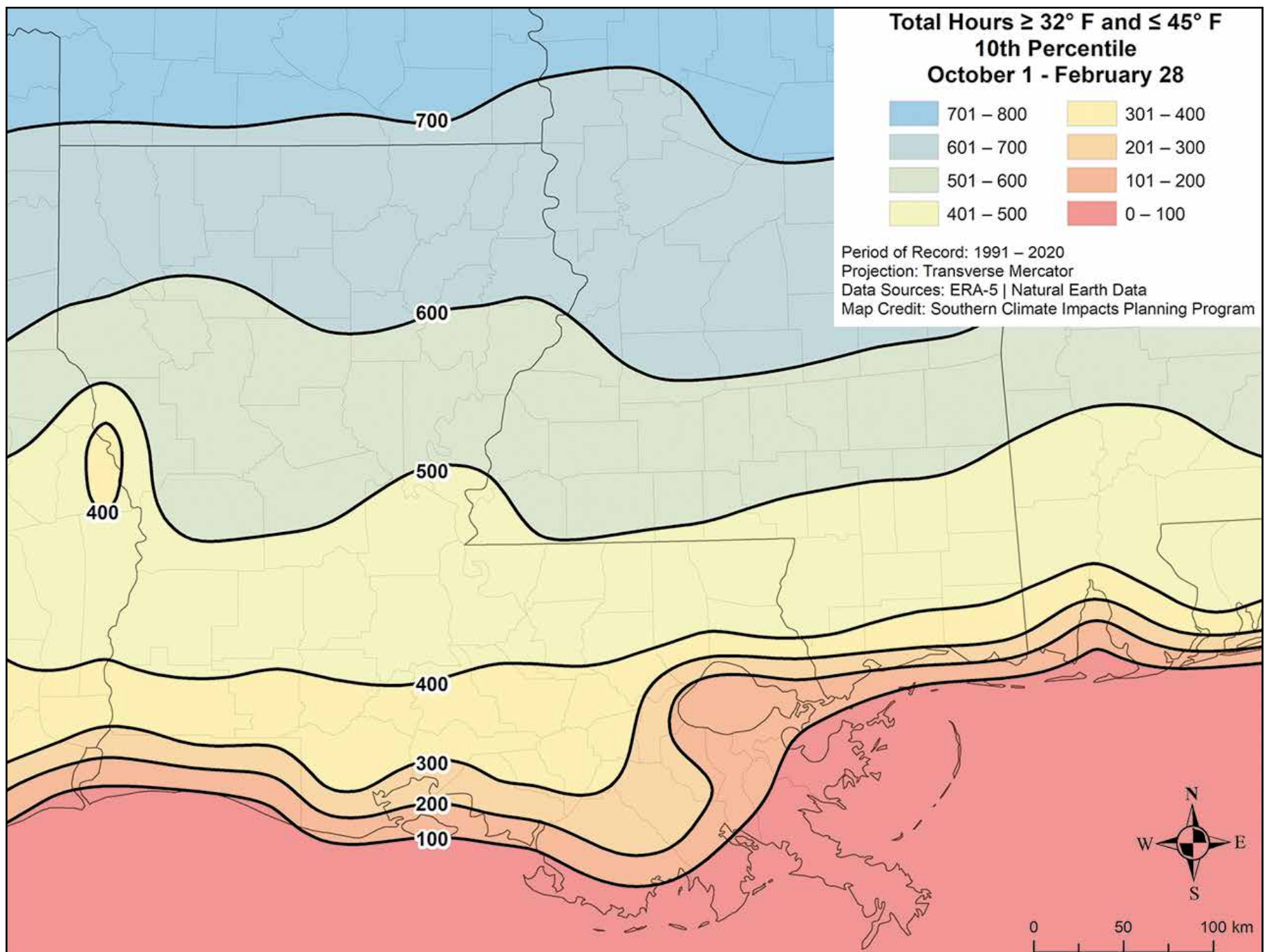


- Pruning saw for larger branches.
- Gloves to protect your hands.
- Disinfectant (like a 10% bleach solution or rubbing alcohol) to clean tools between trees and prevent disease spread.

Sharp, clean tools make pruning easier and reduce the risk of tearing bark or introducing pathogens. A little preparation goes a long way toward keeping your orchard healthy.

Pruning isn't about reshaping your tree into something unnatural—it's about guiding healthy growth and preventing problems. Keep these core principles in mind:

- Remove what's dead or diseased first. This prevents decay from spreading and improves overall tree health.
- Eliminate crossing or rubbing branches. These can create wounds that invite pests and disease.
- Open the canopy. A tree that allows sunlight and airflow through its branches will produce better fruit and experience fewer fungal issues.
- Maintain a balanced structure. Avoid indiscriminate "topping," which stresses the tree and leads to weak regrowth. Instead, if you need to control height, use controlled heading cuts—shorten the leader or upper branches by cutting back to a strong lateral



branch. This keeps the tree shorter without sacrificing strength or productivity.

- Favor strong branch angles. Wide angles (about 45 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit) create strong scaffold limbs that can support heavy crops. Narrow angles form weak forks that may split underweight, so remove or redirect those early.
- Make clean cuts. Cut just outside the branch collar (the swollen area where the branch meets the trunk) to help the tree seal the wound properly.

Think of pruning as sculpting for strength and productivity—not just appearance. A few smart cuts now will pay off with healthier trees and bigger harvests later.

SPECIES-SPECIFIC TIPS

Different fruit crops have different pruning needs. Here's a quick guide for common Louisiana favorites:

- Pecans: Focus on structural strength. Remove low limbs, suckers, and any narrow crotch angles that could split under heavy crop load. Height control is rarely needed for mature pecans, but early training helps prevent weak forks.
- Blueberries: Thin out a few older canes (over 4 to 5 years old) to encourage new growth. Aim for a mix of young and mature canes for consistent production.
- Muscadines: Spur pruning is essential. Cut back last year's growth to spurs with 2 to 3 buds each along the cordon. This keeps vines productive and manageable.
- Mayhaws & Apples: Light thinning is best. Remove crowded branches and water sprouts, but avoid heavy cuts that can stimulate excessive regrowth and increase fire blight risk.
- Citrus: Hold off for now! Citrus should not be pruned in January because it's still vulnerable to cold damage. Wait until early spring after the danger of hard freezes has passed. When you do prune, keep it light—focus on removing dead wood and shaping mainly for height. Citrus generally needs less pruning than other fruit trees.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Pruning is simple once you know the basics, but a few common missteps can cause long-term problems:

- Over-pruning: Removing too much wood at once can stress the tree and reduce next season's crop. Aim for gradual improvements over several years.
- Pruning during wet conditions: Moisture increases the risk of disease entering fresh cuts. Choose a dry day whenever possible.
- Leaving stubs: Cuts that don't follow the branch collar leave dead tissue that can invite decay. Always make clean cuts just outside the collar.
- Using dirty tools: Pruning tools can spread disease from one tree to another. Disinfect between trees with a bleach solution or rubbing alcohol.
- Cutting at the wrong time: Citrus and some tender species should not be pruned during cold months. Timing matters for tree health and survival.

Avoiding these mistakes will keep your trees healthier and make pruning a positive investment rather than a setback.

PRUNING ENCOURAGEMENT

Pruning doesn't have to be intimidating. Start with one tree and focus on the basics—remove what's dead, open the canopy, and make clean cuts. Each small step improves your orchard's health and sets the stage for a productive season ahead.



Think of winter pruning as an investment: a few minutes now can mean stronger trees, better fruit, and fewer problems later. Grab your tools, pick a sunny day, and give your trees the care they deserve—you'll thank yourself when harvest time comes.

Molly Lyles is a Horticulture Agent and Michael Polozola II, PhD, is Assistant Professor & Extension Fruit and Nut Specialist at LSU AgCenter.

HORTICULTURE SURVEY TO START THE NEW YEAR

As your horticulture agent for Avoyelles, Grant, Rapides, and St. Landry parishes, I would like to take this opportunity to better understand the gardening and horticultural needs of our community. Your input will help guide future educational programs.

If you have a moment, please fill out the survey by scanning the QR code on this page with your smart phone camera. It's a quick and easy way to share your thoughts. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact Molly Lyles at mlyles@agcenter.lsu.edu or (318) 767-3964.



Happy Birthday, America! (We Helped, Too)

By Jerry Sanson, PhD



January 2026 ushers in the semiquincentennial of United States independence from Great Britain. Some of you probably remember the bicentennial in 1976 and the many observations of that important milestone. (We will not even think about how old we have to be to remember that celebration). While it is true that the thirteen Atlantic Seaboard colonies bore the brunt of the fighting against the mightiest empire of the day, the Spanish Louisiana colony also fought in the only battle associated with the Revolutionary War west of the Mississippi River and did its part by defeating the British at the Battle of Baton Rouge in 1779. The battle was not a turning point in the war, but it

helped demoralize British troops.

France and Spain, the two major colonial powers that had competed with Britain for colonies in North America, responded differently to the outbreak of the Revolution. France no longer had colonies in North America after the Treaty of Paris 1783 that ended the French and Indian War and could thus recognize the United States and sign its first treaty of friendship and alliance without fear of spillover of the revolutionary ideals into its colonies. Spain still possessed colonies in North America adjacent to the British colonies and thus was cautious about close alliance with the new country, even though government ministers allowed their New Orleans settlement to supply the Americans unofficially and allowed them to navigate the Mississippi River which they controlled.

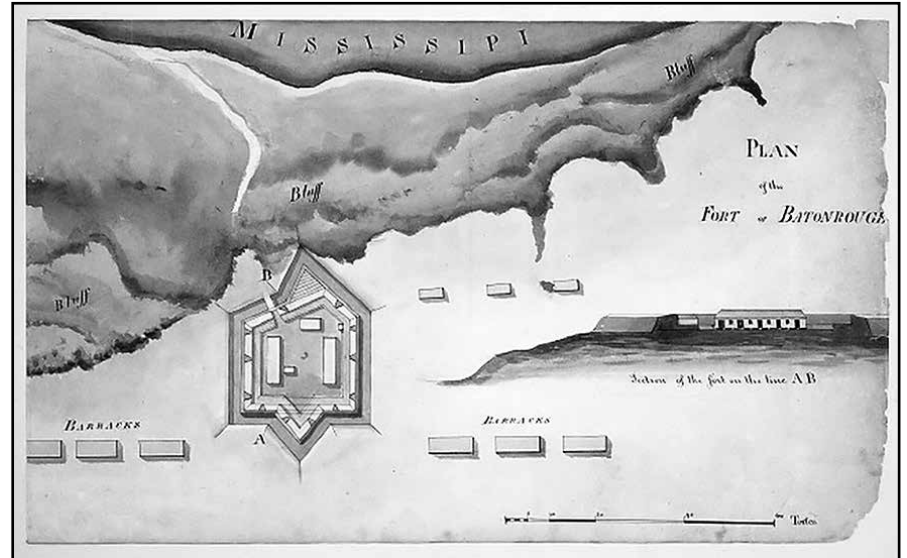
That situation changed on May 8, 1779 with the beginning of the Anglo-Spanish War, a separate sideshow to the American Revolution during which the Spanish government neither signed an agreement with the American rebels nor openly admitted that they were helping the Revolutionary cause. The real motive for Spain's declaration of war on Britain was to seize East and West Florida, colonies taken from Spain and awarded to Britain by the 1783 Treaty of Paris while British forces were busy with the French and Americans along the east coast.

Spanish King Carlos III authorized his subjects to wage war on Britain on July 8, 1779, and his agent in New Orleans sprang into action. Colonel Bernardo de Galvez, governor of Louisiana, received the news on July 21st, organized his forces and marched out of New Orleans just over a month later on August 27th. His force was comprised of 520 Spanish army regulars, 60 militiamen, 80 free blacks and men of mixed race, and 10 Americans led by Oliver Pollock, an American businessman in New Orleans who had largely financed purchases of American supplies in the city from his own funds. Galvez's objective lay to the north, the British fort of New Richmond in what is now downtown Baton Rouge at approximately the site of the state capitol.

Galvez augmented his force while moving upriver with about 600 men, including Indians and some Acadians who were only too happy to take up arms against Britain, the country that had exiled their people from Acadia after taking the colony from the French a few years before.

The first skirmish of Galvez's campaign occurred about 15 miles from downtown Baton Rouge at Ft. Bute on September 7th. The post barely deserved the title of "fort" because it was a dilapidated leftover from the French and Indian War which

the British had not prepared to defend. Galvez's troops captured it after a brief battle with the few British defenders. Nevertheless, the skirmish gave Galvez's men experience in battle, experience which few of them possessed.



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Galvez arrived in Baton Rouge on September 12th and found a different situation. British commander, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Dickson, had ordered construction of a strong fortification with thick earthen walls surrounded by a moat 18 feet wide and 9 feet deep. The position was garrisoned with more than 400 regular British Army troops and about 150 militia members who would try to thwart any Spanish battle plan while protected by Ft. New Richmond's earthen walls. Galvez's men had to fight in the open.

Galvez began his preparations for the battle by sending some of his men upriver to cut communications and possible reinforcement from British settlements north of New Richmond, then ordered others to stage a feint north of the fort. The British turned their considerable force of thirteen cannons toward the perceived threat and fired volley after volley at the Spanish force, making deliberate noise in the forest to attract their attention. Meanwhile, Galvez placed his troops and artillery within musket range on the other side of the fort. The British endured hours of shelling from the Spanish heavy artillery before Galvez offered terms of surrender.

Galvez's terms required not only surrender of New Richmond, but also of Ft. Panmure, located in today's Natchez, Mississippi. Panmure was the next large British



fort along the Mississippi River, and military historians generally agree that it would have been difficult for Galvez to capture given the number of his troops. Dickson decided that he had no choice, and he surrendered both forts on September 22nd.

The commander at Panmure was not happy with Dickson's decision and one official there reported that the "commanding officer wounded his head on his tea table" by striking it in frustration.

Galvez left an occupying force at New Richmond and Panmure and returned with about fifty men to New Orleans where he began planning his next moves. Both forts remained in

Spanish control for the rest of the war.

Even though the Spanish had control of West Florida after Galvez's Baton Rouge escapade, they still needed to assert their control of East Florida which he accomplished in campaigns that captured control of Ft. Charlotte at Mobile in 1780 and of Ft. George at Pensacola, the administrative capital of East Florida, in 1781. The Treaty of Paris of 1783 ended the American Revolution and the independent war between Spain and England. It returned both of the Florida colonies to Spain, and the United States did not obtain control of the area until 1821.



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Easy-Care Flowering Indoor Plants

By Melinda Myers

Brighten your home's décor and elevate your mood by adding a few flowering plants to your indoor garden. You may be surprised to find a wide array of flowering plants that will bloom when they are grown indoors. Match the plant to the growing conditions and your maintenance style for ease of care and greatest success.

Add a long-blooming moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis*) to your collection. It thrives in most home environments, making it the easiest of all the orchids to grow. Position your orchid in a brightly lit location that's free of hot or cold drafts. Water thoroughly with tepid water once a week. Leave the flower stalk intact and wait for a second smaller flush of flowers. Or prune it back to an inch above the foliage, provide proper care and watch for a fresh set of flowers in about a year. Or gift the non-flowering plant to a gardening friend. There's always one who's willing to wait for the next set of flowers. In the meantime, you can invest in a new variety for your home.



Treat yourself to an easy-care anthurium. You can now find white, red, pink, lavender and even yellow anthuriums for sale almost year-round. The colorful heart-shaped "flowers" are modified leaves that hold their color for many weeks. Grow this low maintenance, very forgiving plant in bright, indirect light and water thoroughly whenever the soil begins to dry.

Include bromeliads, another long bloomer with unique tropical flowers. Those with pliable leaves are more tolerant of lower light, while the stiff-leaved bromeliads need bright light to thrive. Water the soil often enough to prevent the roots from drying. After weeks and even months of flowering, the plant eventually dies but forms offsets, known as pups, you can grow to maturity.

The tubular, red-burgundy flowers of lipstick plant (*Aeschynanthus radicans*) reveal the inspiration for its common name. Grow this long-blooming, trailing plant in a warm location



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with bright, indirect light. Water thoroughly when the top inch of soil begins to dry. Move it to a slightly cooler location and allow the soil to dry a bit more between waterings during the winter.



Have fun by adding a hanging basket of goldfish (*Nematanthus*) to your collection. This easy-care plant produces long-lasting, orange-red flowers that resemble goldfish. Place it in bright, indirect light and water when the soil begins to dry.

Keep these and your other houseplants healthy and minimize pest problems by providing proper growing conditions and care. Fertilize actively growing plants with a flowering houseplant fertilizer according to label directions. Boost the humidity by grouping plants together. As one plant loses moisture, transpires, its neighbors' benefit. Place pebbles in the saucer or tray to elevate the pot above any water that collects there. As the water evaporates, it increases the humidity around the plant and eliminates the need for you to empty excess water out of the saucer.





Check all your plants for insects each time you water. It is easier to manage small populations than larger infestations. Use yellow sticky traps

to monitor and trap white flies, fungus gnat adults, thrips and other houseplant pests. Manage fungus gnat larvae residing in the soil with organic Summit Mosquito Bits. It contains a naturally occurring soil bacteria, *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* (*Bti*), that's safe for people, plants, and pets. Just follow the label directions for the most effective control.


Look for opportunities to include these and other flowering plants in your home. You'll enjoy the added color and beauty these plants provide.

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" streaming courses and the nationally syndicated *Melinda's Garden Moment* TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine and was commissioned for her expertise to write this article. Myers' website is www.MelindaMyers.com.





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Resolve to Stop Litter in 2026 and Let Louisiana Shine

Keep Louisiana Beautiful (KLB) and Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser ask people in all 64 parishes of Louisiana to stop littering in 2026. Adopt one or all 10 of KLB's proposed New Year's resolutions to help clean up our Sportsman's Paradise. "As we approach America's 250th birthday, we're reminded that caring for our communities is a responsibility we all share," said Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser. "By making simple, everyday choices—never littering and picking it up when we see it—we can protect our Sportsman's Paradise and ensure future generations inherit a cleaner, greener Louisiana."

"Litter hurts our economy, our environment, and our quality of life," said Susan Russell, KLB Executive Director. "By adopting one or all of these resolutions, you are doing your part to prevent litter and helping to Let Louisiana Shine."

In 2026, I resolve to:

1. Bag my trash, tie the bag tight, and put a lid on my outdoor trash can. These simple actions prevent loose trash from becoming litter.
2. Keep a garbage bag in my vehicle and dispose of my trash properly when I get home. This action helps prevent roadside litter. According to Keep Louisiana Beautiful's litter study, there are approximately 143.8 million pieces of litter on Louisiana roadways.
3. Check the bed of my truck to ensure it's free of trash and debris that could fly out and become litter. This action helps prevent roadside litter. Motorists are responsible for 53.2% of roadway litter.
4. Secure my load with tarps, nets, and tie-downs when transporting large items in my truck or trailer. This helps prevent accidents caused by fallen equipment, furniture, etc. Unsecured loads account for 17% of roadway litter.
5. Get a travel ashtray. Tossed cigarette butts are a fire hazard and can end up in our waterways and harm fish and wildlife. Tobacco products make up 24.5% of micro litter (less than 4 inches) on Louisiana roadways.
6. Keep my business parking lot free of litter and install trash receptacles when possible. A clean place of business is a business that cares about Louisiana. Check out the Clean Biz Partnership! There are now more than 1,000 Clean Biz Partners.
7. Talk about the importance of not littering with my friends and family. Education and awareness are key to litter prevention! Check out KLB's new educational video at KeepLouisianaBeautiful.org to see how.
8. Use fewer single-use plastics, like plastic water bottles and plastic bags. Lightweight plastics can become litter, as they are easily carried by the wind and water. Reusable bottles and bags are affordable investments. Plastic water bottles were found at 80% of KLB's surveyed sites and were the most frequently found visible litter type overall.



9. Sign up to clean up during Love the Boot Week, seven days of litter cleanup and beautification events happening April 18th through 26th. Registration opens at LoveTheBoot.org on January 12th. Love the Boot Week has become a movement, mobilizing 25,000+ to clean up and beautify our 64 parishes.

10. Pick up litter when I see it, and report littering and illegal dumping to the litter hotline at 855-LA-LITTER.

If we all chip in, we will see a difference. Hold people accountable who litter by reporting them to the hotline. Remember you can also check out clean up supplies at your local library through the "Get Down and Clean Up" program.

Litter can include paper, fast food wrappers, beverage cans, Styrofoam, cardboard, plastic bottles, cigarette butts, tire parts, plastic bags, clothing, and even biodegradable items. When not disposed of properly, trash adds to Louisiana's litter problem.

Find more ways to get more involved with Keep Louisiana Beautiful at KeepLouisianaBeautiful.org.



Author JoAnn Stevens

By Michael Wynne



One of the best ways that a new author can get started in their writing career is to write about things that they know about. Books filled with personal stories, if done right, can be woven into a delightful and cherished book, both for the reader and the author. Over the past half century, I have almost never, as a reader, been disappointed with these books as they are true to heart and feel authentic—because they usually are.

JoAnn Stevens of Jena has now discovered this poorly kept secret on how to write a really great book. Her most delightful and charming book, “Laughter from the Funeral Parlor; Eight Decades of Humorous Stories and Memories,” can be enjoyed by anybody, young and old alike, at anytime, for any reason.

The daughter of a hard-working pipeline superintendent and a homemaker, JoAnn was born in Jena and has spent her whole life there as a proud citizen. “My mother only had a 7th grade education,” JoAnn shared, “but she had the most common sense of anyone that I ever knew in my life. She had a way of figuring people out and could critique them to a ‘T’.” JoAnn feels that she received her natural humor from her dear mother which helped later inspire her to write this book and to guide her through the development of it.



A graduate of Jena High and then on to Northwestern State in Natchitoches, working towards a degree in business, JoAnn first chose to become a secretary, working for Continental Trailways bus line on Bolton Avenue in Alexandria. She soon spotted the love of her life, Jerry, on Third Street here. They have now been married for 59 years, and counting, with one son and two grandsons.

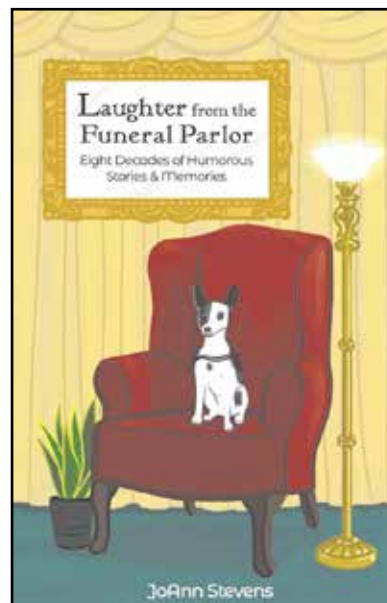
When asked what got her into the brave new world of writing stories, she responded that it began with the sharing of stories with friends. You should know first that JoAnn and Jerry formerly owned the prominent Kinner and Stevens Funeral Home in Jena, a legacy of Jerry’s family dating back a century. One day, she and Jerry were exchanging stories with the employees at the funeral home. She realized that these were great stories and that they needed to be preserved for posterity for the enlightenment and enjoyment of others. She then typed the stories out on an old electric typewriter and put them away. Two decades later, with the urging and assistance of a good friend who retyped out the stories on a computer, JoAnn had a book that was well worth reading today. She wrote about her life with Jerry, their sometimes-strange encounters with others, as well as their funeral business. The Stevens were careful to alter the stories so as to not embarrass others.

One story was about Jerry going to the hospital to pick up a deceased man to

bring back to the funeral home to embalm. The deceased wasn’t wearing his dentures and Jerry found dentures in the nightstand next to his bed. The dentures seemed to fit in the deceased’s mouth. Jerry took the deceased back to the funeral home, placed the dentures in his mouth, then embalmed him, permanently locking the dentures in the deceased’s mouth. The daughter of the deceased later called and asked, “Do you need Papa’s teeth to bury with him?” Jerry said, “I found them in the nightstand at the hospital.” She replied, “Oh, no, Mr. Jerry, those were Mama’s teeth!” Jerry finally replied, “Well, Mama will need to get some new teeth!”

“There is humor in everything,” JoAnn says. “When you talk about humor in funeral homes, you will always first remember your love ones and friends. Humor is almost always what comes to mind.”

JoAnn’s fine book is available on Amazon and Kindle.



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A Special Thanks to 2025 Doll & Toy Donors:

Wally Fall:

\$100 In memory of his in-laws, Bob & Anne Johnston

Greg Gormanous:

\$100 In Memory of the Families of deceased members of the Syra-Meric Club of Alexandria

Bob Bash: \$100

Ralph Hennessy: \$100

Foster Walker: \$100

Dennie Williams: \$50 In memory of Jock Scott

Connie Cooper: \$50 In memory of Ruth W. Cooper

Wally & Rebecca Morris: \$50

John Benjamin: \$50

JB Stroud: \$50

The Doll & Toy Fund provided toys to over 500 children this year! The United Way was also there to give a book to each child. Any leftover toys were given to United Way ALICE families; LA State Troopers to bring to children in local hospitals and a Section 8 Housing community.

Special thanks to Bolton Academy ROTC for all their help unloading and setting up the toys, Vic Sooter for bringing doughnuts, YPG members who helped out. And, thanks to event chair, Angie Johnson, and every Rotarian who helped work the event or made a donation to support it!

Wayne & Becky Watkins:

\$1,000 In memory of David Cooper Watkins

Anonymous: \$600

Cenla Coin Club:

\$450 In memory of Ralph & Barbara Rice

Shelby King & Harris T. Bourgeois: \$235

Judy & Randy Miller:

\$200 In honor of their children & grandchildren

Second Union Missionary

Baptist Church: \$150

Montessori Educational Center

Teachers: \$135

Wayne Denley:

\$100 In memory of Past Rotary President, Billy May



United Way of Central Louisiana Appoints Lafe Jones as CEO

United Way of Central Louisiana (UWCL) announced the appointment of Lafe Jones as its new Chief Executive Officer, effective February 1st. Jones brings more than three decades of executive leadership and a proven record of strengthening organizations through strategic planning, financial stewardship, team leadership, fundraising, marketing and communications, and cross-sector community partnership building.

Jones is widely recognized across Central Louisiana as a trusted, collaborative leader with deep roots in the region. His career reflects a consistent focus on strengthening the systems that support families, employers, and communities—closely aligning with United Way’s mission to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of the community.

“Lafe brings an exceptional combination of executive leadership, financial discipline, and community credibility to the role,” said Marcia Hardy, 2025 Chairperson of the United Way of Central Louisiana Board of Directors. “He has led complex organizations, built high-performing teams, and cultivated strong relationships across business, nonprofit, education, healthcare, and philanthropic sectors. We are excited to welcome him and confident that his leadership will strengthen United Way’s impact across Central Louisiana.” Al Turner will chair the Board in 2026 and ensure a smooth transition and support for the new leadership.

Jones currently serves as Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President of Louisiana Central, the regional economic development organization serving the 10-parish Central Louisiana region. In that role, he has provided senior executive leadership across organizational operations, program strategy, staff leadership, investor engagement, grant-supported initiatives, workforce and talent development efforts, and business attraction and retention activities. His work has required close collaboration with employers, civic leaders, educational institutions, and community partners—experience that closely mirrors United Way’s role as a convener and catalyst for community solutions.

Prior to Louisiana Central, Jones served for nearly 15 years as Chief Executive Officer of Louisiana Eye and Laser Center, a multi-location healthcare organization with 12 physicians and approximately 120 employees. Jones also served as Director of the Division of Continuing Education and Special Projects at LSU of Alexandria, where he managed workforce training and adult education programming, led special initiatives, developed partnerships, and supported institutional strategic planning. In addition, he has provided strategic planning, research, and marketing



UNITED WAY
Central Louisiana

consulting services for nonprofit and community organizations across Louisiana for many years, including work connected to United Way planning efforts—giving him a strong understanding of both the region’s needs and United Way’s unique role in addressing them.

Jones’s civic leadership and volunteer service reflect a long-standing commitment to Central Louisiana. His community involvement includes leadership roles with the Central Louisiana Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club of Alexandria, the Explore Alexandria/Pineville Convention and Visitors Bureau Board, and prior service as a Trustee of The Rapides Foundation, among numerous other nonprofit and civic organizations. He also holds Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) through the Public Relations Society of America, a credential that supports United Way’s emphasis on transparency, public trust, donor engagement, and effective community storytelling.

As CEO, Jones will work closely with the UWCL Board of Directors to advance the organization’s mission, ensure long-term financial sustainability, and strengthen partnerships with donors, nonprofit agencies, employers, and community stakeholders. In alignment with the responsibilities of the CEO role, his focus will include organizational leadership and strategy, operational and financial oversight, resource development and fundraising, board governance

support, community engagement, and measurable outcomes across United Way’s focus areas: Youth Opportunity, Healthy Community, Financial Security, and Community Resiliency.

“I am honored and grateful for the opportunity to serve as CEO of United Way of Central Louisiana,” Jones said. “United Way has a powerful legacy of bringing people together to address our community’s most pressing needs. I look forward to listening, learning, and working alongside our staff, board, donors, nonprofit partners, and community leaders to strengthen outcomes for families across our region. United Way is uniquely positioned to convene, collaborate, and create lasting impact, and I am excited to help lead that work.”

United Way of Central Louisiana mobilizes resources and partnerships to strengthen education, financial stability, health, and community resilience across the region.

For more information about United Way of Central Louisiana, visit www.uwcl.org.

When the New Year Locks You Out (and Lets You See More Clearly)

By Christy Pennison, M.S., LPC



CHRISTY PENNISON, LPC-S

The new year has a way of inviting reflection. We're encouraged to set goals, create resolutions, and decide who we want to be in the months ahead. But sometimes, perspective doesn't come from a planner or a word of the year. Sometimes, it comes from being unexpectedly locked out of your car at a gas station. That's exactly how my day started on January 2nd, only two days into 2026!

Somehow—still a mystery to me—I managed to lock my keys inside my car while pumping gas. In seconds, I realized just how unprepared I was. My phone was in the car. My purse was in the car. No money, no jacket, no way to call for help. In 2026, that kind of situation feels almost foreign. We are so used to having everything we need within arm's reach that being without it can feel unsettling.



At first, I felt shocked and frustrated (mainly at myself). Then came the realization: I had no choice but to slow down. And that's the first lesson this moment offered me. When life forces us to slow down—whether we want to or not—we often notice things we would normally rush right past. Slowing down gives us space to see life differently, to gain perspective, and to reframe situations that initially feel frustrating or inconvenient.

After a few deep breaths, I asked the gas station attendant if there was any way I could borrow a phone. Without hesitation, she handed me her personal phone so I could call for help. That small act of kindness mattered more than she probably realized in that moment.

As I waited, I began to observe the people around me. I noticed individuals who didn't have cars at all, walking from place to place. That shifted something in me. What had started as frustration turned into gratitude. Even standing there locked out, I was reminded that having a car is something I don't want to take for granted.

Then, I noticed a man walking slowly down the road with a boot on his foot. He was clearly in pain, moving at his own pace. As he passed by, he smiled at me and offered a kind word and a blessing for my life. I returned the sentiment, wishing him a blessed year as well. That brief exchange stayed with me. Here was someone navigating his own challenge, yet still taking the time to offer kindness to a stranger.

That brings me to the second lesson: kindness matters—more than we realize. Whether it's the kindness of a gas station attendant, a stranger offering encouragement, or a mother who drops everything to come rescue her grown child with a spare key, kindness has the power to change the tone of an entire day. People are overwhelmed, stressed, and anxious. We never truly know what someone else is carrying. A kind word, a patient moment, or a simple act of generosity can make all the difference.

The third realization came once the initial anxiety and restlessness settled. Without my phone to distract me, I found small ways to pass the time. I cleaned my windshield (something I can't remember the last time I intentionally did). I stood in the sun. I felt the breeze. I allowed myself to be present.

Eventually, help arrived, my keys were retrieved, and I went on with my day. From the outside, it was almost as if nothing had happened. But something had shifted internally.

As we move into 2026, my hope is that we give ourselves permission to slow down when we can, to reframe challenging moments, and to notice the good that still exists, even in inconvenient circumstances. It's okay to decide what we want to let go of and what we want more of in the year ahead. But if there's one thing I hope we all lean into a little more, it's kindness.

Kindness toward others. Kindness toward ourselves. Because kindness has a way of unlocking perspective, restoring hope, and reminding us of what truly matters—even when life temporarily locks us out.



45,000 Emails!

By Debbie Guy, LCSW



At my last class, emails were being discussed and, out of the blue, one commented she had 45,000. I blurted “45,000!?” Then others chimed in. I again uttered in disbelief. 45,000... let that sink in. Hers included work but others were private accounts with over a thousand just sitting there. If we visualize emails in terms of people, we have a lot of people waiting to talk to us! In fact, if lined up shoulder to shoulder, 45,000 is 12.8 miles long! In the grocery store, a line of three gets rumbly grumbly and glares at the perpetrator who caused the intercom to blare, “price check.”

Our emails are not the only ones beckoning our attention. It’s our “you’re missing out” notifications. Fitbit reminding us to walk, a podcast announcing the latest drop, and games luring us with “your lives are restored with bonuses.”

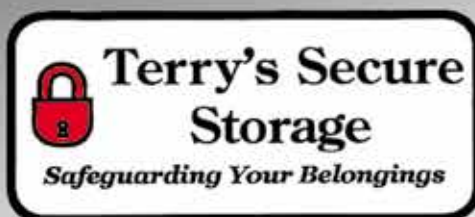
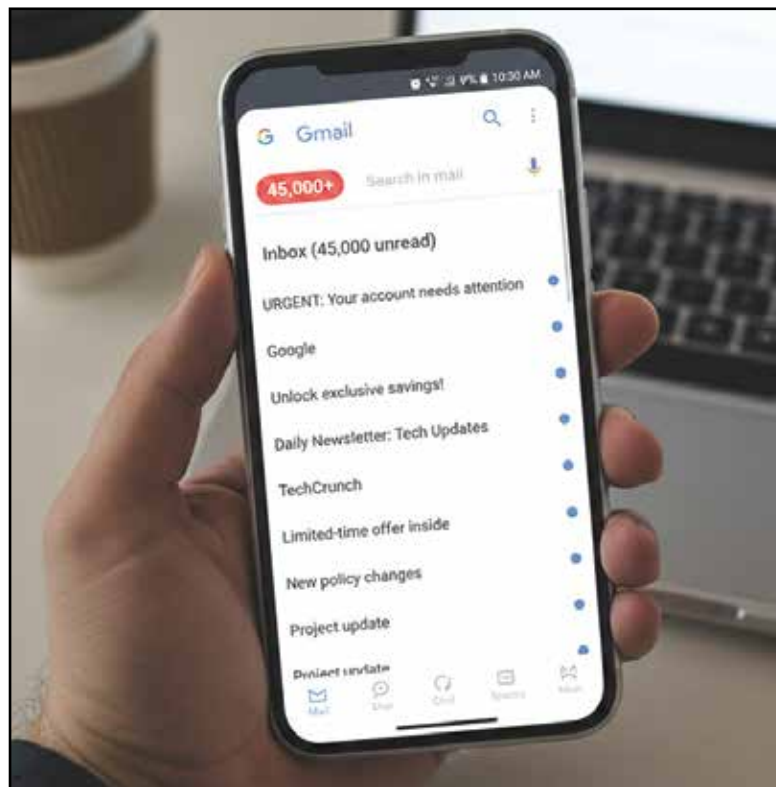
Care to guess which device is used the most? Our computer-with-a-phone-app, smart phone. She never leaves our side and, admit it, we love her. There, I said it! She’s a flashlight, map, phone book. She calls 911 if I yelp when startled, or alerts my husband with “on my way, need help unloading the Jeep,” or provides 6,200 photos and home videos to entertain whoever’s in the car seat. In real time, she connects me to that far away land to watch grandkids participate in Field Day. Oh, her latest, she tucks me into bed with her “Down to Sleep” App reading “Winnie the Pooh.” The down side is her yummy smorgasbord of games and social media consuming on average, three

or four hours per day, or prying open our pocket books teasing us with more neat, must-have items we were just talking about. Therefore, like our favorite food, we have to learn portion control.

Let’s get started. First, focus on emails. Some emails are divided into Primary, Transactions, Updates, Promotions, while others show inbox and junk. Regardless, we have to peruse it all because AI makes filing mistakes. So, one possibility is establishing multiple email addresses. One for medical, banking, or transactions which include payment notifications. Another for family, friends, organizations. One for subscription notifications such as Audible, Fitbit, podcasts, etc. Open in order of importance. Next, on to our contacts and text messages. Assign those will-answer-regardless ones special ring tones. And, if really brave, silence all other

alerts. Set aside times to check, respond, delete, and move on. Lastly, be conscientious and kind to our bodies; rest those eyes and move around. This includes all screen activity. Researchers suggest the 20-20-20 rule. Every 20 minutes, glance 20 feet away, and gaze for 20 seconds allowing our eye muscles to relax. As a family, prioritize and discuss the importance of screen limits. Use a timer, or after an hour or so, when the kids get intense or numb, just yell “screen break,” shut it down and do something else—cleaning their room comes to mind!

Do y’all think we can do it? Control our appetite? If so, 2026 may witness us use those extra hours to enjoy all our precious blessings around us. Happy New Year!



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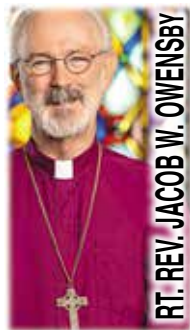
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Real Self-Care

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



Self-care has become a lucrative industry. We spend billions of dollars on oils, apps, and fitness programs that claim to enhance our physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness. Observing the results of these products and these techniques among her patients, psychiatrist and author Pooja Lakshmin concludes that the self-care business doesn't deliver on its promises. Her patients are at least as stressed and insecure as they've always been. Maybe more so, given the extra time and money they've invested in self-care stuff.

In her book "Real Self-Care," Lakshmin urges us to move beyond the superficialities of self-care commodities. She's got nothing against oils, bubble baths, and yoga classes. They can be pleasant and even helpful. But, on their own, they touch only the surface of our lives. Their effects are fleeting. Authentic self-care is deeply transformational. It requires serious inner work. She outlines four pillars that support genuine wellness: setting boundaries, self-compassion, aligning your values, and exercising power.

In this space, we're going to limit ourselves to talking about what it means to align our values as disciples of Jesus. More specifically, we'll begin by sketching a common secular approach to values alignment. Then we'll turn to Jesus-shaped self-care.

Sociologist, columnist, and MacArthur Fellow Tressie McMillan Cottom encourages us to ask ourselves what truly matters to us. We need to reflect on our beliefs, our priorities, and what gives our life a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Practicing self-care involves aligning our lives with our core values.

Jesus challenged his followers to do precisely the same thing in parables and in his personal example. Build your house on rock not on sand, for instance. Give all you have to purchase the pearl of great price. Let the dead bury their own dead. In other words, make first things first. Align your actions with your highest values. But Jesus goes a crucial step further. He teaches us to align our values, and hence our lives, with the divine care for all things. That is to say, with the moral order of reality.

You see, one of the basic assumptions of secularism—at least one broadly held brand of secularism—is that objective reality is what you can observe with your senses; what you can weigh and measure. Values are subjective. They're in the individual's heart and head. Your values and my values may happen to agree. But there is nothing out there beyond us that justifies or invalidates what we prefer or hold dear.

By contrast, Jesus teaches that God wove a moral order into the universe. This is not to say that God merely gave us a set of rules to follow robotically. God did not

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POOJA LAKSHMIN, MD

give Moses the Ten Commandments to turn us into rigid, unreflective rule followers. Instead, those ten laws, and the hundreds of directives found in Leviticus, are examples of what it can look like, in various circumstances, to live a caring life. That's why Jesus summarized the law as the law of love. Love God with every fiber of your being. Love your neighbor like the quality of your own life depends upon their well-being.

In other words, real self-care cannot be entirely self-centered. Practicing self-care requires aligning our values with reality. The reality that this universe is the creation of the divine love. To live fully and meaningfully in this world involves caring for others. In the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Jesus illustrates the tragic consequences of aligning our personal lives with values that conflict with moral reality (Matthew 21:33-46).

The parable goes like this:

A landowner set up a vineyard and leased it to some tenants. When harvest time came, the landowner sent members of his staff to collect his share of the produce as payment for the lease. Instead of paying up, the tenants brutally assaulted his staff, wounding some and killing others.

The landowner then sent another group to collect, and they received the same violent treatment. Finally, he decided to send his son, reasoning that a family member's status would be enough to bring these tenants to their senses. But they killed the son and claimed the vineyard for themselves. At this point in the telling, Jesus turns to his detractors and asks, "So what do you think that vineyard owner will do to these tenants?"

They answer, "He will crush them and toss them aside." In other words, we may be able to go a long way down the road tending to our own private passions without regard for, or at the expense of, others. But, eventually, this will prove a self-destructive pattern of life.

God wants wellness, well-being for us. That's why God gave us the Law of Love. That's why God gave us love in the flesh: Jesus.

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 latest book is entitled, "Looking for God in Messy Places" and is available through Amazon or your favorite bookseller. Find Bishop Jake online at jakeowensby.com.



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LDWF Stocks Florida Largemouth Bass into Lake Buhlow

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) released 140 adult Florida Largemouth Bass into Lake Buhlow in Pineville in December as part of ongoing efforts to enhance the lake’s bass population and support long-term recreational fishing opportunities. These fish join 77 others released in the spring to maintain the convenient and high-quality fishery that Lake Buhlow provides and enhance the angling experience for the residents and visitors of the Pineville area.





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These Florida Bass broodstock, used by the hatchery for the last few years to produce fingerlings stocked across Louisiana, are being retired but can still contribute valuable Florida Bass offspring for years to come. Introducing these high-quality Florida Bass will enhance the size potential of the bass population in Buhlow Lake for years to come. Anglers may see LDWF trucks and staff working at the lake during stocking operations.

Louisiana’s freshwater fish hatcheries are an integral part of LDWF’s mission to enhance fish populations and provide more opportunities for the public to use and enjoy these resources. Having the ability to produce and stock areas with healthy sportfish from our hatcheries is a valuable tool that helps reach management goals, such as meeting public demand for catching a trophy bass in Louisiana waterbodies.

LDWF operates four warm-water sportfish hatcheries,

including Booker Fowler and Beechwood Fish Hatcheries in Forest Hill. These hatcheries work together to meet annual statewide stocking requests from our management biologists for Florida Bass, Hybrid Striped Bass, Black and White Crappie, Channel Catfish, Bluegill, Redear, Threadfin Shad, and other species as needed.

LDWF also recognizes and appreciates the continued support of area state legislators, whose commitment to conserving and enhancing local natural resources helps make projects like this possible. A special thanks to Representative Mike Johnson for his leadership and dedication to enhancing our local fisheries; his efforts are truly appreciated.

For more information about stocking, contact Hatchery Biologist Manager Talon Jeppson at (318) 484-6914 or tjeppson@wlf.la.gov. For more information on the management of Buhlow Lake, contact the Inland District 3 Biologist Manager, Shelby Richard, at srichard@wlf.la.gov.





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EDUCATION FOCUS

LSUA Welcomes LSU System President Dr. Wade Rousse for First Official Campus Visit

Louisiana State University of Alexandria (LSUA) proudly welcomed newly installed LSU System President, Dr. Wade Rousse, and his Chief of Staff, Jason French, for their first official visit to an LSU regional campus. As one of the fastest-growing undergraduate institutions in the South, LSUA was honored to serve as the inaugural stop on President Rousse's statewide tour of the LSU System. Throughout the day, Dr. Rousse engaged with university leadership, enjoyed an informative lunch with students, participated in a productive campus-wide meeting with representatives from all academic and business units, and toured LSUA's rapidly expanding campus footprint.



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LSUA continues to emerge as a standout institution within the LSU family, earning national and statewide recognition for its academic quality, student success, and commitment to serving rural and first-generation students. Recently ranked #4 Best College in Louisiana by Niche.com and #14 Best Regional College in the South by “U.S. News & World Report,” LSUA has also been featured in “The Chronicle of Higher Education” for its innovative work in expanding college access and opportunity across rural Louisiana. These accomplishments reflect LSUA’s strategic growth, record-breaking enrollment, and the deep community partnerships that continue to propel the institution forward.



schools, sending more students than ever into fields such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, law, engineering, and allied health. Driven by effective, forward-thinking leadership and powered by engaged, student-centered faculty, LSUA is preparing the workforce that Louisiana needs while offering families an affordable, high-quality LSU degree close to home.

LSUA looks forward to continued collaboration with President Rousse and the LSU administration as the System advances its vision for higher education across the state. The university remains deeply committed to expanding educational opportunity, elevating regional prosperity, and contributing meaningfully to the collective strength of the

President Rousse’s visit evidences the university’s essential role in the LSU System. As LSU’s only LSU family, undergraduate-only institution, LSUA serves as a vital pipeline to LSU’s professional

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Shingles Effect on the Eye

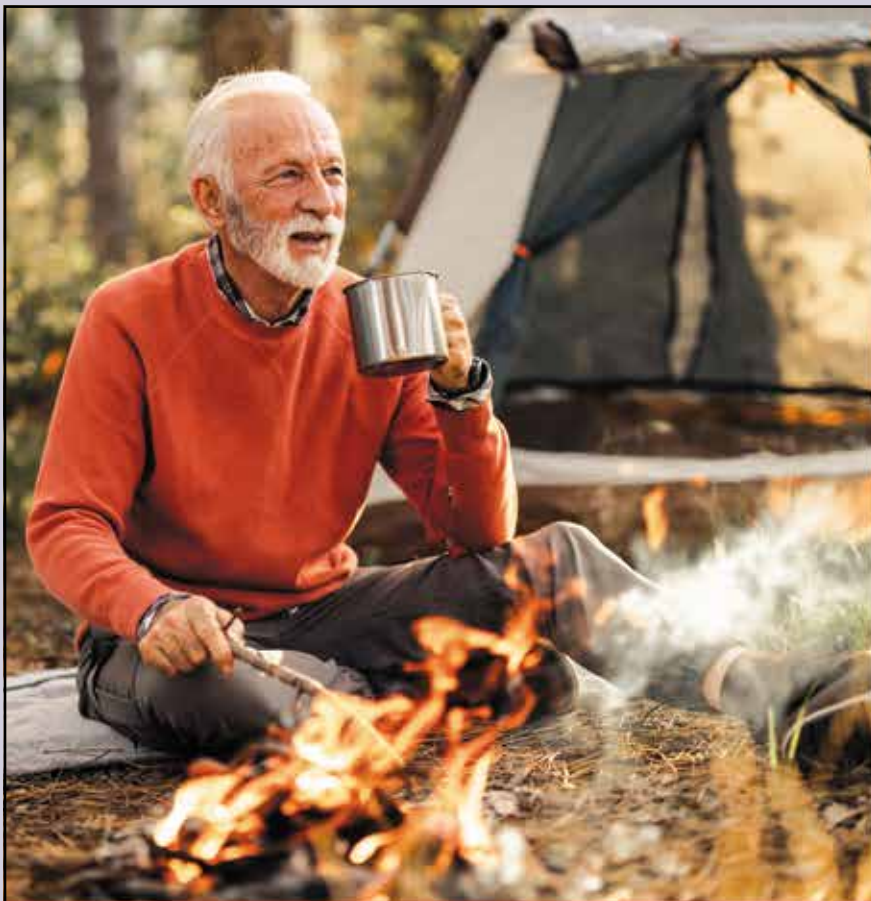
By Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.



One of the viruses that cause herpetic eye disease is the *varicella-zoster strain*. This is the same virus that causes chicken pox in the young, and shingles in older individuals. This is not the virus that causes genital herpes; shingles is not a sexually transmitted disease. The varicella-zoster virus lies dormant (inactive) in the nervous system of most adults from a previous exposure as a child. Sometimes, the virus will multiply or move from one place to another in the body, and an infection outbreak will occur. If the person's immune system is weakened by other illness, an outbreak can also occur. If the eye is involved, it is termed herpes zoster ophthalmicus.

Symptoms of this eye condition include painful rash on the affected side of the face, eye pain, blurred vision due to swelling of the cornea, and eyelid swelling. The hallmark of the shingles virus is that it always only affects one side of the body, since it arises from the nerve bundles on that side. Prompt diagnosis and treatment with anti-viral prescription medications give the best prognosis for visual recovery.

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



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Paragon Casino Resort Makes Donation to CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Foundation



As a result of the Gleaux for the Girls Run, Paragon Casino Resort raised and donated \$3,000 to the CHRISTUS St.

Frances Cabrini Foundation to support the hospital's ongoing efforts to expand breast cancer screening, treatment and education throughout Central Louisiana. The funds will directly benefit programs and services at the CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Cancer Center and Breast Health Center.

"It is incredibly important for us at Paragon to support the life-saving work taking place right here in our region," said Marshall Ray Sampson, Sr., General Manager of Paragon Casino Resort. "Access to early detection and high-quality care saves lives, and we are honored to contribute to the resources that help protect the health of women and families across Central Louisiana."

The donation will be used to enhance local treatment capabilities, rehabilitation programs, education initiatives, support services and community outreach efforts. This year's funding will also support the purchase of an additional 3DHD mammography machine, which will significantly reduce wait times and improve early detection—an essential factor in successful breast cancer treatment.

"We are deeply grateful for Paragon Casino Resort's continued support," said Ashley Walker, Executive Director of Development at the CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini

Foundation. "The funds raised stay local, directly benefitting the CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Cancer Center and Breast Health Center. This year's donation will help us purchase an additional 3DHD mammography machine, ensuring more people have timely access to the high-quality diagnostic care they need."

Paragon Casino Resort remains committed to investing in community well-being through strategic partnerships with local health, cultural and educational organizations. The resort's support of the CHRISTUS Cabrini Foundation reflects its dedication to improving the lives of those who call Avoyelles Parish and Central Louisiana home.



P. Steven Arnold Jr., DMD, MD
Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon



Fred W. Smith, DMD, MD, JD
Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon



Matthew Kennedy, DDS, MD
Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeon

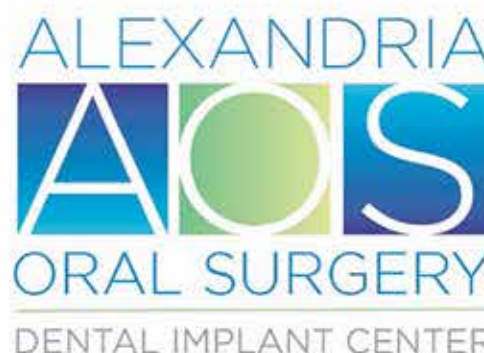


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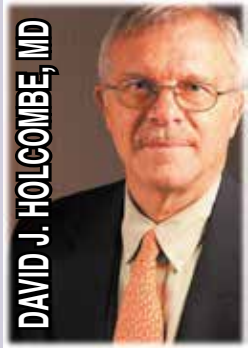
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A Bad Year for the Flu

By David J. Holcombe, MD, MSA



Human influenza, or “the flu,” is a seasonal disease, usually extending from October through March. There are “good” years and “bad” years and this season happens to be bad. Annual deaths from flu in the U.S. range from 3,000 and 30,000. This season alone (and we are only mid-season), there have been around 5 million cases of the flu, 45,000 hospitalizations, 1,900 deaths, including three pediatric deaths. As with most diseases, it is worse in seniors and, much like Covid, around 70% of flu deaths occur in those 70 or older, most of them unvaccinated.

At the same time that the severity of flu has increased, flu vaccinations have dropped, especially in children. Older adults recognize the danger and they have higher vaccination rates, but vaccinations in children have dropped significantly and now hover around 40% or less, depending on the state. Mortality in children, while rare, does occur (with three pediatric deaths already this season). Children, who do not generally get too sick, are still excellent at spreading the disease. Children, as we all know, may not cover their mouths, sneeze into their sleeves, or wash their hands.

The seasonal flu peak usually occurs in February, but that peak can shift either earlier or later. Remember, the vaccine takes a couple of weeks to generate maximal protection. And that protection varies from year to year depending on if the vaccine matches the circulating strain. This year, there is a H3N2 variant which was not included in the current flu shot. While this makes it less effective, it is still useful to be vaccinated.

The WHO has human flu surveillance stations around the world, much as it does for avian flu. Results from the flu season in the Southern hemisphere help pharmaceutical companies match their vaccines to the current strains. A mis-match, as occurred this year, almost guarantees a vaccine with limited effectiveness. U.S. withdrawal from the WHO compounds the problem.

On another influenza note, avian flu still exists in the U.S., requiring the euthanasia of millions of chickens in commercial flocks every year. When a chicken house becomes infected, every chicken must be killed. Workers wearing hazmat suits inject foam into an entire chicken house (with thousands of birds), then bury the dead chickens in massive pits. Even with extraordinary precautions, including spaying incoming trucks, sanitizing equipment, preventing contact with wild birds, and mass killings, avian flu has continued to infect commercial flocks. The result is periodic egg shortages and the skyrocketing of egg prices nationwide.

There are vaccines against avian flu, some of them stored at the CDC, but they are not commercially available, nor is it practical to vaccinate millions of chickens. Limited supplies are held in reserve for humans in case the avian flu mutates into a strain that transmits easily between birds and humans, and human-to-humans. Avian flu has a 50% mortality in humans and Louisiana became the first state with a human death from avian flu in January 2025. That person contracted it from a backyard flock in contact with wild birds. Ducks, geese, and other birds are susceptible and migrate hundreds of miles, spreading the disease around the world.



So far, there has not been a successful avian flu mutation that allows it to jump to humans, but there have been infections in cattle. Multiple herds have been infected



and, while cows do not get deathly ill, the virus is transmitted in raw milk. The avian flu has also infected cats, both domestic and exotic, resulting in numerous deaths. Influenza, whether it is in human, birds, cats or cattle, represents a constant threat of ongoing mutations. We all witnessed what an unfortunate mutation could do with the Coronavirus (Covid). While we cannot prevent mutations from occurring in viruses, we can vaccinate ourselves when the vaccine exists. Get your flu shot.


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Ensure Your Medications Follow You into the New Year

By David Evans, PharmD, BCPS



DAVID EVANS, PharmD, BCPS

With the start of the new year come many changes. Some of those changes may have been made regarding your medications. One thing to make sure this new year is that you and your doctor go over and ensure that any changes to your medication in the past year are up-to-date and current for meeting your needs—especially if you have had a recent hospital stay or major change to your medications this past year.

While we all would hope that our primary doctors, specialists, hospitals, and pharmacies would keep constant communication with one another to ensure that everything is up-to-date, unfortunately, things can fall through the cracks. Old medication lists brought to the hospital could lead to renewed prescriptions for medications that were previously stopped or changed. Dosage changes made in the hospital or at your doctor's office could lead to duplicate therapy and multiple bottles of the same type of medication from

the pharmacy. New medications added by a specialist may not be communicated with your primary doctor, possibly leading to unidentified drug-drug interactions.

It's crucial to make it a point during your routine doctor appointments to bring a current list of all the medications that you have at home and that you go through each of them with your doctor during your appointment to ensure that everyone is up-to-date and on the same page. By bringing a list of all physical medications you have at home, this ensures that the doctor is aware of any changes that may have taken place during a recent hospitalization or specialist appointment. It also provides the doctor an opportunity to adjust current medications, as needed.

While different specialists and hospitals sometimes properly communicate with each other in regard to patient status changes, speaking up for yourself and making sure that those changes are communicated is always recommended. It's always better to over-communicate and possibly say the same thing twice then to assume that it was already communicated, especially when it comes to your health and medications.



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New Year, New Quality of Life

By Cornel D. Leblanc, D.C.



The New Year has arrived, and many people have made New Year's resolutions. One of the most important resolutions or goals one could make for themselves or loved one is the goal of having peak performance and optimal health this year. In our office at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center, we specialize in restoring and optimizing patients' performance to live their life to the fullest. We also offer the state-of-the-art technology in Non-Surgical Spinal decompression that has helped many patients gain back their mobility that they once had.

Many people suffer from chronic neck and low back pain, sciatic pain, spinal stenosis, and even disc degeneration. These spinal conditions can prevent people from achieving their health goals. Whether it is getting into shape, decreasing stress, or just wanting to feel great every day, chiropractic care can help people reach their goals through chiropractic adjustment which realigns the spine or through our Non-Surgical Spinal decompression table. Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center offers the top-of-the-line care and safest technology to get patients the results that they have been looking for.

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This new year, make your health a priority. Don't wait to see what happens because we have found that, unfortunately, your illness will determine it for you. If it is your intent to make this the best year ever and get your health back, and more importantly your quality of life back, call and make an appointment at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center at (318) 561-6250 and let's make this year the best year you ever had. The first five people that call and mention "95 percent success" and "I saw this in Focus" will receive a \$250.00 discount to their Non-surgical IDD care!



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Get to Know Your Radiation Team

By Lawrence Menache, MD



From the time you first see the doctor to when you get your first treatment, many people have been involved in designing your care. Some you will meet and some of them work behind the scenes to make sure that radiation therapy is safe, accurate, and effective

The team leader is the Radiation Oncologist, who is a physician and is the one who prescribes and oversees the radiation. He or she is the one who decides what type of radiation treatment is needed, the doses, and number of treatments. They will monitor the progress and manage side effects if any.

The physician works closely with the Radiation Therapy Physicist whose job is to make sure the machines are calibrated and running correctly. They are also helpful in generating treatment plans and make sure that the dose delivered is accurate and that safety standards are met.



The Dosimetrist works closely with the physician and physicist to create treatment plans using very specialized computer systems. Their job is to arrange the beams so that the dose to the tumor is as prescribed, while decreasing dose to normal surrounding tissues.

The Radiation Therapist is in charge of your daily treatments and you will get to know them very well. Each day, they will ask you for your birth date and your name, then set you up on the treatment table according to the parameters set by the approved treatment plan to ensure it is executed correctly. They are the first person

you normally talk to if you are having any side effects from the treatments themselves.

The Radiation Therapy Nurse, who you usually meet on your first visit, will also be instrumental in making sure that you continue on your course of radiotherapy with comfort and well-being while providing education. They are instrumental in making sure that side effects such as skin reactions or fatigue are managed. They can also answer many questions and provide emotional support. You will see the Oncology nurse and the radiation oncologist at least once a week, whether you are having problems or not.

Support personnel includes an Occupational Therapist who can assist with education, prevention, and treatment of lymph edema as well as a Dietitian depending on the individual needs of the patient and their diagnosis.

The Oncology Social Worker is also instrumental in making sure that you receive spiritual and mental well-being support during your course of therapy. They can help you access services both within and outside the hospital such as gas cards and support groups.

This team approach ensures accuracy and safety throughout your course of treatment.

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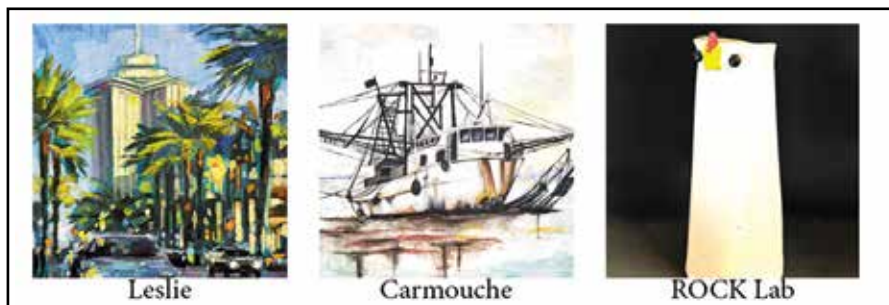
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River Oaks Unveils a Standout 2026 Lineup

As River Oaks Square Arts Center turns the page into 2026, the Arts Center is rolling out a full year of exhibitions, classes, outreach, and community events that continue its mission of making contemporary visual art and fine crafts accessible right here in the heart of downtown Alexandria. The annual exhibition schedule release also marks the kickoff of River Oaks' membership drive, when members and supporters receive the calendar and start plotting their year around classes, fundraisers, and gallery visits.

"Exhibitions are certainly the most visible part of what we do," says Rachael Dauzat, Executive Director at River Oaks. "But membership truly fuels the larger mission. It supports outreach programs, education, and the daily work it takes to keep River Oaks thriving as a creative hub. When people join as members, they're helping keep art alive and growing in Central Louisiana."



The year begins with a trio that sets the tone for 2026: Jimmy Leslie will be featured in the Bolton-Davis Gallery, alongside Leslie Carmouche and the River Oaks Arts Academy - ROCK Lab Ceramics Crew. Running February 5th through April 4th, this season also includes classes offered February 11th and 12th. It's a strong reminder of what makes River Oaks unique: a place where professional exhibitions and hands-on education live side by side, giving both artists and audiences a reason to keep coming back.

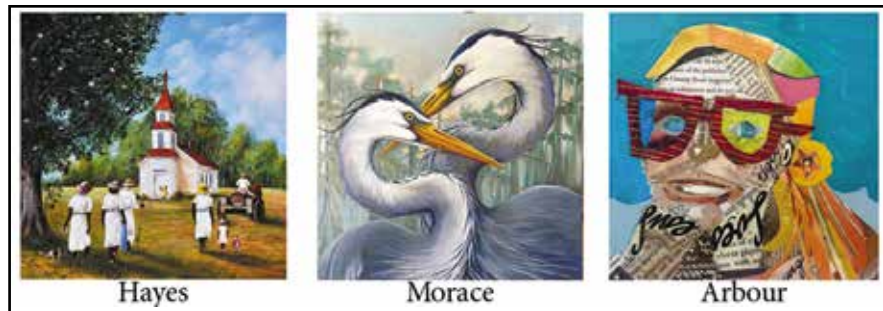
Spring brings one of the most anticipated national events River Oaks hosts each year: the 12th Annual Dirty South Cup Call, featuring Guest Juror Amy Kline, a Friends of the Juror showcase, and a concurrent exhibition by Madilyn Anderson. The Cup Call runs April 16th through May 30th, with classes planned for April 14th through 16th. Over the years, this event has become a major draw for ceramicists across the country and a must-see for anyone who loves functional art. There's something special about seeing cups and vessels from top makers nationwide gathered in one place, and River Oaks has become known for doing exactly that.

Just as the Cup Call wraps up, River Oaks shifts from clay on display to culinary competition with one of its biggest community favorite fundraisers: Men Who Cook, set for May 2nd. This event is always packed with friendly competition, bold flavors, and a strong sense of community support. It's one of the most fun nights of the year at River Oaks, and it directly helps fund the programming that makes the rest of the calendar possible.

Summer at River Oaks is always a high-energy season, beginning with the Resident Artists Annual Summer Show, featuring work from every resident artist and concurrent exhibitions by Simonne Soileau and Bill Bryant. This show runs June 4th through August 1st. The Resident Artists Summer Show is one of the best opportunities all year to see the breadth of talent that lives and works in River Oaks' studios. Different mediums, different styles, different voices, all under one roof.

Of course, summer at River Oaks also means Summer Arts Studio, Central Louisiana's largest and longest-running visual arts summer camp for kids. In 2026, the program includes a residency by Dusty Reed, and the camp sessions are

scheduled for June 8th-19th, June 22nd-26th, July 6th-17th, and July 20th-31st. The creativity that comes out of Summer Arts Studio is on full display at the Summer Art Studio Student Show on August 15th from 4:00pm to 5:00pm, where selected works from students across all sessions are exhibited in the gallery.



As the season transitions into fall, River Oaks brings in another exciting trio of featured artists: Larry Kip Hayes in the Bolton-Davis Gallery, with Leah Morace and Katy Keppinger Arbour exhibiting concurrently. These exhibitions will run August 27th through October 10th, with classes offered August 25th through 27th. This portion of the year always feels like River Oaks at full stride, with fresh exhibitions, strong attendance, and the arts center buzzing as people return to fall routines.

Then comes the stretch of the year that River Oaks is famous for: the lead-up to the Van Gogh Gala. The Van Gogh Gala Exhibition—Collaborations with Mentor Artists will be on display October 17th through 23rd, offering the public a sneak peek at the artworks created through mentor and guest artist pairings. The Van Gogh Gala itself takes place October 24th, bringing another unforgettable night of costumes, art, and fundraising to downtown Alexandria.

To close out the year, River Oaks will once again shine on a national level with the 11th Annual 5x5x5 Show National Call, featuring Guest Juror Tyler Barnes. Running November 12th through February 6, 2027, this show celebrates miniature works that pack major creativity into a small footprint. Concurrent exhibitions include Matt Dawson, along with a major showcase of River Oaks Outreach Programs, featuring works from Rapides ARC, OLS Community Homes, CLSSC, Hope House, Matthews Memorial, and The Honduras Cookie Project, led by instructors Lindsay B. Moore, Carla Guillory, and Chastity Sayer Smith. Classes are scheduled for November 10th through 12th.

Finally, the year wraps up with one of the most beloved holiday traditions in Central Louisiana—the Annual Porch Sale on December 5th. This event has become the place where many people start their holiday shopping, looking for original art, fine crafts, and one-of-a-kind gifts while supporting artists and the Arts Center all at once.

River Oaks extends sincere gratitude to the annual sponsors who help make this full year of exhibitions, education, and community programming possible: Explore Alexandria Pineville CVB, Red River Bank, Cleco, The Diamond Grill, The Hotel Bentley, Legacy Floral Designs, The Bentley Room, The Mirror Room, RoyOMartin, the City of Alexandria, and the Louisiana Division of the Arts. Their continued support strengthens River Oaks' ability to bring exceptional art and meaningful opportunities to Central Louisiana year after year.

For more information on exhibitions, workshops, membership, or events, call River Oaks at (318) 473-2670, visit RiverOaksArtsCenter.com, or follow River Oaks Arts Center on Facebook. We hope you'll join us this year as a River Oaks member and be part of the creativity that makes our Arts Center so special.

An Ocean Liner In Cenla!

By Michael Wynne



It is so much fun discovering new and interesting facts about our Central Louisiana history and culture. There is just so much fascinating history yet to be discovered out there that I don't have a long enough life to research and write about all of it!

One story that I recent stumbled on was that an "ocean liner" (really a make-believe mock-up of one) was built here for the enjoyable use of children. It was located on the man-made lake behind the Maryhill Seminary and Retreat Center near Pineville. Here is the story of this famed "ocean liner."

Catholic Bishop Charles Pasquale Greco (1894-1987), the now-legendary leader of the Catholic Church in Louisiana, was last stationed in Cenla. Beloved and respected by all who knew him, Bishop Greco was also the long-time national Chaplain for the Knights of Columbus (KOC), a Catholic brotherhood. Several KOC councils around the nation share his name for their council names, including the KOC Council #1134 headquartered at St. Rita Catholic Church, located in Alexandria on Bayou Rapides Road.

The Maryhill Renewal Center began in the 1940s as a vision of Bishop Greco. The property was purchased in Pineville with plans to build a retreat house and summer camp for children as well as for the creation of a "minor" religious seminary for priests in training. With the help from the Knights, Greco built the summer camp for children, opening in the summer of 1951. A man-made lake was built within the pine tree-covered property behind the retreat/seminary. The motto of the camp was, "Come to Camp Maryhill and get one step closer to God, and have fun doing it!"



Over the course of many years, the children from around the state who attended summer camp there still have many fond childhood memories of the camp, especially of the "ocean liner," really a multi-purpose boat house and children's gathering place.

As a young priest, Bishop Greco traveled on ocean liners several times to and from Europe. As was told to me, Greco loved Italian ocean liners and decided to create a mock-up of one when Maryhill's lake was built. He named it "The Star of the Sea." In reading Greco's hand-written autobiography, in possession of the Diocese of Alexandria and published by the national Knights of Columbus, Greco, as a young priest stationed in the New Orleans area, was challenged by then-Archbishop Shaw to build a floating chapel in St. Maurice Parish as travel there for its parishioners was very difficult. Greco built the state's first "boat chapel" and christened it, "The Star of the Sea." The name comes from the mother of Jesus, Mary, who is often called the "Star of the Sea" (Stella Maris) because she is seen as a guiding star for Christians, like the North Star was for ancient sailors.

"The Star of the Sea," built by Greco circa 1949, was to provide up to 10 boat houses at the waterline with dormitory facilities for 50 beds. The main deck, bow, and stern decks were pavilions, the lifeboats were benches and the pilot house was a lounge that could seat 20 persons. The two large smoke stacks were added for a realistic appearance. Dimensions of the structure were 95 by 60 foot.



The KOC summer camp remained in operation till 1983, closing at about the same time of the use of "The Star of the Sea," due to safety reasons.

One old camper has said, "Being a junior counselor and finally getting to sleep on 'The Star of the Sea' was my lifelong dream." Another former camper said, "I can't even count the number of times that I have been on and played on the boat in the late 60s." Late television actor and the star of "Bonanza", Michael Landon (1936-1991), paid a visit circa 1965 to Cenla, and visited the camp and campers and even walked aboard The Star.

Sometime shortly after 1986, The Star was dismantled, but its memory still lives in the hearts of many of the "old" children here today.

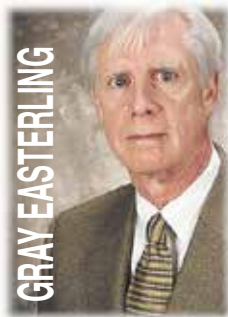
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Starting A Business?

By Gray Easterling



If you are considering starting a new business soon, pay attention to the information in a recent Wall Street Journal article outlining reasons why many startups fail. You will face many challenges and missteps common to new ventures. Those with eyes, read. Only half of new businesses make it two years, and only one-third last five years. As someone who started a CPA firm with two other friends, it was a dream/nightmare combination that finally found its legs after detours, disappointments, and finally, success. Gray hairs are to be expected. The article notes that trying to begin a business alone is not the easiest path to success. You usually need a team that brings different skills and perspectives to the table. Just as important is support for each other in the tough times that will occur. You will need to find the right balance between growing too fast and maintaining the status quo. Make sure you have adequate cashflow and working capital in place before pursuing growth strategies. If you have prior experience in the business you are starting, you will have a big advantage. According to the author, the best experience is working in a family business. It could result in a lower likelihood of your business closing and higher sales. Be realistic about the struggles you are about to encounter. If your identities and self-worth are tied to the business, it could become more difficult to make a clear decision because it's not just losing the business, it's also losing part of who you are.

If you have partners, it is important to feel comfortable having discussions about problems without triggering arguments. Constantly butting heads could result in stagnation of growth and destruction of employee morale. An expected obstacle is finding access to credit and capital. Building a customer base and bringing in revenue while expenses are increasing requires funds to bridge the gap. Anticipate this challenge and have your funding source in place, if possible. Just because you like the product or service you are providing does not necessarily mean that the public has the same appetite. You need to study your market in great detail before making a financial decision. Also try to be prepared for the uncontrollable. Opening a business during or just before a recession will affect your chances of success. A new business typically has less capital to absorb shocks, less capacity to stockpile inventory, and less leverage to renegotiate prices, or change suppliers. Note that the way you respond to the unexpected will have a huge influence on your chance to succeed. An example would be moving from dining into delivery services. Finally, the inability to hear, to listen, to be open to other perspectives can be a death blow. If you want to be in complete control, and are so tied to your ideas that you refuse to correct course when necessary, you are doomed to failure. Focus on your strengths, grow at your own pace, and do not lose sight of why you started in the first place. And never be too proud to seek advice and admit mistakes.

Always remember that you always have help ready and waiting. From Psalm 121: "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved and he who watches over you will not fall asleep. Behold, he who watches over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand, so that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe." Good luck with your new venture. With hard work, good vision, and daily prayer, I think your chances are good.

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Ways to Address the High Cost of Health Care in 2026

By Wesley Watkins



We all know the cost of healthcare is higher than most people can afford, but what can be done about it? What is being done about it? Will any action be effective in the long term? 2026 can be a year where big action is taken in the positive direction of health care, or it can be a year where almost no action is taken. Our government can't seem to agree on which path to take, and political agendas interfere with true progress and healthy steps toward lowering health care prices.

You may have read or heard about the Trump Administration addressing the inequities of prescription drug pricing when comparing the USA to other countries, and you will see more advancement in 2026 for the transparency of prescription drug prices. This is an item where we have bipartisan agreement that something needs to be done about prescription drug prices and the way America subsidizes other countries for prescription drugs. It's a little more complicated than what I describe, but at least we agree to devote attention and resources to this issue.

In 2026, you will be exposed to more information regarding hospital prices, and the Administration will address price transparency in this area of healthcare more this year. Some legislation has already been passed to promote price transparency; however, enforcement has been lacking. Expect more on this topic in 2026. This

agenda gets less bipartisan support than prescription drug prices, so politics will be more at play on the success/failure of this issue.

Health insurance is a passthrough. Health insurance does not drive the cost of healthcare. However, if you remove health insurance and let people pay cash for their healthcare services, what will happen to the cost of healthcare? Many people predict a sharp decrease in healthcare prices if there were no health insurance, however, more disparity and less access to quality care is also predicted. It's a fine line and definitely a double-edged sword. We need to continue to investigate ways to use health insurance wisely and not treat it differently than auto or homeowners' insurance. Maybe carve out such items as prescription drugs? Expect more attention in this line of thinking in 2026.

With the high price of medications along with other increasing health-related costs, health insurance premiums aren't going down. 2026 is a year with lots of items on the agenda, but politics can be tricky. Educate yourself. One of the best places to start is by contacting someone who is knowledgeable and reputable and will educate you without "selling" you. Reach out to Gallagher today by calling (318) 445-9464 to learn more about health insurance products we provide individuals and companies.

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Important Advice for the ‘Sandwich Generation’

By Lori Decker

If you’re between the ages of 35 and 60, you may be feeling a financial pinch from both your growing—or grown—children and your aging parents or in-laws. You may also find yourself juggling your work commitments and the expectations of family members for your time and support. As a member of what’s known as “the sandwich generation,” you’re not alone.

Unlike previous generations, where children left their homes earlier and more permanently, today children tend to live at home longer—or move out and return over time, sometimes with their own children in tow. At the same time, parents tend to live longer, often spending 25 years or more in retirement. If you’re wondering how to keep yourself financially on track in the face of these competing demands, the following strategies may help.

Pay yourself first. Instead of paying your bills and other expenses and then saving what’s leftover, automatically route a portion of your paycheck to your 401(k), Roth IRA or other retirement savings account—and encourage your working children to do the same. This ensures you’re regularly investing in your future financial security. And because of the power of compound interest, the sooner you or your children start this habit, the better their chances are of accruing wealth. Immediate needs and expenses can loom large; establishing a routine of saving regularly can help provide financial stability in later years.

Talk openly about finances. Discuss the basic tenets of sound money management with your children to help them develop good saving and spending habits at an early age. According to the Parents & Finances study published by Ameriprise Financial, 70% of parents involve their children in family financial decisions to help instill values and principles. Helping children understand the role that money plays in your family can allow them to grasp where they can contribute within the family finances. On the flip side, it’s equally important to talk with your parents about their plan for meeting their financial obligations in the years ahead. This includes knowing what—if any—plans and financial resources they have, should they become ill or incapacitated.

Make sure financial and legal documents are up-to-date. Whether it’s you, your parents, or your children, it’s important to determine whether you’ll need a Durable Power of Attorney, a Healthcare Proxy, a Living Will, and a Last Will and Testament. It’s also key to review and update beneficiary designations on investments and insurance policies because they may outweigh what is stated in a will. In addition, it’s wise to keep a list of your financial accounts and passwords—and know where your parents and children keep theirs—in case one of you needs to step in for another. Don’t forget to keep these documents in a safe and secure place.

Discuss long-term care insurance. One of the greatest challenges when it comes to planning for retirement is trying to predict future healthcare expenses. In-home health care costs or a lengthy nursing home stay can be very costly. If you or your parents don’t already have long-term care insurance, it may be wise to look into it to see if it fits with your family’s goals and options. Talk with siblings or other trusted family members about what a possible care plan could look like for your parents and for yourself. While conversations around long-term care can be tough to initiate, it’s often easier to bring everyone together while you and your parents are still healthy and in good mental capacity.

Explore resources to help offset costs. If your children are attending college, research the scholarship opportunities or work-study programs that may be available to them. Also, find out whether your parents qualify for any federal, state, or local benefits for their care. This knowledge can help all of you make better and more informed decisions about budgeting, school choices, loan options, and other financial choices that need to be made.

Set limits. If you have the desire and financial resources to support adult family members, it’s important to balance your generosity with ensuring you have

enough money to last through retirement—and support your family’s own financial independence. Be clear with your children and parents about how much financial support you are realistically able to provide. If you choose to give them money, establish whether it’s a loan that needs to be repaid or a gift that does not. When loaning money, document the conditions of the loan in writing and have both parties sign and date the agreement so that there are no misunderstandings.

Managing the responsibility that comes with being a member of the sandwich generation can be difficult. For help understanding how to plan for your future while caring for those who matter most to you, consult a reputable financial advisor. An advisor can help you create a financial strategy that makes sense for your unique situation.

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. To contact her, visit www.ameripriseadvisors.com/Lori.Decker/. 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. 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. Securities offered by Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. Member FINRA and SIPC. 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.



Lori Decker, CMFC®
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Associate Vice President

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Social Security Survivors' Benefits

By Annie Lemoine Newton



ANNIE NEWTON

When a loved one dies, Social Security survivors' benefits can help provide financial support to family members left behind. These monthly payments are provided by the Social Security Administration and are based on the work history of the person who passed away. Benefits may be available to widows or widowers age 60 or older (or age 50, if disabled), spouses of any age who are caring for a child under 16 or disabled, children under 18 (or up to 19 if still in high school), and in some cases, dependent parents age 62 or older.

To qualify, the deceased worker must have paid into Social Security long enough to earn the required work credits. Benefit amounts depend on the worker's earnings, with a surviving spouse able to receive up to 100% of the worker's benefit and children generally receiving about 75%, subject to a family maximum. Survivors' benefits do not start automatically and require an application, but they can provide important monthly support to help families remain financially stable after a loss.

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.

FORMER SOCIAL SECURITY JUDGE **PETER J. LEMOINE** Social Security Disability Law

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MEMBER: Louisiana State Bar Association, Lafayette Bar Association,
Avoyelles Parish Bar Association, National Organization of Social Security
Claimants' Representatives

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".

(318) 717-1995



Congratulations
SARAH GIANNONE

BOM Bank is thrilled to announce the
promotion of Sarah Giannone
to Retail Regional Manager!

Sarah's exceptional leadership, dedication,
and passion for supporting her team
and members have truly set her apart.

We can't wait to see her continue to shine and
make an incredible impact across our region.

Congrats, Sarah!



New Buz in Bunkie for 2026

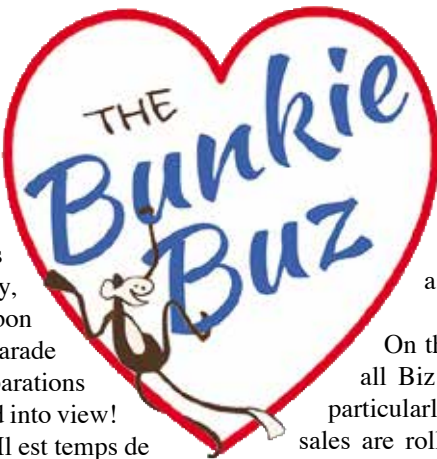
By Robert Smith

We of Family Buz wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year as strains of “Auld Lang Syne” accompanied by wild cheers, applause, and copious confetti fill the background!

With the holiday season of ‘25 wrapped and put away, we Buzters can truly say that a grand and glorious bon temps was had by all as we entertained friends, family, and most especially, new found friends within the borders of beautiful Bunkie. Yet, bon temps are brewing even as we speak! For with all the pomp and parade along the promenade, the season of Mardi Gras has arrived! Preparations and parties in hues of green, gold, and purple have already popped into view! Avoyelles and Acadie Nord are all excitement and anticipation! Il est temps de faire la fête!

Also, we must make mention of a co-calendered, concurrent, and complementary to Mardi Gras, the Acadiana Renaissance Faire raucously running every weekend from January 10th through February 8th, replete with midwinter merriment, arts, crafts, and feast-ables! It is easily accessible just outside of Ville Platte, located at 629 Mount Carmel Road. Fun awaits you; all you need bring is your imagination! And you just might catch a glimpse of L’il Bunkie while there!

On the aural side of the Buz, we’ve just finished our 59th (that’s almost 60, folks) “touching on tourism” broadcast of The Bunkie Buz Live at Five Radio Show! The



Monkey mayhem continues in 2026 as you park your tail and prop your ear on 92.5 KVPI FM while we pat ‘dat toe, wave ‘dat paw, and shake ‘dat tail! We’re tossing out tasty travel tidbits of places to see and savor in Bunkie and beyond, even capturing Acadie Nord! We are truly thankful for the response and plan to incorporate interviews with members of the Buz family as well as friends within the connective touristic tissue!

On the oral side of the Buz, be it known, proffered, and echoed that all Biz in the Buz District are already active in post seasonal sales, particularly Saxon Studio with their “Beaux Art Sale” Included with all sales are rollicking and rapacious discounting, dealing, and even good ol’ haggling! (Flogging them with dollars has been known to have great success, also!) Pennies notwithstanding, drop in for a deal or two on your walkabout in the Buz District of Bunkie.

On the visual side of the Buz, we have cultivated quite a following on Facebook and increased readership in Cenla Focus Magazine! Gritudinal Kudos to Will, Mark and Co. for the honor of being in Focus for Central Louisiana. The info in Focus makes it the preeminent resource for happenings in the area, as well as affordable (money well spent) advertising, especially for this New Year! Therefore, come and catch the Buz in Bunkie and have a Happy New Year, brought to you exclusively by the Buz family of Bunkie!



It takes time to build strength and stability. It takes putting down roots in the communities where you work and live. That’s what sets Red River Bank apart. Decisions aren’t made from a distance—our customers are the people we know as neighbors. We’re here for them, and here to stay.



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Ringing In the New Year in Avoyelles

By Wilbert Carmouche



As we step into a brand-new year in Avoyelles Parish—Centre de la Louisiane!—January arrives with meaningful moments, unique experiences, and the unmistakable charm of our communities. From history being honored in our courthouse square to the lively celebrations that close out the month, Avoyelles offers something memorable for every resident and visitor.

The Solomon Northup Committee for Commemorative Works unveiled and dedicated a bronze statue of Solomon at the Avoyelles Courthouse’s Monument Plaza. A historic milestone honoring the life, legacy, and enduring impact of Solomon Northup—the free Black man from New York whose kidnapping and enslavement in Louisiana became one of the most important autobiographical testimonies of American slavery, “Twelve Years a Slave” (1853). At the heart of this new cultural landmark stands “Hope Out of Darkness,” the first-ever bronze sculpture of Solomon Northup, created by award-winning sculptor Wesley Wofford. The unveiling marks a defining moment in Louisiana’s public history and national memory.

Leading the creation of the monument and plaza is the Solomon Northup Committee for Commemorative Works, a Louisiana-based nonprofit founded in 2022. The committee has worked tirelessly to ensure that Northup’s history is preserved through public art, education, and commemoration. Their efforts reflect a vision of public memory that acknowledges both the painful history of enslavement and the transformative power of truth-telling in the present.

The sculpture was created by Wesley Wofford, an Emmy and Oscar-winning sculptor known internationally for his monumental works that blend realism, symbolism, and emotional depth. In “Hope Out of Darkness,” Wofford captures Northup at a moment of emergence—his figure rising from shadow toward illumination, embodying both the brutality he endured and the transcendent resilience that defines his legacy. The likeness of Northup will serve as the centerpiece of the plaza and as a lasting tribute to Northup’s courage, resilience, and the enduring pursuit of justice.

Hypolite Bordelon Home Society invites you to a Birthday Celebration Honoring Hypolite Bordelon on Saturday, January 31st from 2:00pm to 3:00pm as we celebrate the birthday and enduring legacy of Hypolite Bordelon, a hardworking farmer whose life and generosity helped preserve a meaningful piece of our local history. Event will be at his home located at 242 Tunica Drive West in Marksville.

Hypolite Bordelon lived and worked on his land in a modest farmhouse dating to

circa 1820, a home that reflects the simple strength, resilience, and values of early rural Louisiana life. Through his foresight and generosity, Mr. Bordelon left his home to the Historical Society, ensuring that future generations could experience and learn from this treasured landmark.

This public birthday celebration is an opportunity to honor Mr. Bordelon’s life, recognize his contribution to historic preservation, and gather at the home that stands as a lasting testament to his legacy. Guests are invited to enjoy fellowship, reflect on the region’s agricultural heritage, and celebrate the story of a man whose life remains rooted in the land he loved.

All are welcome to attend and take part in this meaningful tribute to Hypolite Bordelon—a farmer, a steward of history, and a lasting part of our community’s story. For more information or how to send Hypolite Bordelon a birthday donation for continued restoration and maintenance, contact Mary Guillory at tourism@kricket.net or call (318) 964-2025.

As January continues, Avoyelles springs to life with the rich culture and entertainment our parish is known for. Families and adventure-seekers can gather at Paragon Casino Resort on January 31st for the always-popular Alligator Feeding Show, a crowd favorite that showcases the wild heart of Louisiana up close. Visit Paragon Casino’s website www.paragoncasinoresort.com for more information and details.

EXPLORE AVOYELLES



CALENDAR of EVENTS

Solomon Northup Statue Unveiling

Avoyelles Courthouse Square-Marksville
January 4, 2026 @ 2:00pm
www.snccw.com

Hypolite Bordelon Birthday Party

Hypolite Bordelon Home – Marksville
January 31, 2026 @ 2:00pm
FB: Hypolite Bordelon Home

Alligator Feeding Show

Paragon Casino Resort
January 31, 2026
www.paragoncasinoresort.com

Taste of the Country

St. Genevieve CC – Brouillette
January 31, 2026 @ 5:00pm
FB: Janice Brevelle

King George Concert

Paragon Casino Resort
January 31, 2025 @ 8:00pm
www.paragoncasinoresort.com



TravelAvoyelles.com | 800.833.4195
 8592 Hwy 1, Mansura, LA



That same evening, local flavor takes center stage in Brouillette at Taste of the Country, on January 31st, beginning at 5:00pm following the 4:00pm mass in St. Genevieve Church Parish Hall. This beloved event, hosted by the parishioners of St. Genevieve CC serves up some of the finest home-cooked dishes, fellowship, and good old Avoyelles hospitality. For ticket information that sell out quickly, search Facebook for Janice Brevelle.

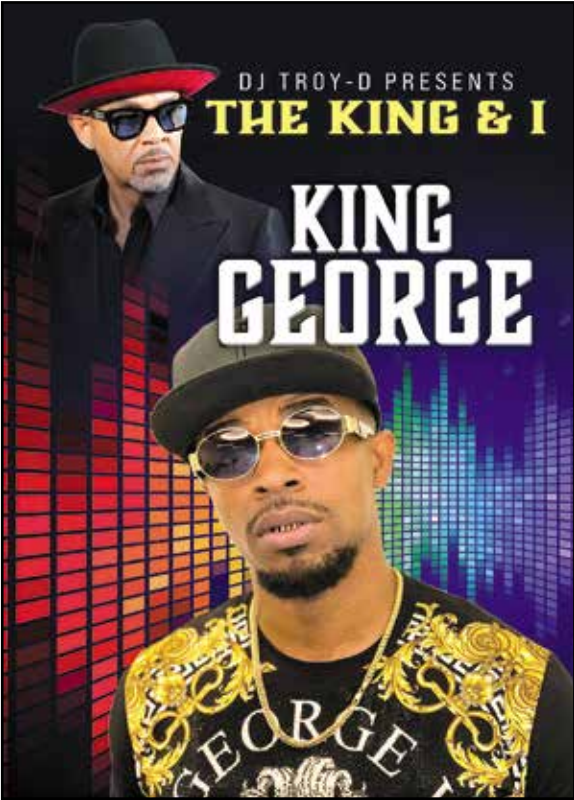


For music lovers, Paragon will keep the energy high with a King George Concert at 8:00pm on January 31st. King George, a fast-rising R&B and Southern Soul entertainer, has captured audiences across the South with his smooth vocals and grown-folk groove. Known for hits like “Keep on Rollin’,” “Leave & Party,” and “Too Long,” he brings a modern twist to classic soul sounds. His feel-good music and charismatic stage presence have made him a favorite for fans who enjoy an evening of rhythm, fun, and down-home good vibes.

Looking ahead to February, save the date for the annual Krewe of Cyllenius Mardi Gras Parade hosted by the Rotary Club of Avoyelles on February 8th at 1:00pm in Marksville.

As a new year dawns in Avoyelles Parish—Centre de la Louisiane—we pause in gratitude for the land, the people, and the rich heritage that shape who we are.

We give thanks for the stories passed down, the traditions preserved, and the welcoming spirit that defines our communities. Join us in celebrating the start of 2026 with the people, places, and events that make Avoyelles Parish such a special place to call home—and an unforgettable place to visit.



For all your Avoyelles Parish travel needs, contact Mary, Murial, or Wilbert at (318) 964-2025, (800) 833-4195, visit us at 8592 Highway 1, Suite 3 in Mansura, LA 71350 or online at www.travelavoyelles.com and Facebook at Travel Avoyelles or Allons Avoyelles.

Happy 5-Year Work Anniversary at BOM Bank!

Join us in celebrating Leah Verheyden, who is marking five amazing years with BOM Bank as a dedicated Loan Assistant at our 5924 Coliseum Boulevard location in Alexandria!

Leah, thank you for your hard work, positive spirit, and commitment to our customers and team. We are so grateful for everything you do and proud to celebrate this milestone with you!

Celebrating 5 Years
LEAH VERHEYDEN

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RSO Explores ‘Our Common Chords’ in 2026

By Joshua Zona



Happy New Year, Focus readers! We at the Rapides Symphony are excited about our 2026 concert season, one we are calling “Our Common Chords.” Our entire season in celebration of the 250th birthday of our nation and the characteristics that make America and our people the beacon of hope and freedom around the world.

The season opens with “Idealism” on Sunday, February 1st at 2:30pm at Calvary Baptist Church in Alexandria, featuring music by American composers John Corigliano, David Amram, and Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson as well as Eduard Grieg’s jaunty “Holberg Suite”.

“Aspiration”, featuring the Red River Chorale and Northwestern State University Choral Artists, will highlight our common purpose to make each generation better than the last leads us to music of American composers--and Leonard Bernstein’s “Make Our Garden Grow”. The winners of our biennial student Concerto Competition will also be showcased at this concert on Saturday, March 14th at 7:30pm.

As a special treat, the Symphony will present “Carnival of the Animals” on Sunday, March 15th at 2:30pm in the Festival Plaza at the Alexandria Zoo. Bring the kids and join us for Camille Saint-Saens musical zoological exploration, “Carnival of the Animals” at the Alexandria Zoo. The concert is free and entrance fee to the zoo is on us!

The season continues with the Symphony’s return to the riverfront with “Courage” on Saturday, April 25th at 7:30pm in the Downtown Alexandria Riverfront Amphitheater. Our pops on the river is strictly Red, White, and Blue with patriotic music and fireworks on the Red River. As always, this concert free to all with special table seating available by calling (318) 442-9709.

“Exploration” is inspired by America’s ardor for pushing boundaries which led to the settling of America’s west and exploring the cosmos. The Symphony celebrates this spirit of discovery with Aaron Copland’s “Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo” and Gustav Holst’s epic, “The Planets” on Saturday, September 12th at 7:30pm.

Piano soloist, Spencer Myer, will be featured in “Influence” on Saturday, October 17th at 7:30pm. Whether it be culture or politics, America found it’s voice in the late 19th through the 20th Century. We perform Joan Tower’s “Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman”, Gershwin’s jazzy classic “Rhapsody in Blue with internationally recognized pianist Spencer Myer, and Dvorak’s classic “New World Symphony.”

The season wraps on Sunday, December 6th at 2:30pm as we celebrate the holidays with holiday music with the panache that only America can produce. It’s a great concert for the whole family!

Season tickets for all of the concerts this year are available at rapidessymphony.org or by calling the Symphony Office at (318) 442-9709.

A poster for the Rapides Symphony Orchestra's 2026 Concert Season. The background is a blue sky with white stars and a hand holding a musical instrument. The text is arranged in a grid-like fashion. At the top left is the logo for the Rapides Symphony Orchestra with the name "JOSHUA ZONA - MUSIC DIRECTOR". At the top right is "2026 CONCERT SEASON". In the center is a large red banner that says "SAVE THE DATE". Below that is "OUR COMMON CHORDS" in large white letters. Underneath is "IN RECOGNITION OF AMERICA'S 250TH YEAR". The bottom half of the poster is divided into two columns of concert information, each with a title in large letters and details in smaller text on a red background.

IDEALISM	EXPLORATION
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1 2:30 PM CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH, ALEXANDRIA	SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12 7:30 PM COUGHLIN-SAUNDERS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
ASPIRATION	INFLUENCE
SATURDAY, MARCH 14 7:30 PM COUGHLIN-SAUNDERS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER	SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17 7:30 PM COUGHLIN-SAUNDERS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
COURAGE	GOODWILL
SATURDAY, APRIL 25 7:30 PM ALEXANDRIA RIVERFRONT AMPHITHEATER	SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6 2:30 PM COUGHLIN-SAUNDERS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

An advertisement for Candiloro & Co. The background is a light beige color. At the top is the company name "CANDILORO & Co." in a large, stylized font, with the tagline "shine. share. succeed." below it. In the center is a large circular image of a woman with long dark hair wearing a red jacket. Surrounding this are four smaller circular images: a man holding a baby, a couple kissing, a couple embracing, and a couple standing together. At the bottom right is a photograph of the Candiloro & Co. storefront, a brick building with a sign that says "CANDILORO & Co." and "HEADSHOTS". At the bottom left is contact information for the company.

Candiloro & Co.
707 Main Street
Pineville, LA
www.candiloro.co
(318) 447-8027
in @candiloro.co
f p d @candiloroco

Entertainment Focus

The Miss Magnolia Senior Citizen Beauty Pageant

If you loved the “Four Old Broads” before, then buckle up. Leslie Kimbell’s brand-new comedy brings the Broads back together with some delightfully unhinged new friends, and drops them straight into a beauty pageant run by Lurleen “What Could Possibly Go Wrong?” Dupree. Spoiler alert: everything goes wrong!

Directed by Jim Leggett and Michael Dalme, the cast features Theresa Louviere as Beatrice Shelton, Ruth Weinzettle as Eaddy Mae Clayton, Kim Patton as Imogene Fletcher, Melissa Savage as Maude Jenkins, Michael Dalme as Sam Smith, Johnette McNeal-Coco as Lurleen Dupree, Bob Savage as Clovis Crown, Debbie Dollar as Martha Parcell, Janelle Ranton as Hazel Dillard, and Becky Hooter as the Nurse.

Performances begin Thursday, January 29th at 7:30pm and run each Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night with Sunday matinee performances at 2:30pm through February 8th on the Hearn Stage at Kress Theatre in Downtown Alexandria. Tickets are \$15.00 for General Admission, \$12.00 for Seniors (over 60) & Military (w/ ID), \$7.00 for Students; and \$5.00 for all Thursday performances.

Advance tickets highly recommended! Get yours today at cpptheatre.com



Congratulations
KIM WILKERSON

We are excited to announce that Kimberly Wilkerson has been promoted to Branch Manager of our Many, Louisiana location!

A DeRidder native and DHS alum, Kim now calls Toledo Bend home, where she lives with her husband, two boys, and their golden lab.

She enjoys traveling, fishing, shopping, and—most importantly—getting to know new people. Kim's dedication, leadership, and passion for serving others make her a wonderful fit for this role, and we know she will continue to do great things for our Many community.

Please join us in congratulating Kim!



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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

January 10: Second Saturday at the Museum, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria). Enjoy the Alexandria Museum of Art without admission charge on the second Saturday of the month. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

January 10: Art In Motion with The Movement Lab, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 10:30am & 11:30am. Join The Movement Lab and get inspired by the art at AMoA! This session will guide children and families as they explore the feelings inspired by art and express their interpretations and creativity through movement and dance. The early session is for young children and families; the later session is for teens and adults. Please pre-register at the AMoA website. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

January 13: 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

February 5: AMoA Renegade Tour, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 6:00pm-7:30pm. An unconventional museum tour-you never know what you're going to get when the museum invites local personalities to interpret exhibits through their unique lens. Karen Riley Simmons is a New Orleans native who made the move to Alexandria following Hurricane Katrina and has since become a vital part of our community, working for the Rapides Parish Library and serving with many organizations. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

Music

January 15: If I Be Lifted Up—The Gathering, Laborde Earles Coliseum (5600 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria), 7:00pm. If I Be Lifted Up: The Gathering is a night of worship and community. Let's come together as a unified body of Christ. Don't miss out on this opportunity to be part of something truly special. Cost: Free. ifibeliftedup.info

January 17: Bradley Wilson in Concert, Coughlin Saunders Performing Arts Center Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 Third Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. This one-night-only event will be headlined by Louisiana artist Bradley Wilson, performing his originals along with new songs that showcase his southern roots and storytelling style. Supporting acts include an incredible lineup of local Louisiana talent—Randon Wooley, Spencer Brunson, and Eric Leger—each bringing their own unique sound and energy to the stage. This concert celebrates Louisiana's thriving music scene and the artists who call it home. Tickets are available on Eventbrite.com. Cost: \$14.64 General Admission.

January 23: Paul Sanchez in Concert, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 6:30pm-8:00pm. AMoA presents singer/songwriter Paul Sanchez

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Entertainment Focus

and his trio for an evening of music and storytelling. Paul spent the 90s and early 2000s making 11 albums and touring with New Orleans rockers, Cowboy Mouth. After losing everything in the flooding during Hurricane Katrina, he left the band he had helped form and went home to New Orleans to rebuild his life. He has 22 solo releases and received many awards for his work including best roots rock album in 2023. He also appeared in the HBO series "Treme." Cost: \$20.00 General Admission; \$15.00 AMoA Members; \$10.00 LSUA Students (w/ ID). Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

February 1: RSO Presents 'Idealism', Calvary Baptist Church (5011 Jackson Street, Alexandria), 2:30pm. The Rapides Symphony Orchestra opens its season united with music by American composers John Corigliano, David Amram, and Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson as well as Eduard Grieg's jaunty "Holberg Suite". Contact the Symphony for individual and season ticket pricing. 318-442-9709. rapidesymphony.org

Theatre

January 12, 19, 26 & February 2: Military Monday at the Movies, Grand Theatre Alexandria (2039 North Mall Drive, Alexandria). All military personnel and first responders can enjoy the ultimate movie experience at Santikos Entertainment for just \$5. Along with \$5 movie tickets, they'll also have access to a \$5 large drink and a \$5 large popcorn, making their cinema experience even more enjoyable and unforgettable. Valid ID required. \$5.00.

January 29-February 8: The Miss Magnolia Senior Citizen Beauty Pageant, Hearn Stage at Kress Theatre (1102 Third Street, Alexandria). If you loved the Four Old Broads before, buckle up. Leslie Kimbell's brand-new comedy brings the Broads back together with some delightfully unhinged new friends, and drops them straight into a beauty pageant run by Lurleen "What Could Possibly Go Wrong?" Dupree. Spoiler: everything goes wrong. Directed by: Jim

Leggett and Michael Dalme. Advance tickets highly recommended for this comedy; get yours now! Showtimes are Thursday through Saturday at 7:30pm and Sundays at 2:30pm. Cost: \$15.00 Adults; \$12.00 Seniors; \$7.00 Students; \$5.00 Thursdays. cpptheatre.com

February 4: The Hound of the Baskervilles, Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 Third Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. Aquila Theatre will journey out onto the fog-shrouded moors of England with this spine-tingling tale written by the acclaimed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This brand-new take on the legendary Sherlock Holmes mystery is a comedy-driven and utterly suspenseful theatrical adaptation. A play within a play, where mystery, suspense, and Aquila's trademark excellence are sure to leave you on the edge of your seat. Cost: \$25.00 General Admission; \$20.00 ACCL Members. Call: 318-484-4474. louisiana-arts.org

Events

Ongoing-January: 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.

January 6, 13, 20, 27 & February 3: 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.

January 9, 16, 23, 30 & February 6: MahJongg, First United Methodist Church of Alexandria (2727 Jackson St, Alexandria), 1:00pm-3:00pm. All sessions are open to all levels of play. Bring your 2025 National Mahjongg League, Inc card if you have it. Beginners table available on the 2nd Friday of the month. Cost: Free.

January 10: 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

January 10: The Truth Behind J. B. Lafargue's Life, Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch Library (1115 Broadway Ave, Alexandria), 2:00pm-3:00pm. Leading New Orleans Times-Picayune reporter Josette Abigov and local Historian Michael Wynne will tell the true story of the amazing life of J. B. Lafargue. Author Michael Wynne will have books on hand for sale. Cost: Free. rpl.org

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

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Entertainment Focus

January 15: From Italy to Your Kitchen, LSUA (8100 Highway 71, Alexandria), 6:00pm. Learn how to make fresh pasta from scratch in this hands-on pasta-making demonstration sharing authentic Italian techniques. Come and enjoy a delicious, flavorful experience with Valeriu and Alisa! Please pre-register. Cost: \$40.00. Call: 318-427-4441. lsua.it/cecourses

January 17: Campfire Cooking with Winter Foods, Forts Randolph & Buhlow State Historic Site (135 Riverfront Street, Pineville), 9:00am-1:00pm. Come see a live demonstration of our clay oven cooking up soft bread rations! Cost: \$6.00.

January 17: 2026 Arbor Day Celebration, Louisiana State Arboretum (1300 Sudie Lawton Lane, Ville Platte), 10:00am-4:00pm. Join us for our 2026 Arbor Day celebration and tree seedling giveaway. This year's trees include Red Buckeye, Parsley Hawthorn, Longleaf Pine, Sycamore, Willow Oak, Smooth Sumac, American Elm, Rusty Blackhaw, Roughleaf Dogwood, and Baldcypress. Limit of 10 seedlings per family. Celebrations will be held at the Arboretum Nature Center located inside of Chicot State Park. 337-363-6289.

January 17: Ali Siddiq—In the Shadows, Laborde Earles Entertainment Center (5600 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria), 7:00pm. Born and raised in Houston, Ali's unique style of stand-up originated behind the walls of incarceration, an incubator for interesting experiences and good stories. He is the first comedian to ever release

a 4-part series of comedy specials, *The Domino Effect 1-4*, which has over 50 million views combined on YouTube. VIP tickets are available. Cost: \$31.78-\$126.00. rpclive.org

January 18: Central Louisiana Orchid Society Meeting, St. James Episcopal Church EYC Building (1546 Albert Street, Alexandria), 2:30pm. Learn everything you need to know about orchids and how to grow them. Get hands on help with your plants! Member Rick Allardyce will present on how he grows his award-winning cymbidiums here in Louisiana. 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.

January 21: Cenla Women's Connection Luncheon, Country Inn & Suites (2727 Monroe Highway, Pineville), 12:00pm. Invite friends and join in for speaker, Paula Abbott, who will present "Condemned! Do Not Enter!" Also featuring Kaitlyn Graff with Wanderlust Productions. \$25.00. Please pre-register. 318-447-4673.

January 21: 20-Somethings, Westside Regional Library (5416 Provine Place, Alexandria), 5:30pm-7:00pm. Love anime? Crave ramen? Wish you had people to share it with? Join 20 Somethings, a monthly program where each session focuses on something you love to do. This month, we're diving into "Frieren: Beyond Journey's End"—the anime that dethroned "Fullmetal Alchemist" on MyAnimeList. We'll

watch together and enjoy some fun conversations about the series so far. Whether you're watching it for the first time or rewatching, it's an experience you won't want to miss. Free. rpl.org

January 29: 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 playwright, actor, author and director Jeff Goetz, a founding force in Spectral Sisters Productions. Jeff will speak on playwriting, plays, the Spectral Sisters, and we might even see a mini-play in person! Cost: Free. Call: 318-442-2483.

January 31: Live Gator Feeding Show, Paragon Casino Resort Hotel Atrium (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 4:00pm. Join the crowd in the hotel lobby on the last Saturday of each month for a live alligator feeding show. Bring the children for photos with a baby gator after the show. You will also hear traditional songs and stories of south Louisiana's flora and fauna performed by Tunica-Biloxi tribal members Donna Pierite and family. Cost: Free.

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

February 7: Central Louisiana Dutch Oven Cookers First Saturday Gathering, Indian Creek Recreation Area (100 Camp Ground Road, Woodworth), 9:00am-12:30pm. A delicious day with Dutch oven cooking enthusiasts. There is no charge for

food, however, donations are accepted. Regular park admission applies. Call: 318-625-1762.

Sports

January 6, 13, 20, 27 & February 3: Yoga in the Gallery, Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 5:45pm. Chill out every Tuesday with yoga classes taught by Learn with Laci. Registration is not required. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

January 19: Harlem Globetrotters 100 Year Tour, Laborde Earles Coliseum (5600 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria), 7:00pm. This is a once-in-a-century celebration of 100 Years of Jaw-Dropping "No Way!" moves, 100 Years of "Wow!" and 100 Years Heart-Pounding Thrills! From gravity-defying dunks to game-changing tricks, experience the team that redefined basketball! This is history you can feel and a celebration of 100 years of over-the-top fun with all-new surprises! Cost: \$33.00-\$98.00. rpclive.org

January 24: Cenla Fly Fishing Festival, Kees Park Civic Center (2450 Highway 28 East, Pineville), 8:30am-3:30pm. Hosted by the Kisatchie Fly Fishers club, this event celebrates the many fly fishing opportunities across the region. There are expert seminars on topics such as tackle, bass fishing, saltwater fishing, kayak fishing, and trout fishing. There's also fly casting instruction and fly tying demonstrations. Lunch is available for a nominal cost. Net proceeds benefit The Food Bank of Central Louisiana. Cost: Free. 318-793-5855. kisatchiefly.org

January 31: Monster Truck Winter Nationals, Laborde Earles Coliseum (5600 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria), 7:30pm. She's back—the world's youngest female driver—Faith Phreed! You will not want to miss the most monster trucks ever! Monster Truck rides, Louisiana Side by Side Racing Championships, Spiderman and more! Cost: Kids \$18.00; Adults \$30.00; VIP (all ages includes pit party) \$35.00. rpclive.org

**All events subject to change.*



Scan for a full
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Aquila Theatre's 'The Hound of the Baskervilles'

Aquila Theatre will journey out onto the fog-shrouded moors of England with this spine-tingling tale written by the acclaimed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on Wednesday, February 4th at 7:00pm in the Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center.

This brand-new take on the legendary Sherlock Holmes mystery is a comedy driven and utterly suspenseful theatrical adaptation. A play within a play, Holmes and Watson return to the scene of the crime to recreate their case of The Hound of the Baskervilles, at The Dartmoor Village Theatre and Tea Rooms. They are joined in this endeavor by the beloved Mrs. Hudson, and the self-acclaimed actor, Sir Anthony Knee-Cap. The audience may need to get in on the act in this participatory night to help the legendary Sherlock Holmes and trusted companions replay and resolve the loose ends of the mysterious death of Sir Charles Baskerville, rumored to be the victim of a supernatural and savage hound. Don't miss this unforgettable theatrical experience—where mystery, suspense, and Aquila's trademark excellence are sure to leave you on the edge of your seat.

Tickets are \$25.00 for general admission; \$20.00 for Arts Council members; and are available at louisiana-arts.org or by calling (318) 484-4474.

Attention Drama teachers: there is also a guided tour with the group and performance for students on Thursday, February 5th at 10:00am. Visit louisiana-arts.org to sign up! Perfect for 5th grade and older.





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Resolutions vs. Goals: An Easy Health and Wellness Fix for 2026

By Jennifer Duhon, MS, RDN, LDN



JENNIFER DUHON, MS, RDN, LDN

Ah, the New Year—the season of fresh starts, shiny planners, and the eternal optimism that this year will be different. For many, that means making resolutions like, “I’ll never eat sugar again,” or “I’ll work out every single day.” Sounds great, right? Until February rolls around and those resolutions are hiding under the couch with last year’s gym membership card.

So, what’s the problem? Resolutions often feel like rigid rules. They’re all-or-nothing commitments that can crumble the moment life throws a curveball. Miss one workout? Suddenly, you feel like you’ve failed. Cue the guilt spiral.

Goals, on the other hand, are the friendlier cousin of resolutions. They’re flexible, measurable, and realistic. Instead of saying, “I’ll never eat dessert,” a goal might be, “I’ll include one extra serving of vegetables each day.” See the difference? Goals allow progress without perfection. They’re about building habits, not chasing

impossible ideals.

Think of short-term goals as stepping stones and long-term goals as the destination. Short-term goals might include drinking more water this week or taking a 10-minute walk after lunch. Long-term goals could be lowering your blood pressure, improving your energy, or running that 5K by summer.

The magic happens when these two work together. Short-term wins keep you motivated, while long-term vision gives you purpose. It’s like having a GPS and a roadmap—you need both to reach your destination without getting lost.

Now, let’s talk fuel. Your body is a high-performance machine, and what you put in matters. Here are a few simple, sustainable tips:

1. **Color Your Plate:** Aim for a rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Each color packs unique nutrients—orange for beta-carotene, green for iron, purple for antioxidants.
2. **Protein Power:** Include adequate protein like chicken, lean beef, fish, beans, or tofu. They help keep you full and support muscle health. The National Academy of

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Medicine recommends that adults get a minimum of 0.8 grams of protein for every kilogram of body weight per day, or just over 7 grams for every 20 pounds of body weight. On average that is 50-90 g per day.

3. Whole Grains Win: Swap white bread for whole grain options. They're richer in fiber, which aids digestion and keeps energy steady. Fiber is your friend but remember to add it slowly so your body gets used to it. Aim for 25 g per day.

4. Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate: Water is your best friend. Start your day with a glass and keep a bottle handy. Aim for half your body weight in ounces as your fluid goal. Hydration doesn't have to be boring. Try infused water by adding any of the following to a cold glass or pitcher of water: sliced citrus fruits or zest (lemon, lime, orange, grapefruit), crushed fresh mint, sliced fresh ginger and cucumbers or crushed berries

5. Mindful Eating: Slow down. Savor your food. Mindful eating benefits include better recognition of hunger/fullness cues, reduced overeating/emotional eating, improved digestion, healthier food choices, stress reduction, and greater enjoyment of food by focusing on sensory experience, which promotes healthier eating patterns and a positive relationship with food. It's amazing how much better you feel when you're not eating in a rush.

Make 2026 your best year yet! Join the LSU AgCenter for our health and nutrition series, "Let's Eat for the Health of It," hosted across the Rapides and Avoyelles Parish library systems. Classes will rotate among library locations, so be sure to check the library's monthly schedule for topics and venues.

Easy Overnight Oats with Yogurt

By Jennifer Duhon

1 Cup Vanilla Greek Yogurt
2-4 Tablespoons Honey
1 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract
1 Cup Milk
1 1/2 Cups Old-Fashioned Oats
1/4 Teaspoon Sea Salt
1/2 Teaspoon Cinnamon, or to taste
Banana or Berries For Topping
Nut Butter (Optional)

In a large bowl, mix together yogurt, honey and vanilla. Stir until the mixture is smooth. Add milk and stir until combined. Add oatmeal, sea salt, and cinnamon and stir until mixture is uniform throughout. Pour into four 4-ounce mason jars, or two 8-ounce mason jars and secure the lids. Place in the refrigerator to chill overnight (or for at least 6 hours). Add fresh fruit or berries, a drizzle of nut butter, or extra honey.



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Sweet Onion Upside Down Cornbread & Deer Sausage Bread

By Wilbert Carmouche

A new year, new resolutions; some to be cherished and carried through, others destined to fade as life gets busy. Yet each January brings a gentle nudge—a reminder that small, mindful steps can shape a healthier, more energized version of ourselves. As we welcome 2026, we turn our focus to eating well, feeling better, and embracing choices that nourish both body and spirit. Whether you're ready for a full reset or simply looking to refresh a few habits, this season offers a perfect moment to explore wholesome flavors, smarter substitutions, and the joyful discovery that healthy eating doesn't have to be complicated to be delicious. Let's take the journey together. How about these recipes for starters or easing into the new year, both can be served with a salad as a full meal!

Sweet Onion Upside Down Cornbread

2 Sweet Onions
4 Tablespoons Butter
1 1/2 Cups Fine Ground Yellow or White Cornmeal
1 Cup All-Purpose Flour
1 1/2 Teaspoons Kosher Salt
1/3 Cup Sugar
1 Tablespoon Baking Powder
8 Ounces Frozen Broccoli, Thawed
4 Eggs
16 Ounces 2% Cottage Cheese

Preheat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Slice onions into rings, leaving the rings in order stacked if possible. Melt butter in a 10 or 12-inch cast iron skillet. Place the onion slices close together into butter, fill in any spaces with smaller bits of onion. Finely chop any remaining onion and set it aside. Set skillet aside for further use also.



Let onions cook on medium heat for 5 minutes. While onions are cooking, mix the batter: In a mixing bowl, add cornmeal, flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder; stir to combine. Pour the batter over the onions in the iron skillet.

Bake cornbread for 20 to 23 minutes or until done. Let the cornbread cool for 10 to 15 minutes. Run a knife around the edge of the cornbread. Place a plate over the pan and, using oven mitts, carefully flip the pan over and remove the cornbread from the pan. Serves 8.

Deer Sausage Bread

1 1/2 Pounds Venison Sausage
4 Ounces Cream Cheese
1 1/2 Cups Mild Cheddar Cheese
1 Small Onion Finely Chopped
1/2 Green Bell Pepper Finely Chopped
1 Teaspoon Minced Garlic
1/4 Cup Sliced Jalapenos
8 Ounces Sliced Canned Mushrooms
2 13.8-Ounce Cans Pizza Crust
Cajun Seasoning, to taste

In a large skillet on medium-high heat, brown deer sausage for about 15 minutes until all edges begin to turn crispy. Add onion, bell pepper, garlic, jalapenos, and mushrooms to sausage then continue to cook until onions are clear, stirring

occasionally to prevent sticking. Add a sprinkling of seasoning all over mixture, then add both cheeses and turn heat down to low, stirring until all the cheese is melted. Once cheese has melted, remove from heat and let cool.

While sausage mixture is cooling, pre-heat oven to 385 degrees Fahrenheit. Roll out 1 can of pizza dough. Stretch flat and into an oval-like shape, do the same with the 2nd can and set both aside. Once sausage mixture is cool,

spray nonstick cooking spray on a medium size baking sheet then place one flattened dough onto it. Add sausage mixture to center of dough and spread out evenly, staying about an inch away from the sides. Cover with second dough and firmly crimp and roll edges of both breads between fingers. If you have extra shredded cheddar cheese, you can sprinkle on top now. Bake on center rack of oven for 15 to 20 minutes. When time is up, top of bread should be golden brown. Remove from oven, let cool for 15 minutes, slice and serve. Serves 4-6.

Avoyelles Parish cookbooks are available for sale in the gift shop located at the ACT Office, located at 8592 Highway 1, Suite 3, Mansura LA 71350. These recipes were selected from "Central Region Commodity Cookery 4H Cookbook," a collection of recipes from the 2017 winning recipes from the 4H Central Region (10 parish area). The cost is \$10.00 for pickup, or add \$6.00 for mailing. Call (318) 964-2025 or email us at tourism@krocket.net for more information. Happy New Year and Bon appetite!





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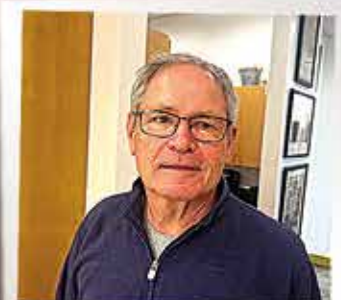
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