

# CenLA FOCUS

The Community Lifestyle/Business Profile Journal of CenLA

Volume 29 • Issue 2  
February 2026

PRICELESS  
TAKE ONE



# LSUA

## Fierce and Focused for the Future

in this  
ISSUE

**RECEN**  
Rapides Early Childhood Network

The  
Month  
of the  
Young  
Child

CHRISTUS S. Frances Cabrini Hospital's  
**CARRINI  
FLASHBACK  
BALL**

Celebrating  
45 Years

Best  
of the  
British  
Isles

**ST. JAMES**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
CONCERT  
SERIES  
presented by  
The McCormick-Smith Fund, Inc.



*Come Check Out*

*Homemade  
Pies baked  
daily*

Apple ~ Pecan~ Cherry  
Lemon Meringue ~ Coconut Meringue  
Chocolate Meringue ~ Strawberry

**GRIFFIN'S ANTIQUES**

**& MAIN STREET MARKET**

**Over 70 Vendors  
Under One Roof!**

**Antiques, Clothing, Art,  
Handmade Crafts and More!**

Monday - Saturday 9:00am-5:30pm

**Featuring a wide variety of all things old and new!**



**Homemade Pastries • Homemade Sandwiches & Burgers**

**318-346-5005**

*Scoops & Milkshake  
featuring...*



**228 SW Main Street Bunkie, LA 71332**

**GIBKO POOLS & SPAS**

**No matter Winter, Spring, Summer, or Fall  
there is never a bad time to install  
a new pool!**



**318-442-1144**  
**Alexandria**

[www.gibko.com](http://www.gibko.com)

**318-346-8733**  
**Bunkie**



# The Buz In Bunkie



Fresh Produce, Fresh Meats,  
Fresh Seafood, Homemade Jelly,  
Fresh Yard Eggs



Open

9:00am - 5:30pm  
Monday - Saturday



NOW  
SERVING  
HOME COOKED  
PLATE LUNCHES!



**318 346-8950**

110 SW Main Street Bunkie, LA

## OLD FASHIONED DEPARTMENT STORE

Housewares • Toys • Candy • Dry Goods • Gifts • Much More!



"Welcome Back to the Good Ole Days"

**318-346-3883**

Open

Monday - Saturday 9-5

202 SW Main Street Bunkie, LA





# Find the Perfect Gift for Your Valentine

**Custom Jewelry • Jewelry & Watch Repair**



*Creating  
Tomorrow's  
Heirlooms  
Today!*

*Edwards*  
Custom Jewelry



3  
1  
8

787-2919



4617 Jackson Street Alexandria, La 71303  
[www.EdwardsCustomJewelry.com](http://www.EdwardsCustomJewelry.com)



**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** Will Harp, Jr.

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:** Vickie R. Cofer,

Micah Touchet, Deidre McNamara

**ADVERTISING CONSULTANT:** Mark Hoosier

**EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT:** Lorie Robinson

**WEB PRESS:** Baton Rouge Press

**DISTRIBUTION:** Steve Piercy, Paul Manemann

**COPYRIGHT:** Cenla Focus, LLC

## CONTRIBUTORS

Gray Easterling, Michael Wynne, Rt. Rev. Jacob W. Owensby, Wilbert Carmouche, Dr. Jerry Sanson, Dr. David J. Holcombe, Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr., Dr. Cornel D. LeBlanc, Dr. Michael Polozola II, Molly Lyles, Christy Pennison, Debbie Guy, Wesley Watkins, Annie Lemoine Newton, Lori Decker, Toby Brazzel, Robert Smith, Rocky Couvillion, Sarah Drell, Roy Rosenthal

Cenla Focus is published in the first week of each month. © 2026 by Cenla Focus, LLC. All rights reserved. Any reproduction without prior express written consent of the publisher is prohibited. Cenla Focus eagerly invites ad inquiries, photographs and written contributions. Return postage must accompany all materials submitted if return is requested; however, neither Cenla Focus nor its staff can assume responsibility for unsolicited materials. We can be reached via the following:

Phone: (318) 442-8277 • Fax: (318) 484-3745

E-mal: [contact@cenlafocus.com](mailto:contact@cenlafocus.com)

Website: [www.cenlafocus.com](http://www.cenlafocus.com)

Media Kit: [www.cenlafocus.com/media-kit/](http://www.cenlafocus.com/media-kit/)

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 12774, Alexandria, LA 71315

Shipping Address:

3911 Parliament Drive, Alexandria, LA 71303

FOUNDED IN 1998 BY WILLARD A. HARP, SR.

# Contents



## on the cover

LSUA Fierce and Focused for the Future .....page 6-8

## history focus

Beginning of Equality in Louisiana Education ..... page 10-11

## home & garden focus

Celebrate Louisiana’s Native Plants ..... page 12

## faith focus

Love Is Our Highest Calling ..... page 20-21

## cenla sportsman

The Negro Leagues in Alexandria ..... page 22-23

## medical focus

The Latest from Cenla’s Medical Community ..... page 28-36

## financial focus

Do You Matter? .....page 38

## entertainment focus

What’s Happening in Cenla ..... page 43-50

## who’s cooking focus

A Crawfish Tale..... page 52

## literary focus

Author Shannon Williams ..... page 55

## avoyelles focus

Mardi Gras in Centre de la Louisiane ..... page 59



# TIRE DISCOUNT

Center

**Tire Sales &  
Service  
Brakes  
Alignments**

**Oil Changes  
Road Service  
Semi Trucks  
Welcome**

**Monday-Friday 7:30am - 5:30pm  
Saturday 7:30am - 2:00pm • Closed Sunday**

**96 MacArthur Drive Alexandria, LA**

# 318-704-0204



# LSUA

## Fierce and Focused for the Future

Louisiana State University of Alexandria (LSUA) proudly celebrated the grand opening of the Martin Family Student Success Center on January 21st, marking the completion of the university's newest facility and the first new building on campus since Mulder Hall opened in 2012. More than a ribbon cutting, the opening represents the culmination of a multi-year vision to redefine the LSUA campus experience, beginning with a bold philanthropic commitment in 2019 and ending with a modern, welcoming front door that reflects the university LSUA has become.



The story of the Martin Center began with the launch of the “Fierce for LSUA” capital campaign in 2019, a local extension of the systemwide “Fierce for the Future” initiative that sought to elevate LSU campuses across the state. Championed by the LSUA Foundation and its board, the campaign was rooted in a clear need: LSUA was growing rapidly, academic offerings were expanding, and student services, which were spread across multiple buildings, needed to be unified in a modern, student-centered space. Nearly 100 donors answered that call including community supporters as well as faculty and staff who contributed more than \$5 million in private support to serve as a required match for state capital outlay funding.



From the outset, the vision extended beyond a single building. University leaders recognized that first impressions matter, and that the “front door” of campus should reflect the quality, momentum, and ambition of the institution itself. That vision set in motion a series of transformational projects that would fundamentally reshape how students and visitors enter and experience LSUA.

The first step was foundational. In 2022, LSUA completed a \$6.5 million major infrastructure and drainage project that addressed longstanding issues with standing water and accessibility across campus. Beneath the surface, a new in-ground drainage system redirected water efficiently away from the heart of campus. Above ground, roads were resurfaced, lighting was modernized, and traffic patterns were reimagined.



A former campus roadway was removed and replaced with a pedestrian-first corridor now known as the LSUA Plaza, creating a safer, more inviting environment for students to move through campus.



That work paved the way for the next visible transformation—a new main entrance. In August 2025, LSUA unveiled its grand entrance roundabout and the LSUA Tower, a defining landmark that now welcomes all who arrive on campus. Inscribed with the values Resilience, Integrity, Service, and Excellence, the Tower stands as both a gateway and a symbol. New students walk through it as they begin their college journey; graduates pass through it again as they step into the next chapter of their lives.

With the infrastructure complete and the entrance established, the Martin Center emerged as the capstone of this comprehensive transformation. Construction began in early 2024 and concluded in December 2025. Offices began relocating just before Christmas, and the building officially opened to students at the start of the Spring 2026 semester.



Designed as a central hub for student support, the Martin Center brings together key services that guide students from recruitment to graduation and beyond. Housed within the facility are Admissions and Recruiting, Financial Aid and Student Accounting, First-Year Experience, Advising, Career Development, and centralized student support services, all intentionally co-located to ensure that students receive timely, personalized assistance in one welcoming space.



The center bears the Martin family name in recognition of their extraordinary leadership and generosity. Through Martin Sustainable Resources LLC and Martco LLC, Roy O. Martin III and Kathy Kilpatrick Martin committed a foundational gift to LSUA as part of a systemwide investment in higher education. Their support completed the private match necessary to move the project forward and reflected a deep belief in LSUA's role in strengthening Central Louisiana's workforce and economy.

The grand opening celebration brought together donors, students, faculty and staff, elected officials, LSU System leaders, and community partners, many of whom had been part of the journey from its earliest planning stages. Together, they marked not only the opening of a building, but the realization of a long-term vision to align campus infrastructure with LSUA's mission and momentum.

Today, the Martin Center stands as a tangible expression of LSUA's evolution. It anchors a reimagined campus entrance, supports a rapidly growing student body, and reflects the university's commitment to meeting students where they are and guiding them toward meaningful degrees and careers. As the newest chapter in LSUA's physical and institutional transformation, the center welcomes students and visitors alike into a modern higher education environment: one built on intention, investment, and a fierce belief in student success.

In addition to the brand-new Martin Center, construction is underway for LSUA's new on-campus apartment complex. In partnership with Durand Construction, LLC, the 176-unit residential development will provide modern living options for students, faculty, and staff, while catalyzing future growth that will bring new businesses and amenities to LSUA's growing campus.

This bold initiative addresses the urgent housing demand created by LSUA's record-setting enrollment growth. By utilizing a public-private partnership model, the





university is expanding its campus footprint without direct financial expenditure while supporting its strategic goal to recruit and retain top-tier students, faculty, and staff. The project is also expected to stimulate local economic activity, enhance regional amenities, and reinforce LSUA's commitment to building a vibrant university community at the heart of central Louisiana.



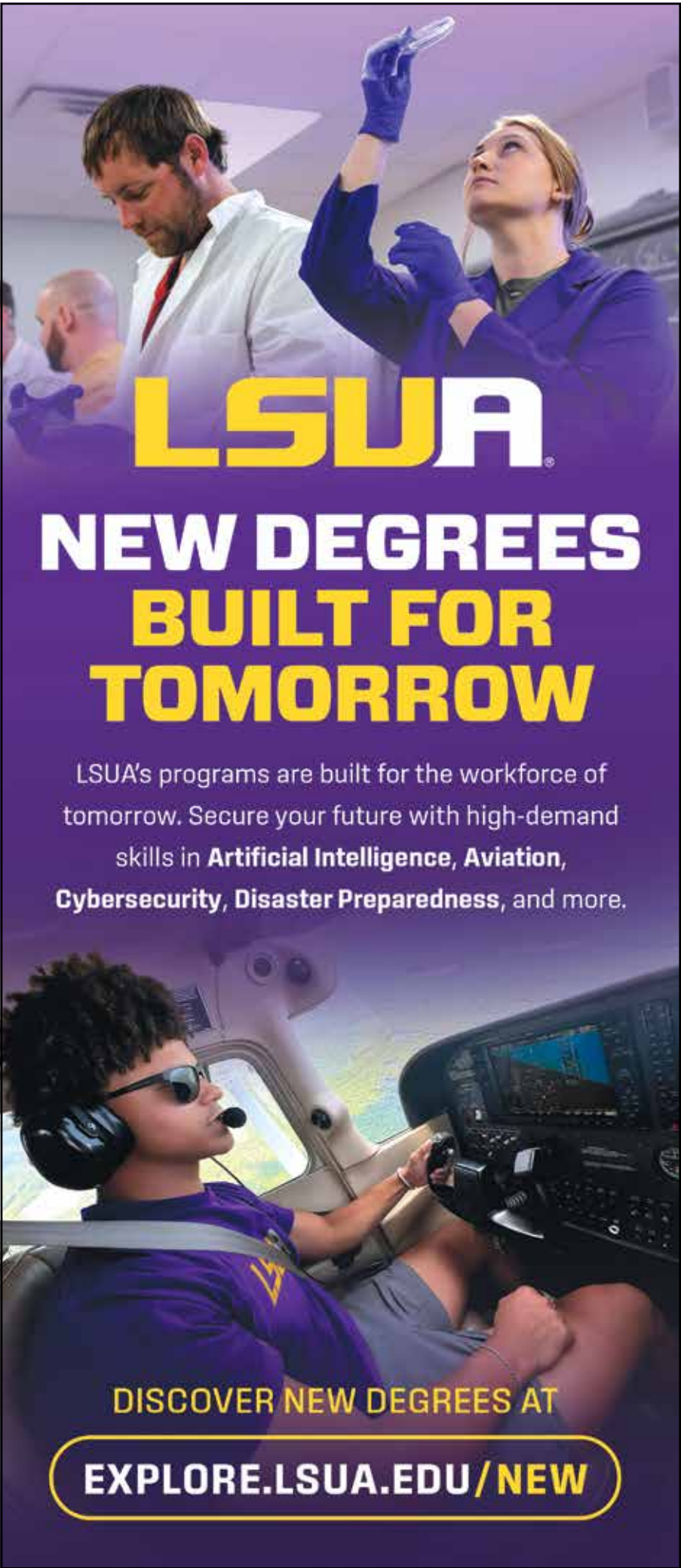
“With LSUA’s record enrollment and as the fastest-growing four-year university in the state of Louisiana, additional residential housing has become crucial and desperately needed,” said LSUA Chancellor Paul Coreil. “With this groundbreaking, we are officially kicking off our long-awaited Campus Edge Project, utilizing a public/private development partnership that will provide student and employee housing on campus. This is a major step forward for LSUA as it continues to evolve into a major four-year university currently serving almost 8,000 students.”



Abbey Bain, Vice Chancellor for Student Engagement, noted the development addresses years of unmet housing demand: “For the past five years, we have had a housing waitlist that reflects our tremendous growth and the strong demand for the LSUA experience. This new campus edge development not only helps meet that need but also sparks new energy and momentum around our university. It represents an investment in our students, our campus, and our community’s future.”

All this a time when many universities across the nation are struggling with declining enrollment, financial instability, and campus closures. Over the past five years, LSUA has quietly built a reputation as one of the most resilient and forward-moving universities in the state. Enrollment has surged by 125% since 2020 and by 252% since 2015, with more than 8,000 students now enrolled. Equally notable is the number of degrees awarded, which continues to reach new records each year.

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



# LSUA

## NEW DEGREES BUILT FOR TOMORROW

LSUA's programs are built for the workforce of tomorrow. Secure your future with high-demand skills in **Artificial Intelligence, Aviation, Cybersecurity, Disaster Preparedness**, and more.

DISCOVER NEW DEGREES AT

**EXPLORE.LSUA.EDU/NEW**



# Focus on Healthy Relationships This February

By Carolyn Hoyt

February is a time when thoughts turn to flowers, candy, cards, and heart-shaped gifts. Interestingly, February also holds the distinction of being Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, bringing national focus to a troubling, growing issue and highlighting the need to educate youth about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

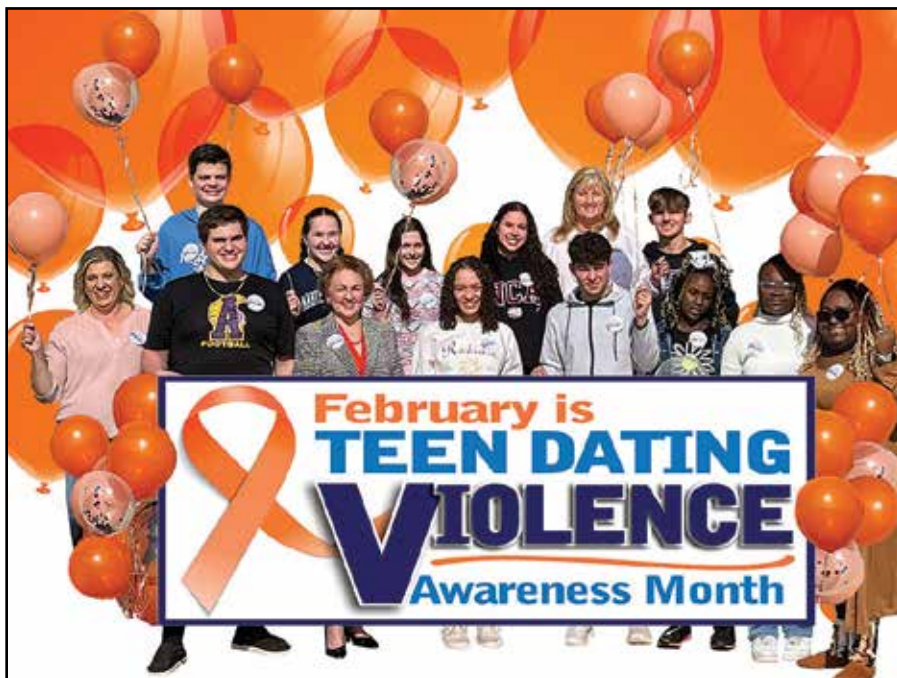
A growing body of research reveals dating violence is shockingly common, with as many as one in three teens falling victim to verbal, emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Tragically, young people involved in abusive relationships early in their dating lives are more likely to carry the patterns of abuser/victim into future relationships; thus, the dangerous, destructive cycle continues—one that plagues family life across Louisiana.



Recognizing the gravity of the issue, the Louisiana Legislature passed a law in 2010 mandating public schools provide instruction relative to dating violence and healthy relationships to students in grades seven through twelve. That year, NextSTEP implemented its original

school-based awareness and prevention initiative, “A Fight We Can Win”, to help schools meet their safety obligations and to empower teens by raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and changing attitudes and behaviors linked to dating violence.

To date, NextSTEP has educated more than 42,000 teens and tweens in 30+ public, private, parochial, and charter schools in six Central Louisiana parishes. NextSTEP also anonymously surveys students to determine what teens know about dating violence, how many are victims, and the types of abuse they have experienced.



Pre- and post-lesson surveys, vetted by the State Department of Education, indicate that dating violence is a social reality for Cenla teens. Annually, pre-lesson surveys reveal 93% to 97% believe it is a serious issue; 34% to 38% know someone in an abusive relationship, while 20% to 24% are not sure; 11% to 15% believe they are, or have been victims of dating violence, while 4% to 8% are not sure. Among the types of abuse they have experienced are physical (hitting/pushing/ shoving), stalking/spying, strangulation (a leading indicator of lethality), threats of violence, hurting of pets, excessive calling/texting, and unwanted kissing and touching.

Teens do not have the experience, nor are they equipped to handle the consequences of abusive, controlling dating partners. Through education, advocacy, and community partnerships, NextSTEP is moving the conversation forward by ensuring teens have the tools to recognize unhealthy relationships and to seek help when they need it. Annually, post-lesson surveys indicate 50% to 60% of students would be more likely to seek help from a teacher, counselor or school resource officer if they were victims of dating violence; pre-lesson surveys show less than two percent would.

By investing in awareness and prevention today, we can protect our teens, strengthen our community, and create a future where every young person feels safe, respected, and empowered to build healthy relationships. For more information about “A Fight We Can Win”, or to schedule a program at your school, call (318) 664-0277.



**Terry's Secure Storage**  
Safeguarding Your Belongings

**Residential and Commercial Storage**

- Climate Control and Standard Units
- Computerized Entry & Exit
- Personalized Access Code
- State-of-the-Art Surveillance
- Perimeter Fence
- Well-Lit Premises
- On-Site Manager
- Internet Access
- Boxes and Packing Supplies Available




**3620 Cottonwood Drive • Alexandria, LA • 318-484-9989**



# Beginning of Equality in Louisiana Education

By Jerry Sanson, PhD



The Louisiana Maneuvers and subsequent military training camps and activities brought many figures to the Bayou State who later became famous because of their roles in World War II. The names Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton come to mind for many people. Did you know that another effort, the early stirrings of the Civil Rights Movement, brought a lawyer to Louisiana during the war years who later earned fame as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court?

Black southerners endured decades of discrimination and second-class citizenship after Bourbon Democrats established segregation and disfranchisement laws during the 1890s. They were seemingly mired in social and legal systems that were impervious to change. As Richard Dalfiume wrote in a 1968 article in the *Journal of American History*, however, “The dominant attitude in World War II came to be that the Negro [original word usage in the article] must fight for democracy on two fronts—at home as well as abroad.”

The “Double V Campaign,” as it was called, became an effort to attain equality in American society that helped spawn change during the post-World War II years. Changes accomplished during the war years became the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement that sent the winds of change through post-war America.

Black educators in Louisiana were part of this fledgling Civil Rights Movement during the early 1940s as they sought to convince Louisiana political leaders to remove an obvious inequality that affected their profession. Louisiana had maintained two pay scales for black and white teachers for decades, even though they might teach in the same parish and possess the same credentials. Black teachers during the war years tried to convince political leaders and used federal courts to argue their case when those political leaders ignored their requests.

Eight black citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish asked the school board in May 1943 to adjust teachers’ salaries “so that white and black teachers with equal qualifications and equal experience would receive equal salaries.” J. K. Haynes, president of the Louisiana Colored Teachers’ Association [legal name of the organization in 1943], asked Governor Sam Jones to influence the Board of Education to equalize teachers’ salaries throughout the state in June 1943 in order to prevent more black teachers from leaving their classrooms for the higher salaries paid in war industries. Daniel E. Byrd, state president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), asked Jones to work for equal salaries. Byrd put to rest the contention of the (white) Louisiana Teachers’ Association that white teachers’ salaries would drop if the state adopted a uniform pay scale because Louisiana could not afford to pay teachers of both races the same salary. Byrd pointed that the situation had not occurred in any of the ten southern states that had already adopted equal pay scales. Despite these entreaties, the salary schedule prepared by State Superintendent of Education James Cox for 1944 maintained separate pay scales.



*Congratulations*  
KATRICE BELOW

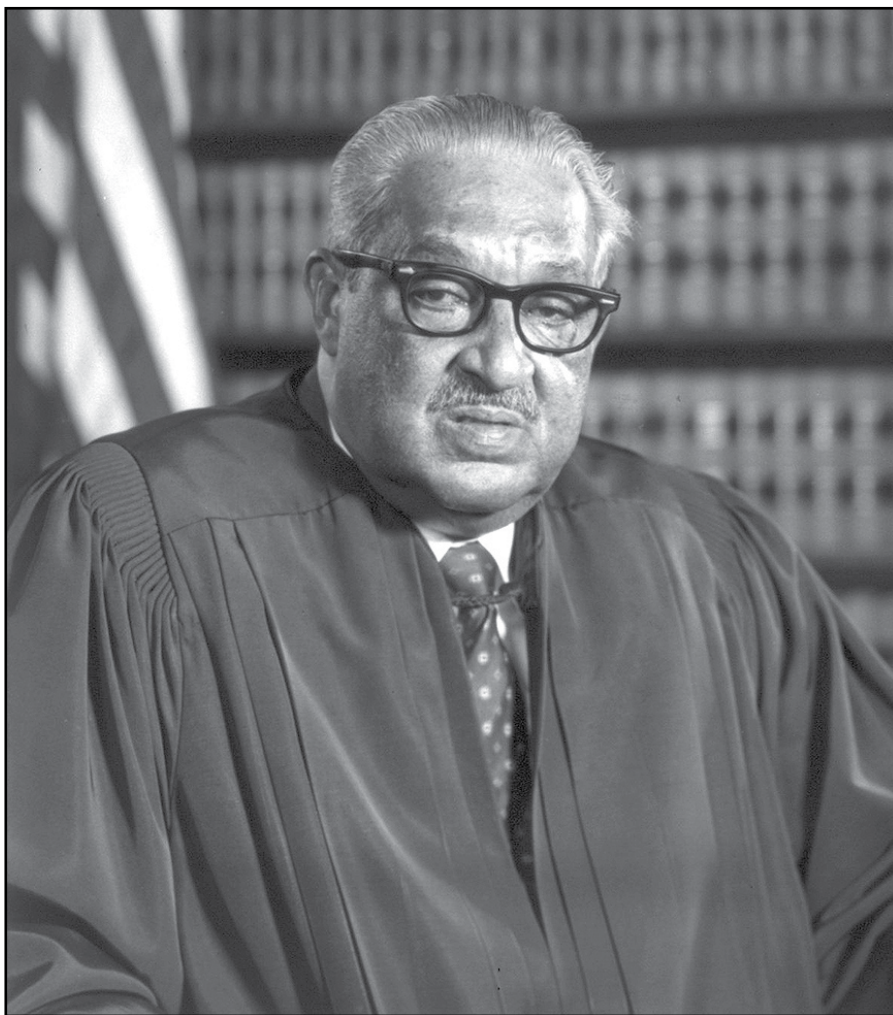
Please join BOM Bank in congratulating Katrice Below on her promotion to Senior Vice President!

Katrice brings over 25 years of banking experience, building her career in relationship management and commercial and consumer lending. Her passion for people and her commitment to excellence have made her an incredible leader within our BOM family.

Outside of work, Katrice enjoys spending time with her husband, daughter, family, and friends. She loves traveling and exploring new places—and carries that same sense of curiosity and drive into everything she does. We are so grateful to have such an amazing woman helping lead and shape our future!







Black educators turned to the court system in two notable instances during the war years. The first of the suits, “McKelpin v. New Orleans School Board,” was filed in June 1941, claiming that black teachers and principals in the New Orleans school system received uniformly lower wages than white educators possessing equal qualifications. The board lost a motion to dismiss the case in 1942 and consented to eliminate salary inequality based on race rather than fighting the case through court.

Wiley Burton McMillon and two other black educators in Iberville Parish filed suit in November 1944 claiming that the parish school board violated their equal protection rights under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by maintaining separate pay scales for black and white teachers. Thurgood Marshall of New York, special counsel for the NAACP and future Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, came to Louisiana to represent the plaintiffs.

Marshall introduced school board minutes showing the use of color classification in granting raises and documents revealing that the word “race” was not omitted from salary schedules until late 1944. He also showed the court that white teachers in Iberville Parrish received an average salary of \$1,749 for a nine-month school year (just over \$194 per month) while black teachers received an average of \$637 for a seven- or eight-month school year (\$94 per month for a seven-month academic year). As a result of the suit and Marshall’s presentation of facts, the Iberville Parish School Board dropped race as a factor in pay and instituted a new salary schedule based on experience, merit, and responsibilities of the job.

While they prevailed in these two instances, black educators failed to persuade either courts or the education establishment to equalize salaries statewide despite their efforts to do so. Black teachers’ salaries increased by more than 50 percent in Louisiana between 1940 and 1944, but that increase occurred mainly when Orleans Parish raised black teachers’ salaries because of the McKelpin case. Orleans Parish employed about 12 percent of black teachers statewide. Black educators waited until 1948 for equalized salaries across Louisiana when Governor Earl Long included that provision in an ambitious legislative program.

“ Having the Blue Cross Blue Shield card in my wallet — well it feels like armor. It feels like I’m part of this special elite club and can get what I need whatever the crisis. ”

**Right Card. Right Care.**

LOUISIANA **BLUE**  | [lblue.com](http://lblue.com)

*Tina*  
New Orleans



# Celebrate Louisiana's Native Plants

The Central Louisiana Master Gardener Association invites gardeners, nature lovers, and landscape professionals to dig into the beauty and benefits of native plants at a Native Plant Symposium on Saturday, March 14th at the Pineville Main Street Community Center, located at 708 Main Street in Pineville.

This one-day event features three distinguished guest speakers and offers an engaging exploration of how native plants shape our landscapes, support wildlife, and inspire better garden design. Doors open at 8:30am, with the symposium running until 2:00pm.

Christina Calcaterra, Field Botanist from St. Louis, will present "Plant Communities of Central Louisiana: Indicative and Rare Species from the Swamps to the Sandhills," highlighting the diversity of native habitats across the region. Darren Green, Landscape Architect for the City of Alexandria, will lead "Designing with Native Plants: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," offering practical insight into successful native plant design—and common pitfalls to avoid. Dr. Morgan Christman, Assistant Professor of Pollinator Ecology at Louisiana State University, will present "Gardening for Pollinators: The Importance of a Diverse Landscape," focusing on how gardeners can create spaces that support pollinators throughout the year.

In addition to the educational presentations, attendees can explore local vendors offering garden-related items perfect for plant enthusiasts. Silent auctions will be held throughout the day, giving participants the opportunity to bid on unique items while supporting the mission of the Central Louisiana Master Gardener Association.

Each \$35.00 registration includes breakfast snacks, coffee, and juice, along with a light lunch, making for a relaxed and enjoyable day of learning and connection. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just beginning your native plant journey,



this symposium offers inspiration, practical knowledge, and a chance to connect with others who care about Louisiana's natural landscapes.

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

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

The Master Gardener Plant Symposium promises to be an enriching experience for all garden enthusiasts with expert speakers providing valuable knowledge, local vendors

showcasing their products, and opportunities for networking and bidding on the silent auction items. Attendees are sure to leave inspired and equipped to add native plants to their landscapes. Don't miss this chance to enhance your gardening journey. Purchase your ticket today using the QR code or by calling (318) 359-5672 or (318) 240-8231 and join you fellow gardeners at the Pineville Main Street Community Center on Saturday, March 14th!





## MINI-MAX SELF-STORAGE

**OPEN 7 DAYS**

**(318) 449-8988**

3700 Lee Street @ Industrial  
minimaxstorage.com

- Climate Control & Non-Climate
- Commercial & Residential
- Individual Door Alarms
- Fenced & Lighted
- Coded Gate Access
- No Deposit








# Debbie Head Honored for Lifetime Contributions to Louisiana's Nursery Industry

By Sarah Drell



Debbie Head, owner and operator of Poole Brothers Nursery in Lecompte, has been recognized with the prestigious James A. Foret Award from the Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association (LNLA), honoring her lifetime of service, dedication, and outstanding contributions to the nursery and landscaping industry.

"It was an honor. I was surprised, and it was really heartfelt," Head said of receiving the award, which celebrates individuals who have made a lasting impact on Louisiana's green industry.

Head purchased Poole Brothers Nursery in 1998 after her husband recognized the unique opportunity the long-established business presented. What began as a promising investment has grown into a legacy of reliability, customer trust, and

industry leadership. Under Head's guidance, the nursery has continued to expand its reach while maintaining its commitment to quality plants and dependable service.

Poole Brothers Nursery proudly serves both the public and wholesale customers, supported by its own trucking company that ships plants along the East Coast. With a wide and loyal customer base, the nursery has built a reputation for consistency, professionalism, and excellence—qualities that Head is widely known for throughout the industry.

This year, Poole Brothers Nursery celebrates 102 years in business, a remarkable milestone that reflects its deep roots in Louisiana's agricultural history. The nursery originated under the Poole Brothers name and traces its early development to Hayden and Murphy in the 1920s. Today, the business remains in capable hands, with a fourth-generation grower, Jay Maloney, continuing the tradition of expert cultivation and care.

Head's leadership, work ethic, and dedication have not only preserved the nursery's historic legacy but have also strengthened its role as a cornerstone of Louisiana's nursery community. Her LNLA recognition stands as a testament to decades of commitment, resilience, and meaningful contributions to an industry she continues to help grow.

## Central Louisiana's top spot for Wholesale & Retail Plants, Trees, and Shrubs and more!

**The 39th Annual Louisiana Nursery Festival is March 20-22, 2026!**



Established 1926



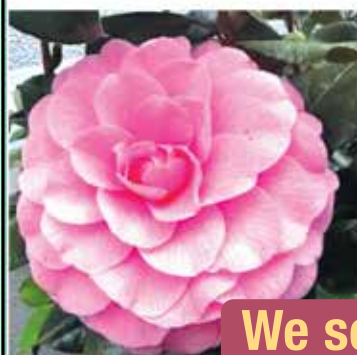
# 318-748-6579

## Poole Brothers Nursery

### 3334 Hwy 112

### Lecompte, La 71346

**Open Monday - Friday 8:00am to 3:30pm**



**We sell to the public year round! • [www.poolebrosnsy.com](http://www.poolebrosnsy.com)**



# Late Freezes and Fruit Crops: What Matters—and What Doesn't

By Michael Polozola, PhD



MICHAEL POLOZOLA, PhD

Late winter and early spring freezes are a regular part of growing fruit in Louisiana. Each year, growers and homeowners watch the forecast closely, wondering whether a cold night will undo months—or years—of care. The good news is that not every freeze is a disaster, and not every cold snap deserves a response. Understanding what actually matters can help avoid unnecessary worry and prevent well intended mistakes.

One of the most important things to remember is that dormancy provides significant cold protection. Many fruit trees and perennial fruit crops tolerate temperatures well below freezing when they are truly dormant. In most winters, temperatures that cause concern—upper teens to mid-20s—cause little to no damage to dormant plants. This is why many cold snaps in January and February pass without consequence. If buds are tight and growth has not started, there is usually no action needed beyond patience.

Freeze damage is not just about how cold it gets—it's about what growth stage the plant is in when the freeze occurs. Dormant buds and crowns are very cold tolerant. Swollen buds or emerging shoots are more sensitive. Open blooms and developing



fruit are highly vulnerable.

A temperature that causes no damage in mid-winter can be devastating later in the season, once growth has begun. For this reason, freezes later in the season often cause more damage than colder freezes earlier in winter. This is why late freezes feel unpredictable: the same temperature can produce very different outcomes, depending on crop type and stage of development.



**80**  
Years in Business  
EST. 1946



**TROTTER'S**  
electronics • appliances  
furniture

**Monday-Thursday 9:00 AM - 5:30 PM**  
**Saturday 10:00 AM - 3:00PM**

Find Us On... 

**5003 Masonic Drive**  
**Alexandria, LA**  
**www.TrotterCompanies.com**



*Your*  
**SUB-ZERO**  
**WOLF**  
*Dealer*

**BIG**

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**COMING SOON!**



**Whirlpool**  
**KitchenAid**

**318.487.8978**







## Starting a School or Community Garden: The Necessary Reality Check

By Molly Lyles



School and community gardens are desired by many community members because they recognize the benefits of learning how to grow food, spending time outdoors, working in the soil, and strengthening community connections. While the idea of a community garden is noble and well-intentioned, there are many important aspects of starting one that are often overlooked. While site selection and garden layout are critical, the long-term success of a community garden depends just as much, if not more, on logistics and planning. These are conversations I always encourage groups to have before a garden is installed.

One of the most important questions to answer is: Who will be responsible for maintaining the garden? Will it be nearby residents, students, staff, volunteers, or a specific organization? Have you spoken directly with members of the community to determine whether they are willing and able to help, or are you assuming participation



>>> **TWO LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU** <<<

**TROTTER'S**  
**BARGAIN**  
**BOX**

HELPING YOUR HOUSE FEEL LIKE HOME.

Central Louisiana's ONLY Platinum Sales & Service Center!

**Speed Queen.**

**80**  
Years in Business  
EST. 1938

**TROTTER'S**  
electronics • appliances  
furniture

**318.704.0020**

1604 Military Highway  
Pineville, LA 71360

Find us on  
Facebook!

[www.TrotterCompanies.com](http://www.TrotterCompanies.com)

**318.581.9058**

238 Keyser Avenue  
Natchitoches, LA 71457



will happen once the garden is installed? Gardens fail far more often from lack of consistent care than from poor design. Gardens that are truly community- or neighborhood-led are often more successful because there is local buy-in and a sense of shared investment.

Start-up funding is often the easiest support to secure because a new garden looks good and generates excitement. However, gardens have ongoing costs such as bed maintenance, soil amendments, plants, seeds, irrigation supplies, tools, and repairs. Long-term success requires either reliable financial support or a clear plan for securing continued funding year after year.

It is also important to determine how the food will be distributed. Will produce be shared among volunteers or donated to a kitchen or food bank? Additionally, are you growing crops that the community wants and knows how to use? Community input at the planning stage is essential. Ask who you want to donate to what produce they need and what is feasible for them to take in.

One resource I strongly encourage schools and community groups in Central Louisiana to explore is the Good Food Project of the Food Bank of Central Louisiana. The Good Food Project serves all 11 parishes covered by the Food Bank and provides extensive support for school and community gardens, including raised garden beds, soil, seeds, plants, and additional resources. The Good Food Project is coordinated by Georgette Waters, who works closely with schools and community partners to help establish and sustain productive gardens throughout the region.

Once the logistics are in place, the actual act of growing food is often the easiest part. With clear plans for leadership, funding, and distribution, it becomes much



simpler to determine what to grow, when to plant and how to manage the garden. Fortunately, groups do not have to navigate this process alone. Resources such as local Extension offices, Master Gardener volunteers, and the Good Food Project can provide education and hands-on support, including guidance on crop variety selection, planting schedules, pest and disease management, and troubleshooting challenges as they arise.

When the foundation is solid, the growing becomes an opportunity for learning, connection, and success, rather than a source of stress.



**COMING APRIL 11**

5909 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria, LA 71303 318-487-9495





# The Energy You Give

By Christy Pennison, LPC-S



January didn't ease us into the new year. Instead, it arrived with illness, winter storms, power outages, and the kind of cold that seeps into your bones. Routines were disrupted. Plans were canceled. And for many in our community, it felt like one unexpected thing after another just when things were supposed to settle down.

When life feels uncertain or out of our control, it often pulls out reactions we don't love. Irritation. Anger. Blame. Excuses. These

responses are human. They show up when our nervous system feels overwhelmed and is trying to protect us. The problem isn't that these reactions happen. It's what occurs when we stay there for too long.

Repeated stress can shape strong pathways in the brain. When our system is under pressure, it looks for efficiency, not creativity, and we begin to lean on familiar ways of thinking and reacting that once helped us cope. These responses become automatic—not because they're the best option, but because they're the most practiced. When stress shows up again, we default to what feels known, even if it leaves us feeling stuck, disconnected, or frustrated.

I've been noticing this in myself lately. When I fall into negative energy cycles, I'm not my best self. I feel more reactive and less grounded. More prone to irritation and resentment. And that energy doesn't stay contained—it quietly spreads to the people around me through my tone, my body language, and the way I show up.

I've seen this pattern often over the years as a therapist. People feel trapped, not because they are failing or not trying hard enough, but because fear, overwhelm, and distress narrow their ability to see clearly. When distress takes over, we struggle to trust ourselves and often look outside ourselves for something to blame.

Now imagine a different kind of energy. One that pauses before reacting. One that notices what's happening inside and names it without judgment. One that acknowledges the feeling but doesn't let it take the wheel. This doesn't mean ignoring frustration or pretending things are fine. It means responding instead of reacting.

So how do we begin shifting our energy? First, notice your patterns. Pay attention to how your body and mood respond when stress shows up. You might notice tight shoulders, shallow breathing, or a quick jump to irritation. These signals are your body's way of communicating, not something to criticize. Awareness isn't about judgment—it's about understanding.

Second, pause—even briefly. A short pause can change the direction of a moment. One slow breath, a step away, or a quiet check-in with yourself creates space between the trigger and your response. In that space, you regain choice and the ability to act in alignment with who you want to be.

Third, pay attention to the stories you're telling yourself. When we're overwhelmed, our brains work quickly to make sense of what's happening. They fill in gaps, assign meaning, and create explanations, often without us realizing it. These stories might

sound like, "This always happens," "I can't handle this," or "Nothing ever works out." Over time, these narratives can feel like facts, even when they're shaped by fear or past experiences. Gently slowing down to ask, "Is this the only explanation? Is there another way to look at this?" can loosen the grip of a story that's keeping you stuck and open the door to a more solution-focused response.



Fourth, protect your energy with compassion. Notice how you feel after certain conversations, spaces, or commitments. Some leave you feeling lighter and more grounded. Others leave you feeling drained or tense. This awareness isn't about judging others—it's about honoring your limits and making choices that support your well-being. Setting boundaries can be an act of care.

And finally, remember that it's okay to get help noticing these patterns. Many of our reactions are so familiar that we don't see them clearly on our own. Support—whether through counseling, reflection, or trusted relationships—can help bring clarity and create space for change.

The energy you carry matters. It affects how you experience your life and how others experience you. And when you choose curiosity, presence, and compassion—even imperfectly—it creates ripples that reach farther than you may realize.

## TSS SECURITY

Over 50 Years Combined  
Experience  
Here in Central Louisiana



Serving the security needs in our area with Burglar & Fire Alarms, Surveillance Cameras, Access Door Control Systems, as well as Customized Security Solutions. We provide state-of-the-art Monitoring WITHOUT requiring long-term contracts!



**DARYL TERRY**  
Owner



**MIKE SHELTON**  
Sales Manager

**Call Us At  
448-7272**





# Thank You, February!

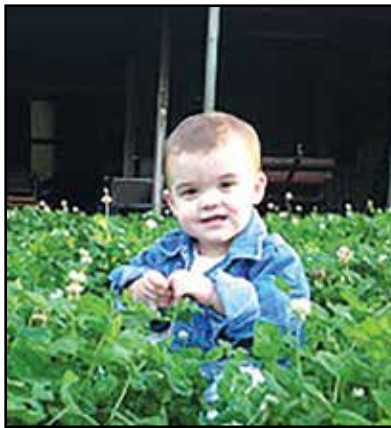
By Debbie Guy, LCSW



It's February! A hodgepodge month. Winter pops a cold snap. Spring hits back with a "digging in the yard" day. Mornings bring "ooooh" as we see a random white Jonquil standing proudly alone, in the middle of our brown, scraggly yard. Something money can't buy. Perhaps that's why it's so sweet. Nature is renewing, a hint we should, too.

We try to stay real, but soon our "what's important" revelations mustered up during Thanksgiving and Christmas are forgotten, boxed and stored. January, we're paying those emotional purchases, finding space for new stuff and our 21-day miraculous change-your-life-program has lost its steam. Something in us, says, "Stop! What's missing?" as we jump on TikTok's latest craze. Aren't we human "beings"; not human "doings"?

It's been said that we mostly spend our lives conjugating three verbs: to want, to have, and to do. Ouch! That hits hard but, honestly, that's what our finances and environment reflect. So, let's examine our "want and have" evidence. Tax season provides us the ideal opportunity to discern where our money went and where it will go. So, purposefully set aside funds for other's wants and needs; help with no expectations. Next, on to our



environment. Look around. Christmas brought in new, so let February take out the old. We got a new coffee maker for a reason, don't save the old one "just in case". While putting away winter clothes, donate the ones we didn't wear, now! These two actions kick starts us to "be kind" and "be aware."

Lastly, the hardest, transforming our "do" into "be." How? We hit the brakes, take a breath, ask questions. Here's a few to consider. What drives our "do" choices? Love? Fear? Need for approval? And then, is "no" even in our vocabulary? Have we ever said it to anyone other than our child wanting another cookie? Are our days so filled with "doing" that we can't "be" with a friend hearing scary news? Our answers will start the first leg of the journey. Our quest is not grandiose; it's not a bold declaration. No cheering crowds. In truth, it's a gradual, quiet, inner transformation; culling the better from the best. Others may not even notice, until one day, when all of our "do's" are swirling around us, we calmly, confidently, gently say, "no" and live a just "be" day.

How does this play out? We get a call. Can y'all keep the baby this weekend? Sure! We put all "do's" on "No" alert. The weather is perfect, so outside we go. Our toddler walks around, stooping to pick and share a random flower. We follow, smile and say, "Thank-you, it's beautiful!" She runs to an inviting patch of clover and plops down. We plop down, too. We call her name and snap a casual pic with no concerns of the old shed in the background...it's our "just be" connected moment. A one time, never-to-be-repeated moment. You can't buy that. Thank you, February!

## THERE'S A LOT TO LOVE AT SOUTHERN HERITAGE BANK

### *Experienced Lenders*

Our experienced lenders want to assist you in all of your banking needs. They work hard with customers to develop lasting relationships and contribute to the financial success of their customers.



**Chuck Thomas**  
NMLS #660935



**Vanessa Barger**  
NMLS #684712



**Lanadia Lloyd**  
NMLS #2310774



**Craig Littleton**  
NMLS #607506



**Morgan Benoit**  
NMLS #2251218

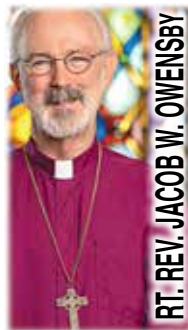


[www.SHBNET.com](http://www.SHBNET.com)



# Love Is Our Highest Calling

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



RT. REV. JACOB W. OWENSBY

Some people seem to know from a very early age what they should do with their lives. They feel driven to write or to paint, to kick a soccer ball or to study primates, to fight injustice or to discover the laws governing the universe. Think Annie Dillard, Pablo Picasso, Jane Goodall, or Stephen Hawking.

They will sacrifice time and money, reputation and relationships, and sometimes even their health for the sake of this defining passion. If they were prevented from pursuing their desire, their life would seem to them to be hollow. Unbearable.

When people talk about calling or vocation, they often have this sort of thing in mind. A calling defines who we are, and being who we are makes life worth living. As the writer Emily Esfahani Smith points out, most people will not experience a Jane-Goodall-sized sense of calling. If we

are able to feel that life is worth living only if we have that sort of vocation, most human beings will spend their lives sinking into despair.

Instead, Smith says this: “The world is full of retail clerks, coupon sorters, accountants, and students. It is full of highway flaggers, parents, government bureaucrats, and bartenders” (The Power of Meaning, p. 95). Many of these people

live rich, rewarding lives. Smith explains this by distinguishing between calling and having a purpose. Most people don’t find meaning in their job as such. Rather, the job—whatever it may be—presents for them the opportunity to help other people. That is why their lives feel worth living.

Smith’s distinction between vocation and purpose is a helpful one. Nevertheless, I believe that what she calls “purpose” is precisely how Christians should understand the deeply imbedded, God-given calling that all human beings share. We are called to be our true selves. Being our true selves is not doing whatever we feel like doing, or saying whatever is on



THE PENTECOSTALS OF ALEXANDRIA



POA.CHURCH • 2817 RAPIDES AVE

SERVICE TIMES

Sunday School - 9AM • Sunday Morning Worship Service - 10AM • POA Wednesday - 7PM





our minds, or having everything we want. We are our true selves when we live into our essence. We were created in the image of God. So, to be our true selves is to love what God loves how God loves it.

It should come as a shock to no one that this is an infinitely tall order. Being our true self is something we grow into or, conversely, something we fail to actualize. Paradoxically, becoming ourselves involves shedding old ways and old assumptions. It involves taking on patterns of behaving and thinking that initially seem anything but natural to us:

- Forgiving people who aren't sorry.
- Loving people who hate our guts.
- Giving our stuff away to people who haven't earned it.
- Seeing every stranger not as a threat but as the friend we're about to make.

In other words, becoming your true self involves changing who you are. That's what growth is, after all. When a potential becomes an actuality, an old actuality passes away. Think acorns and oak trees. Or, better yet, think Simon and Peter. On their very first meeting, Jesus called Simon to follow him by way of changing his name to Peter. Now, strictly speaking, Peter wasn't really "Peter" at that instant. He was going to grow into Peter gradually. Well, sort of erratically, actually. But that's another story (John 1:42).

The point is that Jesus didn't call Peter to a job or a career. He called Peter to be somebody. To be the image of God in whatever circumstances he found himself. Whether he was preaching or eating dinner with Gentiles, whether he was fishing or healing the sick, that activity was the means by which Peter could love.

Flash forward to the end of John's Gospel. Remember that the crucified Jesus had risen and appeared to his friends. Time had passed, and the disciples were out fishing. Jesus showed up and they all shared a seaside breakfast of bread and fish. Three times Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" And each time Peter said, "Yes," Jesus told him to feed his sheep. "Love!" in other words. Make everything you do an expression of the love that God is pouring into you (John 21:1-19).

Jesus showed us how to love in our ordinary lives. Whatever our jobs may be, whatever activities may fill our days, we can make our lives an expression of love. We can pursue our calling. We can strive to love what God loves how God loves it. If you want to find your calling, follow the example of Jesus. Take every present moment, no matter how mundane or stressful or baffling, as an opportunity to love.

*Bishop Jake is the 4th Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Western Louisiana, the 26th chancellor of the University of the South, husband, father, noted speaker, teacher, and author. His 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](http://jakeowensby.com).*

*We're here for it all.* **HOME LOANS | HOME EQUITY LOANS | HOME EQUITY LINES OF CREDIT**

# Let's get you home!

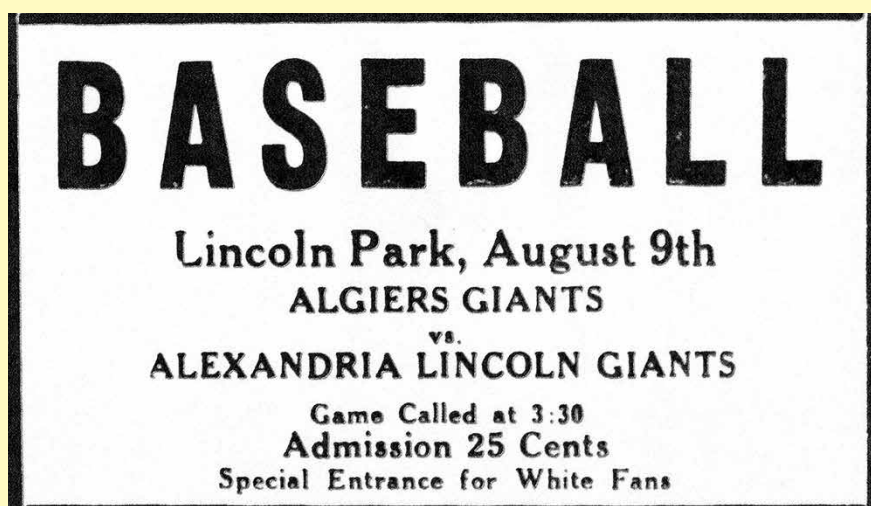
Apply online today at [www.ffbla.bank](http://www.ffbla.bank)



# The Negro Leagues in Alexandria

By Michael Wynne

Due to “Jim Crow” in the era of racial segregation of sports that lasted all of the way up to the 1970s and later, some of the greatest, yet sadly least known, baseball players had to play in segregated black baseball leagues. Because of this, these phenomenal players often did not achieve immortal fame like their white peers, with only a few after their deaths receiving their just and deserved praise. Officially, the term “Negro Leagues” refers to the organized, structured circuits of teams at various levels across the country that began in 1920, from top-shelf leagues such as the Negro National League and the Negro American League, to smaller scale operations such as the Negro Southern League. Teams belonging to these “negro” leagues (as they were called) were in almost every size city throughout America, including Alexandria.



The first official African-American team formed here was the very short-lived West Alexandria Lightfoots in June of 1906, a year before the white Alexandria team, the Alexandria White Sox, started. The black teams always played at the now-defunct former city-owned Lincoln Park, now a largely abandoned field next to the railroad track near the intersection of Lee and Harris Streets in downtown Alexandria. From 1906-1932, various short-lived black teams formed, changed their names and their leagues, and quickly died, often in mid-season. But the best known of the Alexandria black teams were the “Alexandria Pioneers” and the “Alexandria Lincoln Giants” (sometimes referred to as the Alexandria Lincoln Black Giants).

Lincoln Park here was formally opened on July 3 and 4, 1932 with a game between the Pioneers and the Lake Charles All-Stars. The new park was described by the Town Talk: “The negroes have constructed a modern baseball park, with a grandstand seating capacity of 700. The park has been built according to regulations at a cost of only \$900, according to club officials. The grandstand is 150 feet long.

**Loewer Powersports**

**PRESENTS**

**ROCK THE BOAT**

**SALES EVENT**

**March 6-7**

**G3 Boats**  
A YAMAHA BOAT COMPANY

**GatorTail**

**MERCURY**

**YAMAHA**

**xpress boats**  
we build excitement

**PHOENIX**  
BOATS

**SEA-DOO**

**VERANDA**  
LUXURY PORTABLES

**LOEWER POWERSPORTS** 318-487-9495 [loewerpowersports.com](http://loewerpowersports.com)  
5909 Coliseum Blvd. Alexandria, LA



Special reservations will be made for white persons...Scores of white persons have been attending games played so far this season, and as many as 250 of them are anticipated at the formal opening contests.”

The first roster of players included: manager Winifred S. Welch, Lofton in center field, George Sias on 3rd base, Jones in centerfield, Lashie on 2nd base, Raymond on 1st base, Willie “Lefty” Simms in right field, Pete at shortstop, and Parker and famed “Iron Man Moseley” —both pitchers. Other later players on the Pioneers and Giants’ teams had fanciful names including: “Big Train” Parker, Arthur “Pretty Boy” Floyd Kranson, “Fats” Johnson, “Sweet Papa”, and Lloyd “Pepper” Bassette. Both teams play similarly imaginatively-named teams, including the Monroe Monarchs, New Orleans Black Pels, Pittsburgh, PA Crawfords, Lecompte Dirty Devils, the Yannigans, Indianapolis A.B.C.’s, Beaumont Black Exporters, and the Shreveport Black Sports.



The Alexandria Pioneers lasted only a month and were quickly eclipsed by the newly transferred from Shreveport team, now called the Alexandria Lincoln Giants. The Giants had a great remaining season in 1932, winning almost every game, and in 1933 would play the 1932 negro leagues’ world champs, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, a team which included the legendary Hall of Famer Leroy “Satchel” Page.



I had the wondrous honor of sitting alone with Satchel in the stands in 1972 during a semi-pro exhibition game and sharing a box of popcorn with him as well as getting a baseball signed by him—a day I will never forget and feature of a future book.

Sadly, this historic Alexandria Lincoln Giants black team played their last game on Lincoln Field in late August of 1934 when they were shortly thereafter sold and transferred to New Orleans. Alexandria, a true pioneer in the negro leagues, never had another similar team here and the predominantly white Alexandria Aces (the subject of a future article) remains dominant in local baseball fans minds.

# Spawn is on the Horizon!



Make Your Plans to Visit Beautiful Toledo Bend Reservoir Today!

For more information, call 800-256-LAKE (5253) or check the website [www.srala-toledo.com](http://www.srala-toledo.com)

15091 Texas Highway • Many, LA 318-256-4112  
Like us on facebook!



## Rapides Parish Opens Month of the Young Child With Record Success

Rapides Parish School District launches February's Month of the Young Child with strong momentum, highlighting early childhood enrollment, record-setting performance results, and continued community investment that increases access for families across the parish. The annual observance reinforces the district's commitment to ensuring every child from birth to age five has access to high-quality early learning.

Beginning in February, families are encouraged to enroll children from birth to age five in Public School Pre-K, Early Head Start, Head Start, and Type III Early Learning Centers.

- Early childhood programs (birth to age four): [rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com](http://rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com)
- Public School Pre-K applications: [www.rpsb.us/enrollment](http://www.rpsb.us/enrollment)



The Rapides Early Childhood Network also provides full-year scholarships for children birth to age three whose parents are working, enrolled in school, or actively seeking employment. With childcare costs often exceeding \$12,000 per year, these scholarships remove a major financial barrier, allowing families to remain employed or pursue education while ensuring their children receive high-quality early learning. More than 200 employees across Rapides Parish currently benefit from this support, strengthening both family stability and the local workforce.

Superintendent Jeff Powell emphasized the importance of community partnership, noting, "Rapides Parish is better together. When families, educators, and community partners unite around our youngest learners, we create opportunities that strengthen

every part of our parish."

Throughout February, the Rapides Early Childhood Network will host family engagement activities and celebrations recognizing the importance of early childhood learning.

The Rapides Early Childhood Network enters Early Ed Month with historic academic achievements. In the 2024–2025 academic year, the network earned a record-breaking Performance Profile

score of 5.98, its highest to date and one of the strongest in Louisiana.

Twenty-one Type III Early Learning Centers earned "Excellent" ratings, reflecting exceptional instructional quality and strong teacher–child interactions. These results continue a multi-year trend of rising quality. Since 2019, Rapides Parish has increased publicly funded early childhood seats by 8.48% while improving overall performance by 13.6%.

The network also posted the highest DIBELS early literacy benchmark rate in the state among networks with 18 or more centers, with 44.6% of students meeting or exceeding benchmark expectations—a strong indicator of kindergarten readiness.

Early Childhood Director Cindy Rushing noted, "The data tells a story of progress, but it also challenges us to do more. Our mission is for every child to thrive, and we're not stopping until we achieve that goal."

A major highlight of Early Ed Month is the continued community funding support for the 2026–2027 school year, which will provide scholarships to approximately 350 children, birth to age three, to attend high-quality Type III early learning centers.

This opportunity is made possible through The Rapides Foundation's base award and its local incentive challenge, which matches every locally raised dollar. The Rapides Early Childhood Network can then leverage this investment through Louisiana's State and Local Match Fund Program, generating a \$4.00 return for every \$1.00 raised locally.

The Month of the Young Child continues a long-standing tradition of collaboration among the Rapides Parish School Board, the Ready Start Rapides Early Childhood Network, The Rapides Foundation, the Louisiana Department of Education, and numerous community partners. Together, they are advancing a shared mission: ensuring every child in Rapides Parish enters kindergarten prepared for success.

To learn more about the Rapides Early Childhood Network, visit [www.rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com](http://www.rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com).





## Rapides Parish Early Childhood Education Registration Now Open!

The Rapides Early Childhood Network early childhood applications are now open!

For Birth-to-Four Children, Scan the QR Code to Apply:

- Head Start | Ages 3 - 4 by 9-30-26
- Early Head Start | Infant - Age 2 by 9-30-26
- Type III Early Learning Centers | Infant - Age 4



For Pre-K Registration, Scan the QR Code to Apply:

- Pre-K | Must be 4 years old by 9-30-26



### 2025 Rapides Early Childhood Network Highlights

- The Highest Performance Profile on record. According to the 2024-2025 Network Performance Profile, Rapides scored 5.98. Twenty-one early childhood providers received "Excellent" scores.
- Since 2019, Rapides Parish has increased publicly funded early childhood seats by 8.48% while simultaneously increasing Performance Profile scores by 13.6%.
- Rapides Parish earned a Kindergarten DIBELS score of 44.6% at or above benchmark, significantly outperforming the state average.
- Exceeded fundraising goals for our 2026-2027 Early Childhood Education campaign to provide 350 scholarships.



Learn more at: <https://www.rapidesearlychildhoodnetwork.com>





# Passing It On: Pysanky (Kraslice) Making in Central Louisiana

By David J. Holcombe

The Louisiana Folklore Society, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louisiana Division of the Arts and the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism sponsor a series of mini-grants dedicated to passing on folk traditions in Louisiana. One of those grants has been awarded to Frieda Tuma and Nicole Holcombe to lead a series of workshops on pysanky making at the Libuse Branch of the Rapides Parish Library.



Three separate workshops will be held on February 28th, March 28th, and April 25th at the Libuse Library to teach participants how to make pysanky (or kraslice in Czech) to help pass on this ancient tradition of egg decoration to new generations.

Pysanky making pre-dated Christianity by a thousand years, but was adopted as a Lenten and Easter activity by Slavic groups in Eastern Europe. Women usually make the decorated eggs, which were blessed by a priest on Easter day. The eggs were then distributed to their recipients for various reasons: courtship, fertility, protection of the home, productivity in the fields, burial with the deceased, and even placed with infants to keep them from illness. Each of the hundreds of designs and colors had some meaning. Now, pysanky (kraslice) are made as a folk art and exchanged with family and friends at Easter. Pysanky are fragile (they are a real egg), but can last decades or centuries if you handle them with care.

The tradition existed among the early Czech settlers in Libuse and Kolin, but gradually died out over time. Nicole Holcombe helped reintroduce the tradition back into Central Louisiana, specifically to the descendants of Czech immigrants. Nicole also taught in local schools for decades and pysanky are often found in homes all around Central Louisiana. Nicole also taught Mrs. Frieda Tuma, who has since become a master in her own right.

Mrs. Tuma will direct the workshops, providing the materials, including raw eggs, dyes, kitskas, wax, candles, and paper towels to each participant. She will instruct the drawing of a design on the egg. Then, teach the correct use of the kitska (a small brass funnel) for the application of wax and also teach the order of use of the dyes. Finally, Mrs. Tuma will demonstrate how to remove the wax with a candle. Each participant's egg will be subsequently cleaned by Mrs. Tuma, then varnished and emptied.



The workshops are free and open to the general public, with special invitations to young people in the Libuse and Kolin communities of Czech descent. Prospective attendees (11-year-old and above) should contact the Libuse Branch of the Rapides Parish Library system by emailing [lbcirc@rpl.org](mailto:lbcirc@rpl.org) or by calling the library at (318) 443-7259. There will be three separate but identical workshops, each with 20 participants who will be provided with the necessary supplies. Since you use a lighted candle, roll up or short sleeves are recommended and hair should be pulled back, if possible.



Your finished product will be available at the Libuse Library a week or so after each workshop, which gives Mrs. Tuma time to de-wax, varnish, and empty the pysanky. Remember, you work with a raw egg which can break anywhere during the process. Also, pysanky should never be placed in direct sun which fades the dyes. There is a Ukrainian saying that "the world will never end as long as pysanky are being made," so let's make sure this beautiful tradition continues.



# River Oaks Opens 2026 with Bold Painting, Emerging Talent, and a Fresh Season of Creativity

River Oaks Square Arts Center is kicking off 2026 with a dynamic new set of exhibitions that reflect what makes this creative corner of downtown Alexandria so special—nationally recognized artists, compelling resident work, and a growing community of makers learning and creating right here at River Oaks. Currently, visitors will find three distinct shows across the galleries, each offering its own voice and energy while collectively celebrating process, place, and artistic growth.

In the Bolton-Davis Gallery, painter and educator Jimmy Leslie headlines the season with *Between Simplicity and Structure: Landscapes*. Leslie is a painter, former college art professor, and currently a Resident Artist for fine art brands Liquitex and Winsor & Newton. He also serves as Director of Education for the brands in North America, working closely with their marketing team on creative assets tied to product development. His paintings have been exhibited across the United States and are held in collections in the U.S., England, Wales, Australia, and Costa Rica. His work is grounded in a pursuit that is deceptively difficult—clarity. As Leslie puts it, “I am constantly trying to achieve simplicity in my paintings which continues to be a lifelong challenge.” That pursuit shapes both his paintings and his teaching, where he enjoys helping students overcome stumbling blocks through clear, practical instruction. Those interested can follow him on Instagram at @jimmysleslieart.



the highest levels, while also showcasing the incredible talent we have right here at River Oaks—including our resident artists and our RoCK Lab ceramics students. It’s inspiring to see what happens when people are given space, instruction, and encouragement to grow. These exhibitions represent the full spectrum of our mission, and we can’t wait for the community to experience them.”

In addition to his featured exhibition, Jimmy Leslie will also lead a hands-on workshop through the Explore Alexandria/Pineville Education Series titled “Simplifying the Process: Paint Loosely with Gouache”, taking place February 11th and 12th. This class will focus on loosening up technique, simplifying decision-making, and learning how to stay engaged in the process without getting stuck on outcomes—a philosophy Leslie emphasizes in his own studio practice and teaching.

These exhibitions will be on display through April 4th. The opening reception is sponsored by Explore Alexandria/Pineville, the City of Alexandria, Hotel Bentley, Red River Bank, the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, CLECO, The Bentley Room, The Mirror Room, RoyOMartin, Legacy Floral Designs, and Diamond Grill.

For more information about the exhibitions, the workshop, or upcoming events at River Oaks, call (318) 473-2670, visit [RiverOaksArtsCenter.com](http://RiverOaksArtsCenter.com), or follow River Oaks Arts Center on Facebook.

In the Galerie des Amis, River Oaks will feature resident artist Leslie Carmouche with her exhibition “Marks of Becoming”. Carmouche is a Louisiana-based artist and founder of LOCart, and her work explores emergence through layered abstraction—allowing subjects to develop organically rather than forcing them into a predetermined outcome. “Marks of Becoming” begins with abstract marks that create movement, atmosphere, and tone. From those evolving surfaces, subject matter slowly reveals itself: coastal and marshland forms, contemporary portraits, animals, and occasional florals surfaced through intuition rather than plan. Rooted in a Louisiana sense of place, the work reflects a quiet relationship with water, weather, and time. In Carmouche’s paintings, the background is not simply a setting, it’s an active force guiding what the piece becomes.

Meanwhile in the Stokes-Harris Gallery, River Oaks is proud to present the RoCK Lab Studios Intermediate Ceramic Artists Inaugural Art Exhibition, a juried showcase featuring work from the next wave of ceramic artists coming up through the River Oaks Clay + Kiln Lab. Over the past several months, these students have demonstrated consistency, integrity, and real growth in their craftsmanship—earning invitations into the Intermediate Ceramics program, which will include increased studio access, first-access invitations to skills classes, and opportunities for artist critiques. This inaugural exhibition is a meaningful moment for the program and for River Oaks as a whole, spotlighting emerging artists who are building their practice through discipline, curiosity, and the joy of making. The invited student artists, listed alphabetically, are: Marsha Barbera, Brette Brian, Gary Dewitt, Margaret Deshotel, Jennifer Atwood, Shannon McClung, Rowdy McClung, Christine Perkins, Savannah Ross, Treasure Texada, and Angela Winke.

The RoCK Lab program is led by Amber Tate, Lead Educational Instructor for Ceramics, whose guidance and instruction have helped these students build confidence and momentum as artists.

“This is exactly what River Oaks is about,” says Executive Director Rachael Dauzat. “We’re proud to bring in artists like Jimmy Leslie who work and teach at

Advanced  
Cosmetic  
Techniques

- ♥ Eyebrows
- ♥ Eyeliner
- ♥ Lipcolor
- ♥ Blush
- ♥ Eyeshadow

**318.352.4983**

**Natural Looking Make-Up That Won't  
Smear, Smudge or Wash Off**

*Applying Permanent Make-Up for 38 Years!*

♥ **SPECIAL** ♥  
**\$200.00 FOR NEW**  
Eyebrows • Eyeliner  
Lip Color • Lipliner  
With Ariel or Hunter

**Maintenance Appointments Only \$100.00**

**[www.permanentmakeupstudio.com](http://www.permanentmakeupstudio.com)**

**110 University Parkway • Natchitoches, LA**





# EXCEPTIONAL CARE. CLOSE TO HOME.

## WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.

Today's Hardtner Medical Center represents the culmination of years of strategic planning and assembly of the best and most modern. Through all of the growth and expansion, our focus remains – providing exceptional health care to our patients.

From outstanding specialty care to enhanced diagnostics and treatment, Hardtner is here for a healthier you.

**hardtnermedical.com**  
**(318) 495-3131**

## MORE SERVICES:

- > Emergency Care
- > Medical Clinic
- > Surgery
- > Rehab Center
- > Specialty Care
- > Mental Health



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.





# The Importance of Heart Health and Prevention

February is American Heart Month, and CHRISTUS Health is reminding the community of the importance of caring for the body's most vital organ through prevention, early detection, and healthy lifestyle choices. According to the American Heart Association, heart disease remains the leading cause of death for adults in the United States, killing about 916,000 Americans each year.

Herbert Perkins, Age 72, says his outlook on life changed after receiving care from Dr. Muhammad Pir, an interventional cardiologist with CHRISTUS Heart & Vascular Institute in Alexandria. What began as a heart health concern became a turning point that reshaped how Mr. Perkins approaches his daily life when he was diagnosed with severely blocked arteries.



Perkins underwent triple bypass heart surgery and today is living proof that early detection saved his life. "Dr. Pir listened to me and took my concerns seriously from the very beginning," Perkins said. "Because of his care and attention, my heart condition was caught early, and that made all the difference."

Screening for heart-related hypertension is recommended beginning at age 18, and cholesterol checks should start as early as age 30, or earlier for individuals with a family history of heart disease. "Prevention truly is the strongest tool we have against heart disease," Pir said. "Simple steps like staying active, eating a heart-healthy diet, maintaining healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and following up regularly with your primary care provider can make a tremendous difference."

Symptoms of heart disease can vary between individuals and between men and women. These may include chest discomfort,

fluttering sensations, shortness of breath, sudden fatigue, or swelling in the legs or feet.

For Perkins, that early action and the care he received helped change his life and reinforced a message he hopes others will take to heart. "As you get older, you really start to understand how important it is to stay on top of your health, especially with the heart," Perkins said. "Those regular checkups and tests gave me answers and peace of mind. Early detection made all the difference for me."



## HOW MONALISA TOUCH® CAN HELP YOU

*The MonaLisa Touch®, the only laser approved by Health Canada for treatment of vaginal atrophy, offers relief of vaginal discomfort, itching, dryness, painful intercourse & other symptoms experienced by perimenopausal, menopausal or post cancer patients.*

- Pain-Free • Hormone-Free • No Downtime
- In-Office • Less Than 5 Minutes • Quick Relief & Results

**URO**center  
ALEXANDRIA UROLOGY ASSOCIATES

**318.473.2169**

1201 N Bolton, Ste C, Alexandria, LA 71301



# Love to Feel Good

By Cornel D. Leblanc, DC



Valentine's Day will be here before you know it, and the biggest way you can show you or your loved one that you care about them is to get them adjusted. People suffer from chronic neck and low back pain and want an alternative option besides injections, medications, or even surgery. In our office at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center and Alexandria Disc Center, we specialize in giving our patients the care that they have been looking for. We offer adjusting and the latest technology in therapeutic care to getting our patients back to enjoying the life they love.

Chiropractic adjustment, as we have witnessed, is powerful. Getting adjustment regularly can help maximize your nervous system to its fullest potential by increasing range of motion, lowering pain and tension, decreasing stress levels, and can also improve posture. Many people may feel more relaxed and have an over-all increase in energy following an adjustment, which would be ideal for enjoying this Valentine's Day.

Now, if you have been suffering chronic neck and low back pain, sciatica, or stenosis, then we have a safe and successful alternative for you. Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center and Alexandria Disc Center, is at the forefront of the latest technology by utilizing Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression therapy. The Accu-Spina non-surgical spinal decompression table uses specific traction that softly stretches the soft tissue spine which allows for pressure to be taken off the spine without muscle contraction. Our table specifically targets and isolates the exact disc involved and uses negative pressure to draw the hydration of the disc back inside and rehydrates the disc. This result allows pressure to be taken off the disc and nerve. In just a matter of a series of treatments, your body begins to heal and the disc begins to rehydrate, reducing pressure, and helping you move more with greater comfort and ease.

We also use a non-invasive medically certified electroanalgesia called the Matrix that is combined with the Non-Surgical Spinal Decompression therapy. It is a topical non-invasive procedure—like having an epidural without the actual injection. We had patients pain levels that were a twelve out of ten to go down to a two out of ten level on the first try. Our patients have just loved the Matrix along with the decompression therapy. It has been described as a “game changer” by our patients that are nurses, construction workers, teachers, police, and anyone that suffers with severe neck and low back pain.

Nothing should slow you down this Valentine's Day and if you would love to feel your best, it is worth it to you to reach out to us at Alexandria Spine & Rehab Center and Alexandria Disc Center today by calling (318) 561-6250 and experience the freedom to move comfortably and enjoy life to the fullest.



## Lawrence P. Menache M.D. Radiation Oncologist

Over 35 Years of Experience  
Using the Latest Techniques

Cenla's Most Experienced  
Radiation Oncologist  
Continues to See  
New Patients at...

CHRISTUS Cabrini  
Cancer Center

**318.448.6917**

Rapides Cancer Center

**318.769.7200**

Savoy Cancer Center

**337.468.3099**

**AlexandriaRadiationOncology.com**



Bradley F.  
Kirzner, D.C.

Cornel David  
Leblanc, D.C.

Nicolle  
Rivera, D.C.

Brian  
Peters, D.C.

## PEAK PERFORMANCE, OPTIMAL HEALTH



- Improved Lifestyle & Well-Being
- From Infants to Seniors
- Resolve Health from Injuries or Discomfort

*Se habla Español*

**318.561.6250**



1133 MacArthur Drive, Alexandria, LA (Next to the Water Tower)

[www.AlexandriaSpineandRehab.com](http://www.AlexandriaSpineandRehab.com)





ALEXANDRIA COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL PRESENTS

# dancing with the stars



**Dr. Kelvin Spears  
Mandi Guillory**

**MARCH 13 @ 6PM-10PM  
RANDOLPH RIVERFRONT CENTER**

***Get Your Tickets Today and  
Choose Dr. Spears & Mandi  
at Checkout!***

***<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/dwt/>***





# All New W

*WHEN OTHER DEALERS*



6699 Coliseum Blvd, Alexandria, LA 71



# Walker Kia!

*WON'T, WALKER WILL!*



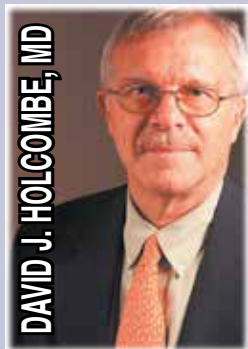
## Walker Kia

303 | 318-321-5576 | [WalkerKia.com](http://WalkerKia.com)



# Vaccination Changes for Children

By David J. Holcombe, MD, MSA, FACP



The Advisory Council for Immunization Practices have made recent recommendations to eliminate seven childhood vaccinations from the recommended list. This reduces the recommended vaccines from seventeen to eleven. Vaccines now fall in three categories: those recommended, those recommended only to high-risk children, and those requiring shared decision making between parents and providers.

Vaccinations that remain recommended include: diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis or whooping cough (contained in DTaP); measles, mumps, and rubella (contained in MMR); varicella (chickenpox); Hib (Hemophilus influenzae type B); polio and pneumococcal (PVC) vaccines; plus HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) with only one shot recommended. These are the seven recommended shots, with some of them containing multiple components.

A certain number of vaccines are now only recommended for high-risk children—those with underlying health conditions or under medical treatments reducing immunity. Those vaccines include: RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus); hepatitis A and B; dengue (given in certain endemic regions only); and meningococcus ACWX or B.

The vaccines which have been allocated to the “shared decision making” category

include: rotavirus; COVID-19; influenza (flu); hepatitis A and B; and meningococcal vaccine (Meningitis ACWY and B). Hepatitis B was formerly given to all newborns and was responsible for a dramatic decrease in hepatitis B cases in infants. It is now only recommended for newborns where the mother is known to be hepatitis B positive (something not always available).

One stated rationale for these dramatic changes is to restore public trust in vaccinations. Another is to align U.S. vaccine recommendations with those of some other countries (such as Denmark and Japan, both lower than regimes in most developed countries). RFK, Jr. believes in a “less is more” vaccination policy promising the same benefits with less risks. Another justification for the changes was the contention that some vaccines were not sufficiently tested for a long enough time to assure their safety (something highly disputed by pharmaceutical companies and vaccine experts).

An over-arching justification is that some vaccines carry excessive risk relative to their benefits, so why expose any children to even minimal risks? This transfers the responsibility of discussing risk/benefit ratios to parents and their individual physicians concerning safety and efficacy or the so-called “shared decision making” group of vaccines.

What do we risk by making these changes? RSV (Respiratory syncytial virus) results in most of the infant respiratory hospitalizations in the U.S. (where 80% of hospitalized children under 2 have no high-risk factors). Hepatitis A vaccination

## CENLA PHYSICIANS HEALTHCARE CLINIC

Now Accepting New Patients  
& Walk-ins Welcome!

### **Providing:**

- Primary Care
- Preventative Care & Screenings
- In House Lab
- Diabetes Management
- School Physicals
- Injuries

# 318-542-4441

**5101 Highway 28 East  
Pineville, LA 71360**

We accept all insurance providers and cash pay.








resulted in a 90% drop in the disease in toddlers since its introduction in 1996. Hepatitis B vaccination resulted in a 99% drop in cases of hepatitis B among children and teenagers from 1990 to 2019, notably among neonates. Rotavirus used to result in 20,000 childhood hospitalizations with 50 deaths yearly prior to the introduction of the vaccine in 2006. Meningococcal meningitis causes less than


1,000 cases yearly, but kills 10% of those who contract the disease and disables 20% of survivors. Flu and COVID kill a small variable number of children every year (note that the 2025-2026 flu season is the worst in the last 25 years).

Both the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association condemned the recent changes as “dangerous and unnecessary.” Anti-vaxxer fears permeate the internet and have resulted in a significant decrease in childhood vaccinations nationwide. Herd immunity requires that 95% or higher of the population be vaccinated, but that percentage continues to drop in recent years. The result has been measles outbreaks in several states (most recently in South Carolina) and concerns about resurgences of RSV, rotavirus, hepatitis A and B, meningococcus, COVID, and flu cases and deaths.

Exaggerating vaccine risks or claiming inadequate testing does not alter the fact that vaccines are both safe and effective. The extraordinary changes from the HHS Secretary and the CDC pose significant risks to public health over the short and long term.

# WE ARE COMMITTED TO






*improving  
QUALITY  
of LIFE*

*“The staff is great! They are always willing to talk to you and help you. The aides are also very dedicated. The entire building is very clean, and well taken care of.”*

Linda C.



## Hilltop

NURSING & REHABILITATION CENTER, LLC

336 Edgewood Drive P.O. BOX 3067  
Pineville, Louisiana 71361  
318-442-9552  
hilltopnursingandrehabilitation.com

**Central Management Company**



# We've Been Dressing Medical Professionals for Over 50 Years!

CENTRAL LOUISIANA'S LARGEST AND MOST COMPLETE UNIFORM CENTER

Hours: Mon - Friday 8am-5pm | Sat - 9am-5pm

2208 Worley Drive | Alexandria, La

**318-448-1573**







# Good Nutrition for Healthy Eyes

By Dr. Phillip L. Carney, Jr.



Scientific evidence increasingly points to a link between good nutrition and healthy eyes and vision. Studies have shown that a vitamin rich diet containing fruits (vitamin C), vegetables (vitamin A), and grains (vitamin E) reduces the risk of many age-related eye diseases such as cataracts and macular degeneration. The reason we hear that carrots are good for the eyes is that they contain important antioxidants including Lutein (pronounced Loo-teen) and Zeaxanthin (pronounced Zay-az-a-thin). These important antioxidants are also found in leafy green vegetables and red-, yellow-, and orange-colored fruits and vegetables. Recent studies

have shown diets rich in antioxidants can dramatically effect eye health and prevent certain eye diseases.

Many once-a-day vitamins now contain antioxidants and other specific vitamins and supplements for the eyes. Fish oil supplements are also widely available in gel capsules or as bottled oil. Of course, with a good healthy diet of fruits, grains, and vegetables, there should be no need for supplements. Proper nutrition will help prevent future eye disease while promoting good eye health.

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



## Let The Good VISION Roll!

Mardi Gras goes better with renewed & refreshed vision by the team of cataract specialists at Wallace Eye Associates. Don't miss a moment this year with poor vision. Schedule your annual cataract evaluation today. Happy Mardi Gras!



Thomas C. Stuckey, III, M.D., Phillip L. Carney, Jr., O.D.  
R. Bruce Wallace, III, M.D., Robert T. Crotty, O.D., Nicholas Braud, M.D.

318-448-4488 | 4100 Parliament Drive, Alexandria, LA | WallaceEye.com



# The 3rd Annual Enslaved Peoples' Tours at Kent House

One of the most talked about events in Louisiana is once again returning to Kent House in Alexandria in February. The Enslaved Peoples' Tours honor the great people who were forced to live in bondage at Kent House and tells their story of their hardships and lives living a life that they did not choose to live. Unlike many other plantation tours around the state that instead concentrate on the lives of the white folk who inhabited the main house, Kent House is again offering this unique tour concentrating instead on the lives of the enslaved. Subjects will range from the building of Kent House, to the unique foods they developed, to their day-to-day work and living during the pre-Civil War years.

This year, only four tours will be available to participate in, two by candlelight at night, an experience itself that you cannot find anywhere else. Reservations for these very limited tours are now open at the regular admission prices. The special tours are as follows:

- Friday, February 13th at 5:30pm (night-time tour by candlelight)
- Saturday, February 14th at 1:00pm (daytime tour)
- Friday, February 20th at 5:30pm (night-time tour by candlelight)
- Saturday, February 21st at 1:00pm (daytime tour)

The tours are non-refundable and reservations for individuals and special groups are on a first come, first served basis.

Come experience what few living people have ever experienced in Louisiana and learn the truth of our complicated heritage. The tour guide will be Michael Wynne, Cenla's well-known historian and author.



More information is available by calling Kent House at (318) 487-5998. Media is invited and is welcomed for possible special advanced arrangements.

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



- Dental Implants
- Wisdom Teeth Removal
- Tooth Extractions
- Bone Grafting

*Serving Cenla for  
Over 45 Years*

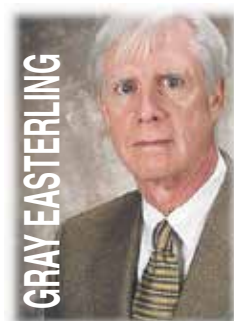
1403 Peterman Drive  
Alexandria, LA  
(318) 443-7208  
alexandriaos.com





## Do You Matter?

By Gray Easterling



This space is reserved for an article on financial focus. However, I recently read an article in the Wall Street Journal that discusses a retirement crisis that is swept under the table in many cases. While it is not dealing directly with “money,” the repercussions can affect your mental state of mind, which can result in a failure to manage assets efficiently. So, in some ways, this is a stretch, but the topic is worthy of discussion. The “crisis” is the erosion of a sense of “mattering”, the deep human need to feel valued and to have a chance to add value to the world. If we don’t plan for a roadmap that will lead us to a lifestyle where we continue

to feel seen, useful, and capable of making a difference as a retired person, then there could be trouble ahead. The author suggests that, as we live longer, sustaining a sense of mattering has become a defining challenge of aging and that it may be time to shift the question from “How long will I live?” to “How will I continue to matter while I do?”



This is not anything new. From the beginning of time, being valued in a group meant safety; being ignored meant danger. When people feel they matter, they thrive; when they don’t, they suffer. A 2024 study in the Canadian Journal on Aging found that most retirees plan for financial needs, but less than half consider what their lives will be like once they quit working. Lifestyle planning needs to be put on the same level as financial planning. Boredom, loss of structure, and diminished connection were some of the most significant challenges for retirees. So, what do we do? We need to find ways that allow us to add value to people’s lives, or the community around us. We want to be depended on again. One suggestion is to identify a need in your church, your schools, your hometown, and use your time, treasure, and talent to help fill that need. Another idea was to “get social” again. Set a modest goal of either saying, “Yes,” to an invitation, or extending one, twice a week. Be aware that an invitation is not just about you. When someone reaches out, they are taking a chance in a bid for connection. Accepting signals that you value them, too. Extending or accepting becomes a mutual exchange of “mattering.” What you might discover is that the fastest way to feel like you matter is to show someone else that they have worth, that they can make a difference. Make a plan, join a group of retirees or members of your church in a similar situation and start a weekly lunch or breakfast gathering, mentor school kids who need direction, or cultivate and visit places where you will feel valued and useful. Your effort could result in not only a longer life, but also a much more rewarding experience.

A note to all you in love or loving someone: don’t forget Valentine’s Day. It’s your chance to show how special your life is because of that one person in your life. I just hope that you are as lucky as I have been to find unconditional love from one young lady for the last 57 years. Your Lord and Savior also has a promise for you. From Psalm 37: do not fret because of those who are evil, or be envious of those who do wrong, for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants, they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land...and enjoy peace and prosperity.

*The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and are not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual. Please discuss your specific situation with your financial advisor. All investing involves risk including loss of principal. No strategy assures success or protects against loss. Financial Solutions Group is located at 128 Versailles Blvd, Alexandria, LA 71303. We can be reached at (318) 448-3201. Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor, Member FINRA/SIPC.*

### A Cool Building with a Warm Heart

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

**Your Friends at Financial Solutions Group**



**128 Versailles Blvd.  
Alexandria, LA 71303  
(318) 448-3201**

Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, Member FINRA/SIPC. Financial Solutions Group is a marketing name and separate entity from LPL Financial.



# Using a Prescriptions Coupon? Who Pays the Rest of Bill?

By Wesley Watkins



Prescription drug prices are sky high for many prescriptions. If you watch TV or stream or simply open your computer in any search engine, you will see an ad for a prescription drug. In some cases, it's downright ridiculous how many advertisements there are out there. I think I have self-diagnosed a couple of my ailments, which is sure to make my family doctor cringe and shake his head in disappointment. Can you imagine diagnosing an ailment based off a marketing ad? It happens daily.

But what if you actually are diagnosed with an ailment that needs a prescription which is a very high price prescription? For example, Humira, Skyrizi, or Ozempic? Drug manufacturers don't assume when manufacturing the prescriptions that you will be able to pay the real cost, and manufacturers quickly give you access to a coupon to pay \$0, \$5.00, or \$10.00. But who pays the rest of the cost? Do you care? Well, you should.

When you have private insurance such as Blue Cross or United Health Care, it can be typical that your insurance company pays the remaining balance after you pay a coupon price. And if you haven't drawn the conclusion yet, when your insurance company pays, your premiums will increase. So, that means all of us who have private insurance should be concerned with which prescriptions are covered by your insurance company and what the real prices are, because in the end, we all pay more—now or later.

Hopefully, just the simple information above helps you understand what is happening right now in our country. The more we mask the real price from the consumer, the faster prices go up. Consumerism is as powerful as education. You need to understand the prices of your prescriptions—the real prices. Our government is becoming more involved in prescription price negotiations because they are the ones paying much of the prescriptions costs for people on Medicaid, Medicare, and other government programs (and that makes our taxes go up). That is why you will see pricing rules affect the prices of medications for people on these programs first, private insurance will quickly follow suit.

So, how much would you pay for your prescriptions if you had to pay directly out of your cash account? Many people say, "That is why I have insurance," and I agree; however, that doesn't eliminate the math of receiving an increase in health insurance premiums at renewal.

What can you do about the real cost of your prescriptions? This question may feel like staring at Mt. Everest, an impossible task for one person. However, there are some easy tips I can share to help:

1. Always ask for generic equivalents or even generic alternatives. Generic equivalents are the same prescriptions in generic form. Generic alternatives are different medications that may result in the same solution you are seeking.
2. Price shop pharmacies. The big brand stores don't always give the best deals. Shop local and big brand. Good Rx is a wonderful way to find the cost of your prescriptions without insurance. Yes, prices can vary greatly from pharmacy to pharmacy for the same prescription.


3. Ask your doctor to prescribe with cost in mind but not sacrifice your health in the process. Doctors are not all-knowing when it comes to prescriptions, so do your homework. You probably shop for a vehicle harder than you shop for something that affects your health such as a prescription. Learn to shop! We teach people every week how to find lower costing prescriptions.

4. Ask a Pharmacist. Is cash price better than running my insurance? Will this count toward my deductible? Is there a generic or similar generic available? Pharmacists

are wonderful assets and, often, overlooked as a resource, but they are schooled in prescriptions! Find one that is nice, willing to take time, and patient with you to find a solution. Yes, they exist, lol.

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 at (318) 445-9464 to learn more about health insurance products we provide individuals and companies.





## Gallagher

Insurance | Risk Management | Consulting

Wesley J Watkins MBA, CBC, REBC  
Area Vice President, Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc.

5501 Coliseum Boulevard, Alexandria, LA 71303  
318.445.9464 | 855.656.4967 | [www.ajg.com](http://www.ajg.com)



# Economic Resilience Meets Elevated Expectations

By Toby Brazzel



The U.S. economy enters 2026 with moderate growth momentum, powered by retroactive tax cuts, strong consumer refunds, and demographic tailwinds as baby boomers shift into spending mode. Household finances remain solid with multi-decade lows for debt relative to GDP, underscoring resilience.

Automation and AI are reshaping production, reducing reliance on offshoring and bolstering domestic competitiveness. While labor market risks linger, equilibrium between job openings and seekers suggests stability. Tariff-related inflation appears to be fading, leaving the U.S. positioned to outperform other

developed economies, even as China and India lead emerging markets. In the meantime, households have deleveraged.

Equities ride into 2026 on elevated valuations and high expectations. The “Magnificent Seven” AI-driven giants dominate large cap indexes, creating concentration risk. Yet beyond them, valuations are more reasonable, and diversification across sectors and regions is key. International equities provide balance, especially as U.S. tech valuations soar.

Bonds reclaim center stage in 2026. With yields attractive across the spectrum—4.25% for government bonds, 4.75% for investment grade corporates, and nearly 7% for high yield—fixed income offers both return potential and portfolio stability.

We expect yields to remain range bound, with a tilt lower by year end, creating opportunities for price appreciation. Tight high-yield spreads signal confidence in

the economy but warranting caution. High-quality bonds stand out as diversifiers against equity risk.

2026 is a year of resilience and elevated expectations. Tax cuts, consumer strength, and AI-driven productivity gains support growth, while equities demand careful navigation and bonds offer compelling diversification.

*Cetera Investment Management LLC is an SEC registered investment adviser owned by Cetera Financial Group. The material contained in this document was authored by and is the property of Cetera Investment Management LLC. Cetera Investment Management provides investment management and advisory services to a number of programs sponsored by affiliated and non-affiliated registered investment advisers. Your registered representative or investment adviser representative is not registered with Cetera Investment Management and did not take part in the creation of this material. He or she may not be able to offer Cetera Investment Management portfolio management services. The content presented should not be construed as offering specific investment, tax, or legal advice and is not an offer or a solicitation of any services. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. Any forward-looking statements are based on assumptions, may not materialize, and are subject to revision. All economic and performance information is historical and not indicative of future results. The market indices discussed are not actively managed. Investors cannot directly invest in unmanaged indices. Please consult your financial advisor for more information. Additional risks are associated with international investing, such as currency fluctuations, political and economic instability, and differences in accounting standards. A diversified portfolio does not assure a profit or protect against loss in a declining market.*



**Toby Brazzel • Financial Advisor**

**318.426.0168**

**1705 Simmons Street  
Alexandria, LA 71301**



**Toby & Kelli Brazzel**

Securities offered through Avantax Investment Services™, Member FINRA, SIPC. Investment advisory services offered through Avantax Advisory Services™. Insurance services offered through an Avantax affiliated insurance agency.



## Collecting Widow's Benefits

By Annie Lemoine Newton



ANNIE NEWTON

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

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

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



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

Recipient of Social Security Disability Leadership Award:  
National Top 100 Social Security Disability Law Firms

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

PUBLISHED ARTICLES: "The Work-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*  
**JARED HICKS**

We are thrilled to announce that Jared Hicks has been promoted to Senior Vice President & Government Guaranteed Lending Manager at BOM Bank!

With over 20 years of experience in banking and government roles — and 6 incredible years with BOM Bank — Jared has consistently shown outstanding leadership, dedication, and a passion for serving our customers and communities.

Jared shared that he feels blessed for this opportunity, and he's excited to continue expanding our Government Guaranteed Lending Department. We know his expertise and drive will take this program to the next level! We're so grateful to have such a talented professional on our team, and we can't wait to see all the great things he will accomplish in this new chapter!





# Five Ways to Reprioritize Your Finances This Spring

By Lori Decker, CMCF



LORI DECKER, CMCF

For many, spring is the chosen time to clean out your home from the winter, so you can start fresh in the summer. Clearing through clutter and refocusing on goals can be just as important for your finances as it is for your home. Explore the following considerations to spring clean your finances and set a plan for the remainder of the year.

Refocus on your goals. Assess your finances to see if you may have strayed from your financial goals. If you're far behind the targets you've set, review your spending habits and try to identify which choices and activities have added to this setback. There's still time to get back on track.

Consider refinancing. Interest rates ticked markedly higher in the years after the pandemic, and have since dropped moderately, given the Federal Reserve's recent pattern of reducing rates. If you're carrying a higher rate on a loan, consider whether you could benefit from refinancing. Lowering your interest rate by even a quarter of a percent can potentially add up to thousands of dollars in savings over the life of a loan. Student loans and business loans are top prospects to consider. Home mortgages may also be eligible, although if you bought your property when interest rates were very low, it likely makes sense to keep your current loan.

Be strategic with your health and flexible spending accounts. If you have funds in an employer-sponsored flexible savings account (FSA), remember that the money expires at the end of the year. It may make sense to schedule health appointments soon, before the summer season is in full swing. You can use your tax-advantaged account to pay for regular medical and dental bills, eye exams, eyeglasses, chiropractic care, and mental health counseling. If you have a health savings account (HSA), the funds don't expire. Consider using the funds for various health expenses this year, or keep the money invested for future needs, which may include retirement health expenses. You have until the federal tax filing deadline (generally April 15th) to make your annual contribution to the account for the prior year. Contribution limits vary based on certain factors, including whether you have single or family high-deductible health plan coverage, so check with your tax professional if there are questions.

Increase contributions. Boost your retirement accounts and reduce your taxable income by allocating the maximum amount to your tax-deferred IRA and 401(k) accounts. Your contributions will not be taxed in the current year. Plus, when you eventually withdraw the savings in retirement, you will most likely be taxed at a lower rate.

Protect yourself. Review your insurance policies and evaluate if you have the appropriate coverage. A divorce, child's college graduation, large purchase, home remodel, etc. could cause you to need more, less, or different options. Look for savings from bundling policies and pursue eligible discounts.

As you reassess your financial well-being this spring, consider working with a financial advisor who can help you sort through potential challenges, identify your key goals and develop a strategy to keep your financial plan on track.

*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 19 years. To contact her, [www.ameripriseadvisors.com/Lori.Decker/](http://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®**  
Financial Advisor  
Associate Vice President

**UDB Financial**  
A financial advisory practice of  
Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC

**318.442.4944**  
207 Ansley Blvd, Ste A, Alexandria, LA 71303  
[lori.decker@ampf.com](mailto:lori.decker@ampf.com)  
[ameripriseadvisors.com/lori.decker](http://ameripriseadvisors.com/lori.decker)

Securities offered by Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. Member FINRA and SIPC.  
© 2025 Ameriprise Financial, Inc. All rights reserved.



# The Afro-Semitic Experience in Alexandria

On Sunday, March 1st at 2:00pm, the Jewish Temple and the Bindursky-Fuhrer family present the Afro-Semitic Experience in concert. This musical duo hails from Connecticut and Amsterdam. The group is made up of David Chevan (double bass) and Warren Byrd (piano and vocals). The Afro-Semitic Experience blends African-American and Jewish musical traditions into something soulful and joyful, while simultaneously genre-defying.

David and Warren's partnership started with a simple idea: to bring together spirituals, gospel, and Jewish liturgical music and use a jazz lens to interpret and meld those traditions. The Afro-Semitic Experience visited Central Louisiana twenty years ago and performed at the Temple as well as several schools in the area. They were a big hit then and we are pleased to present them once again in concert.

The concert is part of the Temple's annual Bindursky-Fuhrer concert series. It is free and open to the public. A reception will follow the concert. The Jewish Temple is located at 2021 Turner Street in Alexandria.



*Congratulations*  
ALLIE FREDIEU

BOM Bank is excited to congratulate Allie Fredieu on her promotion as Head Teller at our Kingsville branch.

Allie is from Pollock and a proud graduate of Grant High School. When she's not at work, she enjoys reading and spending quality time with her family. And some extra exciting news—Allie is recently engaged!

Congratulations, Allie!





# 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

**Ongoing-March 5: Colors of Life—the Full Spectrum,** Weathersby Fine Arts Building Gallery (155 College Blvd, Pineville). Rick Soileau, art teacher at Tioga High School, presents a retrospective, including a comprehensive body of work spanning his entire career. lcuniversity.edu

**February 10: 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 14: 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

## Music

**February 17: VOCES8 “Give Me Your Stars”,** St. James Episcopal Church (1620 Murray Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. This concert explores the

profound and diverse beauty of music inspired by the heavens, human connection, and the places we humans call home. The program spans centuries of choral music from the Renaissance to timeless jazz standards, evoking cities and starlight. St. James is the only Louisiana stop on the VOCES8 United States winter tour. Reception to follow in the Parish Hall. Cost: Free. Call: 318-445-9845. stjamesla.org

**March 1: The Afro-Semitic Experience,** Jewish Temple (2021 Turner Street, Alexandria), 2:00pm. The Afro-Semitic Experience hails from Connecticut and Amsterdam. The group is made up of David Chevan (double bass) and Warren Byrd (piano and vocals). The duo blends African-American and Jewish musical traditions into something soulful and joyful, while simultaneously genre-defying. Cost: Free.

**March 1: Proud Tina—The Ultimate Tribute to Tina Turner,** Coughlin-Saunders Performing Arts Center (1202 3rd Street, Alexandria), 6:00pm. Get the electrifying concert experience of Tina Turner, brimming with iconic hits from the 60s, 70s, 80s & 90s. Featuring the powerful, raspy vocals, high-intensity dancing and thrilling stage presence of South African Caroline Borole live on stage, complete with her international band, brass section, backing vocalists and dancers to make this “Simply the Best” tribute to the Queen of Rock ‘n’ Roll. \$40.00+ ACCL Members; \$45.00+ General Public. louisiana-arts.org

**March 3: An Evening with Emmet Cahill,** St. James Episcopal Church (1620 Murray Street, Alexandria), 7:00pm. This concert marks the Louisiana debut of Irish tenor, Emmet Cahill, “Ireland’s most exciting young tenor.” Cahill will be joined by his accompanist, Seamus Brett. The evening’s concert will include Irish favorites, Broadway show tunes, and inspirational gems. Reception to follow in the Parish Hall. Cost: Free. Call: 318-445-9845. stjamesla.org

## Theatre

**Ongoing-February 8: The Miss Magnolia Senior Citizen Beauty Pageant,** Hearn Stage at Kress Theatre (1102 Third Street, Alexandria). If you

**Convenient Banking**  
Manage your  
finances  
online.

Online Banking ~ Bill Pay ~ eStatements

[www.sabinebank.com](http://www.sabinebank.com)

**SABINE STATE  
BANK**  
& Trust Company



**OUR GOAL,  
YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS.**

Member  
**FDIC**





# Entertainment Focus

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. [cpgtheatre.com](http://cpgtheatre.com)

**February 7: SSP Play Reading Session**, Rapides Foundation Building, 2nd Floor (1101 4th Street, Alexandria), 10:00am-12:00pm. Stuck in the weeds of dialogue? Can't tell if your play is too long or too short? Want some feedback or help with finishing touches? Whatever writing stage you're in, our Reading Sessions can help ensure your work is ready for submission! Bring a script for every character in your play, plus 3 extra. Cost: Free.

**February 9, 16, 23 & March 2: Military Monday at the Movies**, Grand Theatre Alexandria (2039 North Mall Drive, Alexandria). All military personnel and first responders can enjoy the ultimate movie experience at Santikos Entertainment for just \$5.00. Along with \$5.00 movie tickets, they'll also have access to a \$5.00 large drink and a \$5.00 large popcorn, making their cinema experience even more enjoyable and unforgettable. Valid ID required. Cost: \$5.00.

## Events

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

**February 6, 13, 20, 27: 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.

**February 6: "Night of Lights" Mardi Gras Parade**, (Main Street, Pineville), 7:00pm. Get ready to see Pineville shine! We are thrilled to host the only nighttime Mardi Gras parade in Rapides Parish. There is a special kind of magic that happens when the sun goes down and the neon lights of the floats begin to glow against the night sky. This is a community-focused, family-friendly event. It's the perfect environment to bring the kids, catch some beads, and enjoy the spirit of the season. Traffic & Closures: To ensure the safety of our marchers and spectators, Main Street and all feeder streets along the parade route will close at 6:30pm. Please plan your travel accordingly and arrive early

to find your favorite spot! Cost: Free.

**February 10, 17, 24 & March 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.

**February 11: Child Safety Seat Check**, Rapides Regional Medical Center Main Entrance (211 4th Street, Alexandria), 2:00pm-5:00pm. A trained child passenger safety educator will take a look at your car seats, make sure they are not under recall, make sure the seat is installed properly and show you how to install the car seat. The car seat check

process takes between 15-25 minutes, depending on how many car seats are in the vehicle. The seat checks normally are held the second Wednesday of each month. Cost: Free.

**February 13: Classic Cars and Cheerleaders Parade**, Downtown Alexandria, 5:00pm. The Classic Cars and Cheerleaders Parade will kick off Alexandria's family-oriented Mardi Gras weekend. The Classic Cars and Cheerleaders parade features classic cars paired with cheerleaders from schools and cheer/dance teams in Central Louisiana. Cost: Free. [alexmardigras.net](http://alexmardigras.net)

**February 13, 14, 20, 21: 3rd Annual Enslaved Peoples' Tours**, Kent Plantation House (3601 Bayou Rapides, Alexandria). Historian Michael Wynne will lead unique tours concentrating on the lives of the enslaved people who lived at Kent House. Subjects will range from the building of Kent House, to the unique foods they developed, to their day-to-day work and living during the pre-Civil War years. Friday tours will



**ZOOPEL RUMMAGE SALE**  
Saturday, March 7  
8 AM - 1 PM  
WILDLY AMAZING BARGAINS FOR A GREAT CAUSE



Browse a selection of gently used items including home décor, household goods, toys, books, and more.  
Every purchase supports Friends of the Alexandria Zoo, helping fund animal care, conservation, education programs, and special projects at the zoo.

**Have Items to Donate?**  
We're accepting like new / gently used items on  
Saturday, Feb. 21 9 AM - Noon, 2 PM - 4 PM  
Sunday, Feb. 22 9 AM - Noon  
Friday, Feb. 27 3 PM - 6 PM  
Saturday, Feb. 28 9 AM - Noon, 2 PM - 4 PM  
Sunday, Mar. 1 9 AM - Noon  
(We will not accept clothes.)



**Two Convenient Locations to Serve You!**

49 Pinecrest Drive  
Pineville, LA  
(Near Outlaw's BBQ)

5803 Jackson Street Ext  
Alexandria, LA  
(Next to Red River Music)

**Taste the thrill of the chill!**

- Full Event Beverage Catering Available
- A Menu of Over 100 Daiquiris
- Convenient Drive-Thru

Monday - Thursday: 11:00am - 9:00pm  
Friday - Saturday: 10:00am - 11:00pm  
Sunday: Noon - 8:00pm



**318-487-0007**



# Entertainment Focus

be evening tours offered by candlelight, beginning at 5:30pm. The Saturday daylight tours begin at 1:00pm. Regular admission; please pre-register. Call: 318-487-5998. kenthouse.org

**February 14: Mardi Gras Magic Carnival,** Treehouse Children's Museum (1403 3rd Street, Alexandria), 9:00am-12:00pm. Laissez les bon temps rouler, cher! Treehouse Children's Museum is bringin' the joy, the color, and the Carnival spirit to Alexandria with our Mardi Gras Magic Carnival! This is a morning made for families—full of carnival games, prizes, live music, and a special Mardi Gras float photo op that'll have everyone sayin' "mais, that's cute!" Cost: \$7.00 3 & up; Under 3 Free; \$2.00 SNAP/EBT Families. Call: 318-619-9394. treehousecenla.org

**February 14: AMGA Children's Parade,** Downtown Alexandria, 10:00am. Mardi Gras just for the young and young at heart! Virginia Kirkpatrick, Miss Louisiana's Outstanding Teen 2025, will serve as Grand Marshal. Perfect for all ages. Cost: Free. alexmardigras.net

**February 14: 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

**February 14: 2nd Annual Mardi Gras on the Red,** Pineville Riverfront, 11:00am-6:00pm. Get ready to pass a good time on the Pineville Riverfront! We're celebrating the season with our

2nd annual street dance and festival. Whether you're coming for the rhythm of the Zydeco bands or the flavor of the food trucks, there's no better way to spend your Saturday! Live Entertainment by Leroy Thomas and the Zydeco Roadrunners and Gerard Delafosse and the Zydeco Gators. Come enjoy live music, shop local vendors, and grab a bite from some of Cenla's best food trucks. Let's celebrate Mardi Gras Pineville-style! Cost: Free.

**February 14: FOTAZ Mardi Gras Party,** Alexandria Zoo (30161 Masonic Drive, Alexandria), 12:00pm-3:00pm. We're rolling out the purple, green, and gold for a wild, family-friendly Mardi Gras Party with the Krewe at the Zoo! Indulge in complimentary king cake courtesy of Atwood's Bakery and get your groove on with live music by the LaCour Trio. Cost: Regular admission; FOTAZ Members Free. thealexandriazoo.com

**February 15: 2026 AMGA Krewes Parade,** Mid-City Alexandria, 2:00pm. Pineville native and highest NFL draft pick ever to come out of Rapides Parish, Cody Ford, will serve as Grand Marshal leading the Krewes of the Alexandria Mardi Gras Association and local marching bands through the streets of Alexandria, starting on Texas Avenue - Masonic - Memorial Drive - North Boulevard and ending at Sam's Club. Cost: Free. alexmardigras.net

**February 15: Central Louisiana Orchid Society Meeting,** St. James Episcopal Church EYC Building (1546 Albert Street, Alexandria), 2:30pm. Learn everything you need to

know about orchids and how to grow them. Get hands on help with your plants! There is a monthly plant raffle, blooming orchid entry for Show and Tell plus refreshments. In addition, there are opportunities to attend American Orchid Society shows/sales throughout the year.

**February 21: 3rd Annual Central Louisiana African American Culture and Heritage Center Celebration,** Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch (1115 Broadway Avenue, Alexandria), 11:00am. The year's theme is "Strength of our past, power of our future," and honors John E. Allen, Jr., Levator Boyd, Israel B. Curtis, Herbert B. Dixon, Sr., Randolph Holly, Jr., Owen Monconduit, and Freddie Price, Sr. Attendees are encouraged to RSVP. Cost: Free. Call: 318-445-3912. www.rpl.org

**February 26: 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!). Investigative reporter and author Charles Lane of Washington, D.C., author of the controversial and much admired "The Day Freedom Died; The Colfax Massacre, The Supreme Court, and The Betrayal of Reconstruction" will make his only Louisiana talk here via Zoom. Cost: Free. Call: 318-442-2483.

**February 26: AMoA: The Folding Chair Diversity Dinner and Dialogue Experience,** Alexandria Museum of Art (933 Second St, Alexandria), 6:30pm-8:00pm. Engage with our diverse community at this annual event hosted by AMoA Board Member, Ingrid Johnson, Esq. as we enjoy good food and fellowship. In honor of Black History Month, join us for an impactful evening with good food and meaningful conversation at "The Folding Chair: Diversity Dinner and Dialogue Experience." Featuring catering from Dat New Orleans Taste. Cost: \$25.00. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

**February 28: Live Gator Feeding Show,** Paragon Casino Resort Hotel Atrium (711 Paragon Place, Marksville), 4:00pm. Join the crowd in the hotel lobby on the last Saturday of each month for a live alligator feeding show. Bring the children for photos with a baby gator after the show. You will also hear traditional songs and stories of south Louisiana's flora and fauna performed by Tunica-Biloxi tribal members Donna Pierite and family. Cost: Free.

**March 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! \$10.00 Donation.

**March 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

**February 10, 17, 24 & March 3,** Alexandria Museum of Art (933 2nd Street, Alexandria), 5:45pm. Chill out every Tuesday with yoga classes taught by Learn with Laci. Registration is not required. Cost: Free. Call: 318-443-3458. themuseum.org

**February 28: Fly Fishing 101,** LDWF Booker Fowler Hatchery (10 Joan Stokes Road, Forest Hill), 8:30am-3:30pm. The Kisatchie Fly Fishers will again hold a free Fly Fishing 101 clinic covering: overview and equipment, fly casting, knots and leaders. Refreshments and handouts are provided. Pre-registration required. Cost: Free. Call: 318-793-5855. kisatchiefly.org

*\*All events subject to change.*





# Entertainment Focus

## Shamrockin' Fest 2026



You know what a shamrock is and you know what a festival is. Put them together and you have the annual Shamrockin' Fest to celebrate St. Patrick's Day in Central Louisiana. Hosted by Holy Savior Menard, the event is a 21+ evening complete with craft cocktails, delicious food, a live band (this year we are excited to welcome 'Vintage'), and a fabulous silent auction. Lynn Roy, Holy Savior Menard's Advancement Director, tells us, "We are super excited this year

about some of our silent auction items. The community is already excited about the Astro Tickets, the Disney Resort Package, and especially about the acoustic private show in your own home with Fred LeBlanc of Cowboy Mouth!" So be sure to come on out on Saturday, March 14th at the Riverfront Center at 6:00pm for what promises to be a great time.

One of the best highlights of the night is the mixology teams. Each team formed competes for the highly coveted award of "Best Drink Team" while the attendees enjoy samples of each team's drink.

While the event is a fundraiser for the school (this year funds will go toward academic support systems, including science lab equipment, curriculum updates and academic subscriptions), the event focuses on bringing the community together to enjoy a good time and good company.

Tickets can be purchased at [www.hsmfest.com](http://www.hsmfest.com). Come on out for a great event with a great cause!



## NOW SERVING BOILED CRAWFISH AT DINNER

### POP'S

Tuesday - Friday  
11:00 - 2:00  
4:30 - 9:00



Saturday  
4:00 - 9:00

Sunday & Monday  
Closed

'Like' Us on  
Facebook



CRAWFISH & SEAFOOD

FULL MENU  
Not Just Seafood!

## 318.625.8095

### 5859 Jackson St. Alexandria, LA

[PopsCrawfishAndSeafood.com](http://PopsCrawfishAndSeafood.com)

Facebook & Instagram - Pops Crawfish & Seafood





## Entertainment Focus

# Cabrini Ball Honors 45 Years of Lifesaving Neonatal Care at CHRISTUS Health

The CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Foundation will host its 45th annual Cabrini Ball on March 21st, celebrating 45 years of CHRISTUS St. Francis Cabrini's level III neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). "As we celebrate over four decades of miracles, we invite the community to join us in supporting this year's Cabrini Ball," said Ashley Walker, executive director of philanthropy, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Foundation. "Your support as a sponsor is more than a gift—it's a way to honor years of impact while helping shape the future of NICU care in Central Louisiana for generations to come."

Funds raised through this year's Cabrini Ball will contribute to the Foundation's Miracles in Motion campaign, supporting the complete renovation and advancement of the level III NICU at CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital.

Since its inception in April 1950, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini has been a trailblazer in the region, establishing the first intensive care and neonatal intensive care units and providing 24-hour intensivist coverage. The hospital was also the first in the area to implement robotic technology. Today, CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital continues its mission as a nonprofit organization, relying on the Cabrini



Foundation and the community's generosity to provide the most advanced equipment and programs to patients throughout the region.

"Every day, our ministry shows its unwavering dedication to providing the most advanced and highest quality care for its patients while ensuring that everyone is treated with love and compassion," said Monte Wilson, chief executive officer of CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital. "Our mission is to provide exceptional health care right here in Cenla, and we are deeply grateful for the community members and donors whose generosity makes this work possible."

The Cabrini Ball will take place at the Edward G. Ned Randolph Riverfront Center and will include a gourmet seated dinner, signature drinks, a luxury live and silent auction and a special musical performance by the Molly Ringwalds, a high-energy 80s cover band from New Orleans.

To learn more about Cabrini Ball and to secure your sponsorship, please visit: [christuscabrinifoundation.org/cabrini-ball](http://christuscabrinifoundation.org/cabrini-ball)



*Welcome*  
GRACELYN JONES

BOM Bank is proud to welcome Gracelyn Jones as our new Mortgage Loan Assistant at our Wimbledon location in Alexandria!

Gracelyn is from Pineville, and is a graduate of Louisiana State University of Alexandria, where she earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics. Fun fact—she also played college basketball at LSUA!

When she's not at work, Gracelyn enjoys spending time with her family and friends, along with her dog, Ollie.

We're so excited to have Gracelyn as part of the BOM Bank family—keep up the amazing work!



**BOM**  
Bank



CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital's

# CABRINI *FLASHBACK* BALL

SAT | 21 | MAR

Edward G. Ned Randolph Riverfront Center  
6:30pm - 12:00am | Black Tie Affair

Reserve your table



for the celebration!

[CHRISTUSCabriniFoundation.org/Cabrini-Ball](https://CHRISTUSCabriniFoundation.org/Cabrini-Ball)



Featuring performance by  
**The MOLLY RINGWALDS**



## The Best of the British Isles Return to Cenla

By Roy Rosenthal

The St. James Episcopal Church 2025-2026 Concert Series season continues with back-to-back presentations featuring artists from the United Kingdom and Ireland.

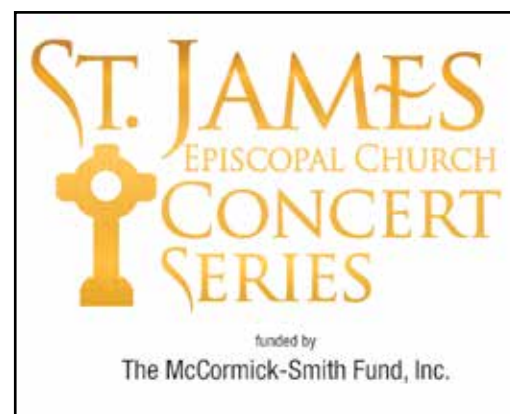
On Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 7:00pm, the incomparable British vocal ensemble VOCES8 returns to sing a concert entitled, "Give Me Your Stars". This program explores the profound and diverse beauty of music inspired by the heavens, human connection, and the places we humans call home. At its heart is Lucy Walker's eponymous new work, written for VOCES8, which captures the delicate balance between celestial wonder and the deep personal connections that make us human. The program spans centuries of choral music from the Renaissance to timeless jazz standards, evoking cities and starlight. St. James is the only Louisiana stop on the VOCES8 United States winter tour.



Following on Tuesday, March 3rd at 7:00pm, St. James is pleased to host the Louisiana debut of Irish tenor, Emmet Cahill together with his accompanist, Seamus Brett. Hailed as "Ireland's most exciting young tenor," Cahill has been touring North America for twelve years as lead singer of the PBS phenomenon Celtic Thunder quartet. Celtic Thunder has recorded six world Billboard number 1 albums. Emmet recently made a sold-out concert debut at New York's famed Carnegie Hall and has performed with the Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra in Salt Lake City. The evening's concert will include Irish favorites, Broadway show tunes, and inspirational gems.



St. James Episcopal Church is located at 1620 Bolton Avenue and Murray Street.



Admission is complimentary thanks to The McCormick-Smith Fund, Inc. and there will be receptions in the parish hall immediately following each of the concerts. For more information, call the Church office at (318) 445-9845 or see the Church Facebook events page @ St.JamesEpiscopalAlexandria.

# Ruff Ride?

## Aggie says come to...

**GEORGE HAUKE'S**  
AUTOMOTIVE

**(318) 443-2345 3204 Industrial Dr, Alexandria, LA**



80<sup>th</sup> LOUISIANA RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION 1946 - 2026



# TASTE OF CENTRAL LOUISIANA

Benefiting LRA Programs, Children's Miracle Network,  
Manna House, Food Bank of Central Louisiana,  
River Oaks Square Arts Center

**MARCH 7, 2026**  
**Randolph Riverfront Center**  
707 Second Street, Alexandria

**7 P.M.**  
**HEADLINE ENTERTAINMENT**  
**NOLA DUKES**

**7 - 11 p.m. | (VIP entry at 6 p.m.)**

**Tickets - \$50**  
\$25 for children under 10  
*Price increase by \$10  
the day of the event.*

**VIP Tables - \$750**  
*Includes reserved seating for  
eight and early admission.*



## GET TICKETS HERE

For more information, contact Britney Ford at [bford@lra.org](mailto:bford@lra.org) or call (225) 240-7189.



# A Crawfish Tale

By Rocky Couvillion



ROCKY COUVILLION

30 years ago, Greg Kojis came to me about boiling crawfish in the back of his convenience store. I said, "Why not?" and we started selling crawfish to go on weekends, cooking one sack at a time on a single burner. The first weekend, we sold six sacks; the next, we sold ten. Over the next few weeks, he remodeled an old building he owned and we started selling crawfish alongside a small seafood buffet. We were a success! Eventually, we moved to the building we currently occupy.

At the time, my son, Paul, was working for Chili's. He left and came to work with us. We developed a new menu that consisted of seafood, steaks, burgers, and a variety of salads. Crawfish remained a seasonal staple, as it is today. Over the years, we have continued to change and evolve. Paul got married and his wife, Brandy, is now a very important member of the team. We eventually purchased the building and Greg left to pursue other business ventures.

Today, we can seat approximately 200 guests and we have added a drive-thru window that has proven to be a tremendous asset to our business. We have also remodeled our crawfish boiling area, where we wash and boil all our crawfish in pots capable of cooking 250 pounds at a time! Each season, we sell thousands of pounds each week, in the dining room and to go. Throughout, we have never forgotten our humble beginnings. It is a crawfish dream come true!



**VIDEO POKER!**

**NOW SERVING CRAWFISH**

**FOLLOW US ON**

**124 Lyle Avenue Bunkie, LA**

**ROCKY'S**

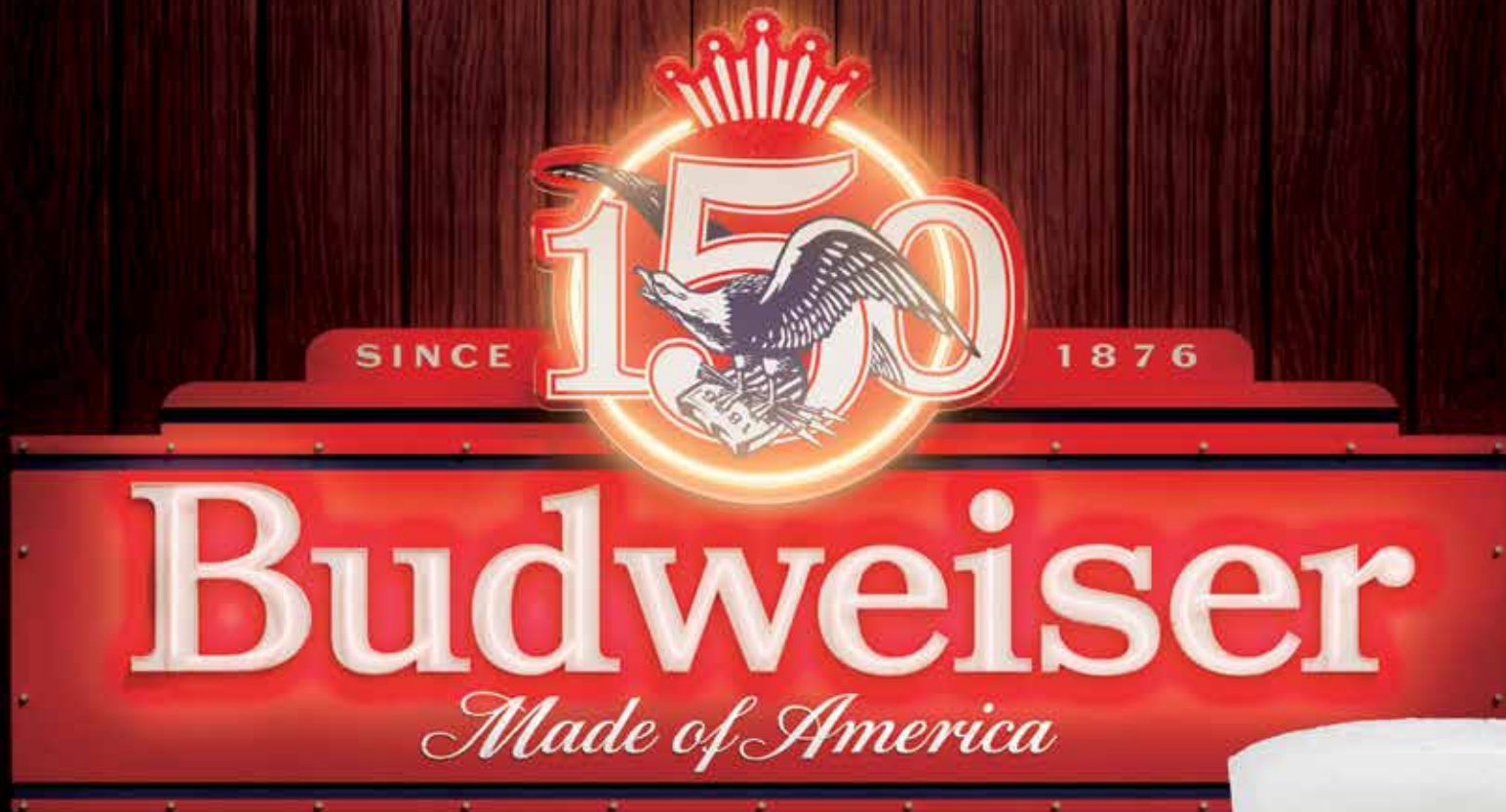
- ✓ Steaks
- ✓ Seafood
- ✓ Craft Cocktails
- ✓ Daily/Nightly Specials

**GRILL DUGOUT BAR**

**TUESDAY - SATURDAY 11:00AM TO 9:00PM**

**318 346-1922**





For 150 Years,  
This Buds For You



**ENJOY RESPONSIBLY.**

A message from MOCKLER BEVERAGE

BATON ROUGE • HOUMA • LAKE CHARLES  
ALEXANDRIA • LEESVILLE



# Pork & Turnip Stew and Meatballs with Gravy

By Wilbert Carmouche

As the days before Lent gently unfold, our kitchens become more than places to cook — they become spaces of intention. This season invites us to slow down, to be mindful, and to gather around meals that nourish both body and spirit. Before the simplicity of Lenten fare begins, we share these recipes in the spirit of preparation — dishes that are comforting, meaningful, and meant to be enjoyed together. Ash Wednesday is February 18, 2026.

Food has a beautiful way of connecting memory, faith, and family. The meals we prepare now help carry us into a season centered on reflection, gratitude, and care for one another. Whether these recipes come from long-kept traditions or new favorites in the making, may they bring warmth to your table and moments of togetherness to your home.

Let us savor this time, cook with love, and enter the Lenten season with full hearts to warm our souls.

## Pork and Turnip Stew

(Fricassee' de Viande de Cochon et de Navets)

2 1/2 Pounds Pork Backbone or Cut of

Choice

1 Large Onion, Chopped

2 Pods Garlic, Minced

2 1/2 Tablespoons Oil

Roux

6-8 Turnips, Peeled

1/2 Bell Pepper, Chopped

Onion Tops and Parsley

Salt and Pepper, to Taste

Season pork well with salt, black pepper and some red pepper, if desired. Heat oil in heavy pot and brown meat well. Add onion, bell pepper, and garlic and sauté with meat. Add 1 1/2 quarts water and enough roux to make a rich brown gravy. Add turnips, cut in halves or fourths and some onion tops and parsley. Let simmer partially covered for 1 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally. Add additional onion tops and parsley about 15 minutes before serving. Serve over rice.

## Meatballs with Gravy

(Boulettes de Viande)

2 Pounds Ground Beef

5 Slices Bread Soaked in Water and Squeezed Out

1 Onion, Finely Chopped

1 Medium Bunch Green Onions, Finely Chopped

1 Medium Bunch Parsley, Finely Chopped



Salt, Black and Red Pepper to Taste

Mix all ingredients together and form into balls. Roll each in flour. Place 3 tablespoons oil in heavy black Dutch oven and heat. Fry balls until brown on all sides. Remove from pot and add 3/4 to 1 cup flour to oil in pot. Stir very often and make a dark roux. Add 1 cup chopped onion to this and enough water to just cover the balls when they are returned to the pot. Add additional green onions and parsley to gravy. After a while, taste gravy as it might need additional salt and pepper. Simmer partially covered for 1 1/2 hours. Gravy will thicken. Serve over rice.

*Note: During the season of lent, ground garfish may be substituted for the ground beef. Use all other ingredients and follow same cooking procedures.*

*Cookbooks are available at Avoyelles Commission of Tourism, tourism@cricket.net, or call us at (318) 964-2025. Recipes were selected from "Historic and Authentic Frenchy Recipes of the Marksville Area" published by the Hypolite Bordelon Home Society, cost is \$6.00 per book pickup or can be mailed at a cost of \$6.00 additional. Bon appetite mais amis!*



## Debra's

### Barber Shop

4508 Coliseum Blvd  
Suite G  
Alexandria, LA 71303  
(318) 561-7093

**Haircut**  
Neck Shave + Hot Towel

**Hot Shave**  
Walk-Ins Welcome  
Family Atmosphere



**Monday • 8:30am - 12:30pm**

**Tuesday - Friday • 8:30am - 5:30pm**

**Men, Women & Children**

**Debra Dauzat**  
**Carolyn Melder**  
**Jade Vercher**  
**Lacey Machovec**





**Daily Lunch Buffet • Full Service Catering • Banquet Room**

208 Main Street, Pineville, LA 71360 • 318.445.2655

[www.southerncreationscatering.com](http://www.southerncreationscatering.com)



# Author Shannon Williams

By Michael Wynne



One of my favorite kinds of authors is an author—in this case, a new author—who has a mission to share important knowledge with the world. Over the decades, I have interviewed hundreds of different kinds of authors. Most have something important to share with the public, but on occasion, some have little to offer that is worth reading about. Whether you write fiction, non-fiction, plays, poetry or even “how to” books, the author has a responsibility to have something to say that is worth reading and hearing about. Shannon Williams, life-long citizen of Alexandria, definitely has something worth reading and hearing about.

The daughter of a custodian and a Pecan Grove Training Center teacher, Shannon has devoted her life to helping people, especially people with disabilities. “Watching my mom raise me as a single mother, I learned to be responsible for myself and others,” Shannon told me. Her first job at 11 years old was helping her aunt at a doctor’s home in Boyce doing the cooking and cleaning. “I wanted to make money to help my family at 11 years old so I worked there in his greenhouse potting plants. With the money I earned, I bought my own school clothes that year. I always tell my children that story as I want them to grown up and be independent, also.”

After graduating Tioga High and working on a Criminal Justice degree at Upper Iowa University, Shannon at first wanted to run her own child care facility. “I love children. I’m now a child care specialist and work with a child with disabilities at Alma Redwine,” Shannon proudly says. “I have a place in my heart for the disabled. God created in me patience and to show empathy for others.” Shannon herself has a child with developmental disabilities.



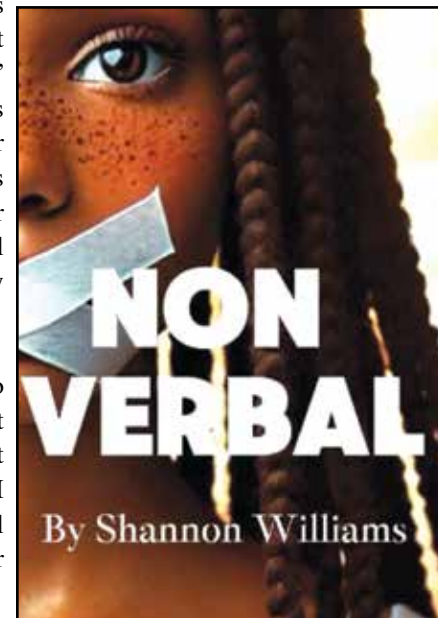
Regarding her novel, “Non-Verbal,” Shannon said of it, “My novel is based mostly on a true story. I had a child who was considered disabled by the public so I wanted to write a story about children who are non-verbal with developmental disability. I think these types of children are overlooked, but disabled children are resilient. Sometimes, we put the disability before the child.

Her novel is a moving story about a girl named Hannah who is non-verbal. It explores the struggles and the strengths of families raising children with developmental disabilities. Themes include faith, perseverance, abuse awareness, family resilience, and unconditional love.

Along with her novel, Shannon has created an educational coloring book. Entitled “I Am Hannah,” she describes her book as a “coloring book with beautiful differences.” Shannon adds, “I just thought that my coloring book is important for families to be able to explain to their children about the differences that are found in other children.” Shannon adds that the book should be explained to children that other children may not always look like them when they come across them in the real world.

Additionally, Shannon has also created a family workshop guide book called, “Stay or Let Go.” “It navigates the complexities of relationships between people. It is not only a journal, but it has my poetry,” Shannon shared with me. “It can serve as a role model for people to journal their own relationships.” The book has prompts every month asking questions about your own relationships, ending in that final question of whether or not you should stay in a particular relationship.

Shannon’s books are eye-opening to anyone who wants to learn more about themselves as well as the separate subject of the complicated world of disabilities. I learned a lot from the books and you will also. They are available on Amazon or from your favorite bookseller.



**UP'N ADAMS**

**Adams Pest Control**

**THE ONE IN CENLA**

**Alexandria • Natchitoches  
Marksville • DeRidder**

**318.443.7311 [www.upnadam.com](http://www.upnadam.com)**



# Strength of Our Past, Power of Our Future

The Rapides Parish Library proudly announces the third annual Central Louisiana African American Culture and Heritage Center (AACHC) celebration. The AACHC tells the story of the cultural, economic and artistic contributions that African Americans from Central Louisiana have made here and on the world's stage. The year's theme is "Strength of our past, power of our future."

The individuals being recognized at this year's event are:

John E. Allen, Jr., a career educator as well as the first Black City Councilman for Alexandria. During his tenure, Alexandria Fire Department hired its first Black firefighter, Mr. Norman F. Dozier, Sr. Mr. Allen founded and organized the City's first Juneteenth celebration and later, he became the District F School Board Representative. His personal investments in the community also extended to the Lee and Texas Walk-in-Clinic to provide increased healthcare access to the people of South Alexandria.

Levator Boyd, a distinguished educator, community leader, and preservationist. He possesses an advanced (MA) degree in the Teaching of Mathematics from the University of Detroit as well as his Plus 30 graduate hours from Southern University and Northwestern State University. He shared his knowledge and expertise with the students of Rapides Parish beginning in 1961 at Jones Street Junior High School. A decade later, he became Assistant Principal at Alexandria Senior High School. From there, Mr. Boyd assisted with the molding of education in Rapides Parish via his work as Coordinator of the Instructional Resources Center, Director of Vocational Education, then Assistant Superintendent of Administration for Rapides Parish School District. His life of volunteerism and teaching continues with involvement in a host of community and philanthropic organizations.

Israel B. Curtis, Louisiana State Representative from 1992 until 2008, was a teacher by education but a remarkable renaissance man by experience. He possessed advanced degrees and education from Northwestern State University, Texas Christian University, Texas Southern University, and Michigan State University. Mr. Curtis served as a personal bodyguard for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after serving in the United States Army during the Korean War.

Herbert B. Dixon, Sr., a graduate from Peabody High School in 1967 and Southern University in 1971 with a Master of Education in 1975. He served in the U. S. Navy from 1972 to 1978 and worked as a sales representative for National Motor Club, Inc. During his time as an educator, Mr. Dixon started the Rapides Federation of Teachers and School Employees Union affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO national unions. He also was a founding member of Cenla's Best, Inc. which raised funds to provide annual scholarships for students. In his political career, Dixon initially ran for a Louisiana House of Representatives

seat in 2003. In 2007, Dixon won the primary election against three opponents. He also served as a member of the Rapides Parish School Board.

Randolph Holly, Jr., acclaimed creator of COPE Inc, TRIO Programs (Challenging Opportunities for Postsecondary Education) has a lengthy resume of successes in the classroom and in philanthropic activities. He has served as President of Louisiana Association of Student Assistance Programs and Southwest Association of Student Assistance Programs. He began his career at Southern University in Baton Rouge after graduating from Southern University

A & M College with a degree in Elementary Education and a Master of Education in Guidance & Counseling. He was also a Walter O. Mason Award winner and has been named one of the Ten Outstanding Men of Substance in Central Louisiana.

Owen Monconduit, a retired brigadier general of the U.S. Army and the first African American general in the Louisiana National Guard. He joined the National Guard in 1980 as part of the ROTC and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1983. He served in various leadership roles, including commander of the 769th Engineer Battalion and the 225th Engineer Battalion. He completed combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq and assisted in Hurricane Katrina recovery. Additionally, Monconduit earned two master's degrees and retired in 2010 after over thirty years of service. His service has been recognized with numerous medals and awards including the Bronze Star with One Oak Leaf Cluster and National Defense Service Medal.

Freddie Price, Sr. is a retired U.S. Army Major, CEO, and owner of PriceTech Solutions, LLC who has received certifications from Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business, HUBZone, and Louisiana Economic Development. He has served on American Red Cross board for nine years and the Rapides Chapter of the Southern University Alumni Federation for fifteen years. His history of service to the United States as well as his dedication to education, includes attaining a Master's degree in Public Administration from Golden Gate University in San Francisco along with the U.S. Army Meritorious Service Award.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. Library Branch Manager LaKeisha Henton stated upon the inception of the AACHC, "There is so much talent and opportunity in our community. There is a dream to be realized, and we are blessed to be a part of it." Henton along with the other members of the planning committee encourage the community to participate in this recurrent celebration of local accomplishment and history on Saturday, February 21st, starting at 11:00am at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch of the Rapides Parish Library, located at 1115 Broadway Avenue. Attendees are encouraged to RSVP to (318) 445-3912 by February 16th. Everyone is invited.





THE CENTRAL LOUISIANA  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE  
&  
HERITAGE CENTER**

**EACH OTHER'S HARVEST:**  
**FOSTERING COMMUNITY & APPLAUDING ACHIEVEMENT**



**YOU'RE INVITED**

**3RD ANNUAL  
EVENT**

**STRENGTH OF OUR PAST  
POWER OF OUR FUTURE**

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026**

**AT 11:00 AM AT THE**

**RAPIDES PARISH LIBRARY**

**MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BRANCH**

**1115 BROADWAY AVENUE, ALEXANDRIA, LA 71302**

**PLEASE R.S.V.P. TO 318-445-3912 BY FEB. 16TH.**





# Beat the “Brrrr” with the Bunkie Buz

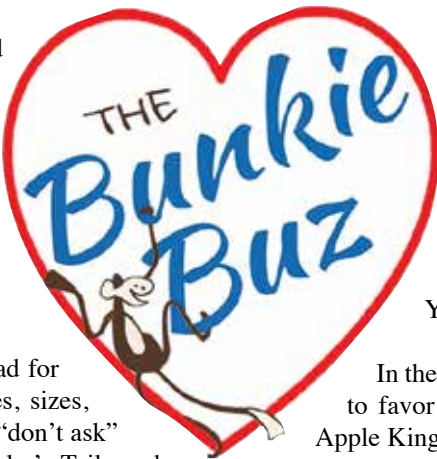
By Robert Smith

Brrrr! Out of the ice age and frozen tundra, we have emerged from our deep freeze—well preserved and ready for the merry mayhem of Mardi Gras parades and pandemonium! The Bunkie Buz District has been appropriately respondent to the gala of gaiety and grander, of glitz, and glamour! Our siren sisters at Twisted Scissors Salon have been boosting the beauty of Bunkian femme fatales, while Steeles and Leslie Catherine’s have so bejeweled the belles of the ball by any royal court! Saxon Studio will toss in a knight, or two!

Of course, WIBC (when in Buz country) Cake is King and read for your enjoyment! Available dressed and baked in many shapes, sizes, and breeds, then stuffed with all manner of dairy and fruit and “don’t ask” wonders. You’ll just have to ask Poppa J’s, Griffin’s, or Rocky’s Tails and Shells about that! These are certified “Buzalicious” by the BBBBB (Bunkie Buz Bureau of Buzalicious Best). Or you can just eat for yourself to believe!

With temps so brisk as to make politicians stick their hands in their own pockets, it’s hot gumbo, soup, stew, and sandwich season in the Buz! Crispy Cajun’s Fried Chicken co-stars with their signature gumbo. Griffins hot and hearty trio chucks the chill with beans and sausage, savory gumbo, and homemade chili (peppers optional). Rocky’s Tails and Shells adds another hot favorite—crawfish! Boiled by the bucket and, in the marvelous metaphorical mix twixt snout and claw, sausage! Bernice counters with their beefy “pure moo” beef po’ boy, and Poppa J’s weighs in with B-B-Q pulled pork “toothless sandy”, challenged by the Philly “phill ya up” Steak of Pizza Shack. What a hot and homemade Buz!

Hoovers has a “no guilt” sugar special in many nostalgic shapes and colors. Or, if you are more in touch with nature, Larry at the Palace Farmers Market will



let you chow down “veggie raw”. As for the other, less edible establishments in the Buz District, you can count on Saxon Studio for their fresh fire side ash...no bark or bite. Rocky’s Service Express provides their signature “your treads are our treasures” guarantee, and Cherry’s “non edible treasures across the tracks” boast prices easy to digest. And, of course, New Parrino can fit you with a medicinal medley of antacids. Then, “gas up” at Gibko Gas (across from Griffins) for your return voyage home. You can be sure that we’ll leave all our lights on for you!

In the features department of the Buz, Leslie Catherine was kind enough to favor the Buz Live Radio Show on KVPI (92.5FM) with a Griffin’s Apple King Cake for an on-the-air culinary critique! Deemed a masterpiece, we sacrificed for you. We know you’d do likewise for the Buz! Also, Wilbert and Mary (Travel Avoyelles Tourism Com) appeared at the studio with tourism representatives from Ireland, Scotland, Italy, and France! So wonderful to share Bunkie tourism with our friends from afar! Thank you, Wilbert, for the sharing!

We are circulating rumors of mysterious boxes arriving at Griffins. There’s a big surprise in it for you! Stay tuned and we’ll let you know next time you tune in via eye (Cenla Focus), Image (Facebook), and ear (KVP-FM) to the Buz. Now’s a great time for a visit to the Bunkie Buz District! The heat and lights are on. Come catch the Bunkie Buz!

EXPLORE AVOYELLES

AVOYELLES

CENTRE DE LA LOUISIANE

CALENDAR of EVENTS

YOGA Class

Led by Mary Bonnette

Unity Park - Cottonport

February 7, 2026 @ 9:00am

Swamp Pop Party

Paragon Casino Resort

February 7, 2026 @ 7:30pm

www.paragoncasinoresort.com

Krewe of Cronus Mardi Gras Ball

Haas Auditorium - Bunkie

February 7, 2026

318.346.7664

Krewe of Cyllenius Parade

Marksville LA

February 8, 2026 @ 1:00pm

FB: Rotary Club of Avoyelles

Children's Mardi Gras Extravaganza

St. Frances de Sales Church - Echo

February 14, 2026

(Parade 2pm, Gumbo follows)

318.794.3982

Joe Nichols Concert

Paragon Casino Resort

February 14, 2026 @ 8:00pm

(Doors at 7:00pm)

www.paragoncasinoresort.com

St. Alphonsus Fish Fry

St. Alphonsus Hall - Hessmer

February 20, 2026

(Drive Through @ 5-7:00pm)

318.201.3209

Gumbo Cook-Off

Maisonette de Armand - Marksville

February 21, 2026

318.452.4075

Wreath Making with Brittany

Big Bend Museum

February 21, 2026 @ 10:00am

318.500.4036

Belledeau Knight of Columbus Fish/Shrimp Fry

St. Martin of Tours Church Hall

Belledeau

February 27, 2026

318.240.0007

St. Paul's KC Fish Fry

St. Pauls CC - Mansura

February 27, 2026

318.359.9635

Gumbo Dinner and Bake Sale

Immaculate Conception Church

Dupont

February 28, 2026 @ 5-7:00pm

318.922.3248

Alligator Feeding Show

Paragon Hotel Atrium

February 28, 2026 @ 4:00pm

www.paragoncasinoresort.com

LOUISIANA

Feed Your Soul.

ExploreLouisiana.com

TravelAvoyelles.com | 800.833.4195

8592 Hwy 1, Mansura, LA



# Mardi Gras in Centre de la Louisiane

By Wilbert Carmouche



WILBERT CARMOUCHE

February brings us a mixed bag of options! Some rescheduled events due to January's weather event, Mardi Gras Season, Valentines' Day celebrations; so, it's a little of this and a lot of that in Centre de la Louisiane, Louisiana's CenterPoint.

Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler on Avoyelles Mardi Gras Weekend, February 7th and 8th. The fun begins with a Swamp Pop Party at Paragon Casino Resort on Saturday, February 7th at 7:30pm featuring three of Louisiana's most popular Cajun & Zydeco bands: Jamie Bergeron & the Kickin' Cajuns, Travis Matte and the Kingpins, and Leroy Thomas & the Zydeco Roadrunners. Venue doors will open at 7:00pm for the high-energy, unforgettable Louisiana Saturday night. Visit [www.paragoncasinoresort.com](http://www.paragoncasinoresort.com) for more information and tickets!

If you would like to change the pace and attend a Krewe Ball, Bunkie is the place to be on February 7th, at their annual Krewe of Cronus Debutante Mardi Gras Ball at the Haas Auditorium. For more information and tickets to the celebration of Mardi Gras in Bunkie, call Margie Melancon at (318) 346-7664.

And yes, we called it a Mardi Gras Weekend in Avoyelles because the next day, Sunday, February 8th, the Rotary Club of Avoyelles' annual Krewe of Cyllenius Parade will roll at 1:00pm. Entry fees are waived; however, completed applications must be submitted to the Rotary Club. Forms are available on the Rotary Club of Avoyelles Facebook page. The route has changed for 2026 with parade beginning at Place du Marche Shopping Center (Taco Bell) heading north on Tunica Drive, turning right on Main Street, and ending behind the Avoyelles Parish Courthouse. Lance-moi quelque chose, monsieur!

Valentine's Day brings a couple of events for the young and, of course, us mature crowd as well.

St. Frances de Sales Church in Echo will again host their Children's Mardi Gras Extravaganza on February 14th on the church campus. The parade will lineup at 1:00pm, judging at 2:00pm, followed by the "Chicken Run" and Parade at 3:00pm. Gumbo and hamburgers will be available for sale after the parade. For more information, contact (318) 264-2816 or (318) 794-3982.

Paragon Casino Resort brings to you Joe Nichols in concert on Valentine's Evening at 8:00pm (Venue will open at 7:00pm). Nichols began his career with The Rodeo Band, playing in high school gymnasiums and small clubs. Throughout the course of his career, Nichols has released eleven studio albums. Visit [www.paragoncasinoresort.com](http://www.paragoncasinoresort.com) for ticket information and details.

The fun begins at Gator Grounds Mardi Gras the weekend of February 13th and 14th for registered guests. The annual MG weekend's planned activities include Camper Decorating Contest, Crafts for the Kids, South LA Chicken Run, Golf Cart

Decorating Contes and Parade Through the Campsites. Call (318) 295-4030 or visit [www.gatorgrounds.org](http://www.gatorgrounds.org) to make your reservations today! Gator Grounds RV Water Park Resort is located at 200 Golf Course Road in Bunkie. Located on property is a 9-hole golf course for your golfing pleasure.

Join us for Open Mic Night at Bailey's on the Square on Thursday, February 19th. The entertainment continues and here is a chance for you to bring your game to Avoyelles Parish. Jacob Ducote, your host, begins the show at 7:00pm, doors open at 6:30pm. Never a cover...always good vibes! Call Van Roy at (318) 240-3495 for additional details.

Join Brittany and her crew at the Adam Ponthieu Museum on February 21st at 10:00am for a Wreath-Making Workshop. The museum is located at 8554 Highway 451 in Moreauville, across from Sarto Historic Iron Bridge. Fee is \$10.00 (cash only). To reserve your spot, call (318) 500-4036 or email: [bigbendmuseum1927@gmail.com](mailto:bigbendmuseum1927@gmail.com).

And now let's talk about one of my favorite subjects—food! And the Lenten season will not disappoint along with other Avoyelles Food Ways. St. Alphonsus KCs will have their annual Fish Fry at the St. Alphonsus Hall (drive through) on February 20th from 5:00pm-7:00pm. For tickets, call (318) 201-3209.

The Gumbo Cook-Off at Maisonette de Armand in Marksville has been rescheduled for February 21st. Call Luis Ramirez at (318) 452-4075 for entry information and tickets to purchase award winning gumbo.

Two options for KC meals on February 27th! Belledeau Kngihts have put a twist to their annual fish fry. This year you will be treated to a Fish/Shrimp Fry at St. Martin of Tours Church Hall. Call (318) 240-2007 for tickets. The second meal location is St. Paul's KC Fish Fry in Mansura. For tickets, call (318) 359-9635.

Continuing with great food, come for a Gumbo dinner and Bake Sale at Immaculate Conception Church in Dupont on February 28th from 5:00pm to 7:00pm! Call (318) 922-3248 for tickets. Bonne appetite!

Paragon Casino Resort hosts its legendary Gator Feeding Show Saturday, February 28th at 4:00pm. Hotel guests, casino visitors and the public can enjoy a free, educational and entertaining 30-minute live-feeding with the live alligators in the "Gator Bayou" located inside the hotel's atrium. Photo opportunities with a baby alligator and a "holding" snake will take place after each show and will be free to the public.

For additional information contact Mary, Murial, or Wilbert to plan your travels to [www.travelavoyelles.com](http://www.travelavoyelles.com) by calling (800) 833-4195, emailing [tourism@krocket.net](mailto:tourism@krocket.net), or following us on Facebook @TravelAvoyelles.





# “Second Blessings” Thrift Store Celebrates Grand Opening!

Catholic Charities of Central Louisiana is pleased to announce the Grand Opening of Second Blessings Thrift Store on Tuesday, February 10th, at 4409-A Coliseum Boulevard in Alexandria. This is a social entrepreneurship project of Catholic Charities where income from the store is used to support operations and services, making the organization more self-sufficient and less dependent on donations, fundraisers, and grants.

A lease for the building located on Coliseum Boulevard was signed in December, marking an important milestone in the development of the organization. While the thrift store will be the centerpiece of the space, the facility will also house vital space for Catholic Charities services. This includes a classroom where those seeking emergency basic needs assistance will attend a budget class facilitated by volunteer financial professionals and meet with case managers to review applications for those at risk of eviction or disconnect of utilities. The rented space will also have a dedicated area to store disaster response supplies. Catholic Charities was blessed by the generosity of certain major donors which has made this resiliency project possible.

Second Blessings Thrift Store will operate Tuesday through Friday from 10:00am to 4:00pm. Donations will be accepted only on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00am to 12:00pm, or donations can be placed in the plastic covered deck boxes to the right of the store.

If you would like to volunteer to work, please contact Heidi at [hwampler@cccnla.org](mailto:hwampler@cccnla.org) or call (318) 445-6424, extension 510.



## GRAND OPENING SECOND BLESSINGS THRIFT STORE

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup>

AT 9AM

STORE HOURS:  
TUESDAY-FRIDAY  
10 AM - 4 PM







In Louisiana's Legend Country follow the trail of outlaws, bandits, heroes, and soldiers who once traversed these lands. Visit Louisiana's Legend Country and make our storied past a tale you love to tell.



Vernon Parish Tourism Commission  
201 South 3rd Street | Leesville, LA 71446  
337.238.0783  
**LegendCountry.com**





# ABOUT

# TOWN



Deborah Shelton



Steve & Dawn Olinde



Darlene Faircloth, Kaitlyn Fleming



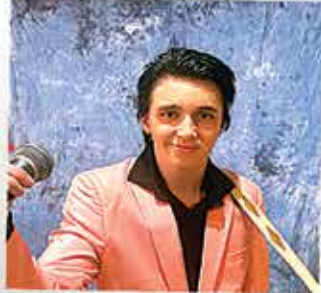
Alexis Welch



Olivia Soileau



Starla Phelps, Madison Lemoine



Jeremiah Wilson



Lynn Roy, Stephanie Laborde



Jeff Langston, Dr. Paul Coreil



Kelsy Byone, Lindsey Day



Jeremy Johnson, Jeremy Hayes



Lynne & Darrell Basco



Denise Pearson



Lynne Eddlemon, Ashlee Hatwig



Kennedy Gardner, Abby Sikes



Glenda & H.B. Smith



Jack Cooper



Max Young, Micheal Bordelon



Rachel Hines



Martha & Foster Walker



Coburn Ahrens, Levi Roberts



Denise & Matthew Ponseti



Steven Vaughan



Sue & Jim McMillian



Barbara Mitchell, Mark Gravel



Debra Glorioso



Dana & Dr. Joan Brunson



Celise & John Harper



Nick Free, Noah Bordelon



Candace Hamilton





THE HOTEL BENTLEY



"THE HOTEL BENTLEY — IT MAKES A STATEMENT ON ITS OWN."  
200 DESOTO STREET - DOWNTOWN ALEXANDRIA - 318-442-2226

THE HOTEL BENTLEY IS AVAILABLE TO HOST YOUR NEXT WEDDING RECEPTION OR EVENT.  
EVENT VENUE SPACES ARE AVAILABLE THAT RANGE FROM 10 TO AS MANY AS 300 GUESTS.  
CONTACT US TO SCHEDULE YOUR NEXT MEMORABLE EVENT.

[WWW.VISITHOTELBENTLEY.COM](http://WWW.VISITHOTELBENTLEY.COM)



# Thank You For Voting Us The Best!



# FEBRUARY AT PARAGON PROMOTIONS & EVENTS

## SWAMP POP PARTY

**SAT, FEB 7**  
DOORS: 7PM  
SHOWTIME: 7:30PM  
TICKETS START AT \$20

Featuring:

- JAMIE BERGERON & the Kickin' Cajuns
- TRAVIS MATTE & the Kingpins
- LEROY THOMAS & the Zydeco Roadrunners

## BIG GAME SUNDAY SPECIAL

**SUNDAY, FEB 8**

**ALL DAY SUPER SPECIALS 11AM-10PM**

- \$12.95\*** Fried Catfish Dinner  
SUNDAYS • 3-10PM  
\*10% No players card
- \$8.99\*** Fried Pork Chops  
MONDAYS • 11:30AM-10PM  
\*10% No players card
- \$8.99\*** Chicken Fried Steak  
TUESDAYS • 11:30AM-10PM  
\*10% No players card

Print voucher at any kiosk for players club price. Dine-in only. No take-outs. Promotional discounts do not apply to these specials (1pt = 10% meal).

## JOE NICHOLS

**SAT, FEB 14**  
VALENTINE'S DAY  
DOORS: 7PM • SHOWTIME: 8PM  
TICKETS START AT \$40

**WEDNESDAYS • 5-10PM**

## PRIME RIB DINNER

Includes Baked Potato & Vegetable

- \$11.99\*** 10oz Prime Rib  
Club Paragon price
- \$15.99\*** 14oz Prime Rib  
Club Paragon price

Dine-In Only

\*Prices without a players card: \$14.99-10oz, \$18.99-14oz. Print voucher at any kiosk for Players Club price. Promotional discounts do not apply to this special (1pt = 10% meal).

## LENTEN BUFFET!

**WEDNESDAY, FEB 18**  
**\$31.99+TAX • 4-9PM**

**VISIT PARAGONCASINORESORT.COM TO PURCHASE TICKETS.**  
Events or performers subject to change or cancellation without notice.

### PARTY ESSENTIALS

SUN-MON, FEB 1-23 • 12-10PM

**50 WILL WIN \$50**  
WEDNESDAYS, FEB 4-25  
12:30-5PM | EVERY 30 MIN

**CHOICE LIQUOR GIVEAWAYS**  
FRIDAYS, 5-9PM

### SIDWAYS WEDNESDAYS

FEB 25, 4, 5 & 6PM

**MARDI GRAS T-SHIRT**  
NOW THRU FEB 17  
TUES & WED 12-10PM, SAT 12-5PM

## Valentine's Day Special

**SATURDAY, FEB 14**

# \$150

PER COUPLE  
Reservations required

## DON'T MISS OUT ON UPCOMING EVENTS!

- **MONDAYS** - 1 Point = \$9.99 Food
- **TUESDAYS** - Senior Days Age 50+ Promotion, 1 Point = \$9.99 Food
- **WEDNESDAYS** - Bingo With Progressive Jackpot, 6PM, 1 Point = \$9.99 Food
- **THURSDAYS** - Bingo With Progressive Jackpot, 6PM, Senior Days Age 50+ Promotion, 1 Point = \$9.99 Food
- **SUPER BINGO** - Feb 15, 4PM

# Paragon

CASINO | RESORT

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT  
[PARAGONCASINORESORT.COM](http://PARAGONCASINORESORT.COM)

For all gift giveaways, actual items may differ from photo. While supplies last. Visit Club Paragon for complete promotional details. Game responsibly. Need help? Call 877-770-STOP (7867)